

PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 10 September 2025

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Wednesday 10 September 2025

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Bills

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

Council's amendments

The PRESIDENT (09:34): I have a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005**, the Electricity Industry Act 2000 and the **Electricity Industry (Residual Provisions) Act 1993** and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General – Responses to Performance Engagement Recommendations: Annual Status Update 2025, September 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

Production of documents

Working with children checks

The Clerk: I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 7 September 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 27 August 2025 on the motion of Mr Davis relating to the April 2025 review of the worker screening unit and working with children checks. The letter states that the date for production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (09:36): I move:

That the letter be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

Members statements

St Kilda Hebrew Congregation

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (09:49): Victorians are stronger when we are united. We become stronger when we not only reject divisive and racist behaviour but embrace our diversity and celebrate our differences. Our multicultural and multifaith communities have enriched our city, our community and our lives. I was recently very honoured to attend the multifaith service at the St Kilda Hebrew Congregation, along with the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Mr Berger and the member for Albert Park in the other place. It was a welcoming and joyful service, and as the songs of prayer filled that historic and beautiful synagogue, they were sung in modes of harmony and peace. At the Kiddush meal after the service we heard words from the minister, from the rabbi and also from Bishop Philip Huggins from the Anglican Church. It was a joyous and great occasion.

It did, sadly, precede some pretty extremist behaviour on the streets of Melbourne the following day, where toxic people spewed toxic rhetoric under the guise of politics to undermine our social cohesion. Their actions and their words must be rejected and stand condemned. But one thing is for certain: Victoria remains united. Victorians reject divisiveness. Victorians reject racism. Victorians reject hate speech. We embrace diversity, tolerance and acceptance, no matter who you are or where you are from.

Police resources

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (09:50): Mernda police station is supposed to be a 24-hour station offering all-day coverage across the Whittlesea police service area. But when Liberal leader Brad Battin visited the station last weekend, the door was shut in the middle of the day, the lights were off and a big red sign said 'Closed'. This is a relatively new police station that only opened in 2017, and it has already been closed unexpectedly because the Allan Labor government is incapable of fully staffing our state's police force. This follows recent unplanned closures at Epping police station due to staff shortages, leaving locals unsure if that station will continue to be open in the future. When I asked the Minister for Police why the government has not started construction of the new Wollert police station, he said, 'Don't worry; Wollert is covered by Epping police station.' But Epping police station has had unplanned closures. Likewise, when I asked about funding for the upgrade of Whittlesea police station and increased service capacity, the minister said, 'Don't worry; that area is covered by the 24-hour station in Mernda.' But now we learn that Mernda police station has also had unplanned closures. The people of Victoria deserve better. There are 1100 vacant police positions unfilled, with hundreds more officers expected to retire this year. Police morale is suffering because the government will not address youth crime and allows repeat offenders out on bail.

Cannabis law reform

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (09:52): Last sitting week I had the privilege of attending the annual oration held in honour of that champion of sensible and compassionate drug policy, David Penington AC. The oration was delivered by another such champion, a former magistrate, the distinguished and utterly delightful Tony Parsons, who focused his speech on cannabis law reform. Tony spoke of the follies and successes of drug policy in Australia, from the high point of the 1980s, when evidence-based harm minimisation policies seemed imminent, to the nadir of the Howard years and the regressive 'tough on drugs' policies. Tony asserted that a jolt of leadership and some foresight were all that were needed to advance sensible drug reform. To paraphrase Tony, at its heart it is about taking control of an uncontrolled market and replacing it with a regulated system that prioritises health, safety and community wellbeing. Our current drug policies force cannabis consumers into a black market and preserve and protect that black market. Every day we wait is another day we waste money on failed initiatives and allow crime gangs to rake in the profits from cannabis sales. As we have said ourselves, how often does a social reform come along that meets the holy trinity of good policy reform: the right thing to do, backed by evidence and enjoying broad community support? As an extra bonus, it will actually save the government money. As Tony succinctly put it, for cannabis reform, it is time.

Battle for Australia commemoration

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:53): I rise today to speak on two different matters. On the first Wednesday of September every year we commemorate the Battle for Australia, remembering the sacrifices made by those who fought for our country during the Second World War. For this year's Battle for Australia day, I had the opportunity to represent the Minister for Veterans in the other place by laying a wreath by the eternal flame at the Shrine of Remembrance on behalf of the Victorian government. After the fall of Singapore in February 1942, John Curtin declared that the battle for Australia had begun, the moment when the war turned into an existential battle for Australia's survival. Eighty years on from the end of the war, it is a sombre reminder that the peace and freedom we enjoy today in this country did not come easily.

Central Park, Malvern East

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:54): The other matter I would like to raise is to do with the official opening of the new lighting for the sports fields at Central Park in Malvern East. I recently attended the official opening for the new lights alongside Crs Jamie Bell and Sally Davis from the City of Stonnington, who have also worked hard to get these on line. I would like to thank the Minister for Community Sport in the other place for delivering the funding for this important project, which will allow the footy to continue even after the sun goes down.

Youth crime

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (09:55): Chol Achiek, 12 years old, and Dau Akueng, 15 years old: these are the names of the two young Victorian boys – children – who were murdered over the weekend in a tragedy that should have never happened. They were basketballers, they were sons, they were friends and they were loved deeply by their families and their communities. Last night hundreds gathered in a community-led vigil. In just two weeks, four young people from this community have been lost – a community pleading for help and still met with no urgent action. Mr Akueng, father of Dau Akueng, repeatedly reached out to police regarding concerns and yet was met with no action. Despite repeated attacks, the police have failed to protect them. To date, there have been no arrests and there has been no justice. The South Sudanese community, like so many multicultural communities, is begging for support, and I join their calls against racialised violence, overpolicing and systemic neglect that go beyond the weekend's tragedy. It took the Premier 48 hours to respond to this tragedy. My question is: would this silence have lasted this long if these boys were not black? I demand equity, inclusion and care for this community, and my deepest condolences and prayers are with the families and communities of Chol and Dau. Rest in power, beautiful boys.

Bairnsdale Tennis Club

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (09:56): I got the chance to drop by Bairnsdale Tennis Club again last week and not only got to have a game of tennis, where the young tennis guns put me through my paces, but also got to have a go at pickleball, which I have heard a lot about but have not had a game of before. It was thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyable, so thanks to Marg and the committee for not only getting me back and talking through the hundred years of activity in sport the tennis club has provided for the East Gippsland region but also the incredible work they have done to maintain the courts and the facilities over recent decades and also the work that they are putting into the planned upgrades.

Swifts Creek Recreation Reserve

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (09:57): Talking of upgrades, I had the pleasure of being at the Omeo district grand final on the weekend at Swifts Creek, and you will be glad to know that there is a new rec reserve at Swifts Creek we were able to officially open. We had speeches and everything, although I think people were a little bit more focused on the footy where the under-16s at Lindenow South had an incredible comeback – three goals in the last 5 minutes. I actually got the winning goal on my phone, so I have shared that with the club. Congratulations to all the young ones there at Lindenow South. Congratulations also to Omeo Benambra, who had a narrow win over Swan Reach. The new clubrooms are fantastic for the community, but there is plenty more we have got to do with the community there. It was a beautiful day, beautiful sunshine, and thanks to everyone for coming out and saying g'day.

Firearms control

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (09:58): My statement today is to express my utter disdain for those that were calling for increased gun control, including the darling of a lot of shooters from the federal Nationals, before even the first funeral for the murdered officers was held. Details on the murders are understandably scarce, but the offender apparently used an unregistered homemade firearm, which would not be captured by any firearm registry let alone an expansive national register.

It is times like these that show the real colours of people – people who purport to be the friends of shooters, the federal Nationals being an example – when they cannot even wait a decent amount of time after an incident to push their real agenda. Remember who gave us the 1996 National Firearms Agreement as well as the 2019 revision – the federal Nationals and Liberals and federal Labor. Now it is an appropriate time to start commenting on the incident. The actions of these people were gross but very illuminating.

Treaty

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (09:59): We are one step closer to treaty. The Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 was just introduced into the Victorian Parliament – a first for our state, a first for our country. I cannot underestimate how significant this moment is. This has been generations in the making, carried forward by the voices, the persistence, the courage and the strength of our elders and ancestors. Treaty is a milestone not just for mob but for everyone who believes in justice, truth and a future built on respect – a future where we walk together. To the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and the Treaty Authority, whose leadership and vision have carried this process with such strength, I honour your determination and your role in getting us to where we are now. To the Premier and her predecessor, to the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples and her predecessors and to those who have stood firmly behind this work, thank you for walking with First Nations people in genuine partnership. I also acknowledge the critical role of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, whose work in truth-telling has laid a foundation for treaty by shining a light on our shared history. To the many elders, the countless advocates and the allies who have been on this journey, I say to you: we are almost there.

Gurdas Maan

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:01): I recently had the great pleasure of attending a concert by the great Gurdas Maan at Melbourne Park. Gurdas Maan is arguably Punjab's number one singer and performer, with 30 albums over a 45-year career. His music is known for unifying people across the region and being a bridge to communities around the world, including outside of Indian culture. With 5000 people in attendance, we saw members of Melbourne's thriving Punjabi community of all generations, young and old, come out in force to dance and to enjoy his music. It is certainly clear why Gurdas Maan is the living legend of Punjabi music. I have also had the privilege of joining Gurdas Ji on stage. Fortunately for the audience, I was not there to sing, but I did get to share a few words welcoming him to Melbourne. It was a truly special occasion, and it was wonderful to be up on stage with Gurdas Ji. I then got to return to the crowd and had a bit of a dance, a bit of a boogie, including with some of my constituents who I bumped into on the night, which was a great pleasure as well. It was a terrific concert. Thank you to Creative Events, Hanz Events, Shinkoo, Lali and the Kumar brothers for having me there.

Production of documents

Machete amnesty

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:02): I move:

That this house, in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within 30 days of the house agreeing to this resolution, all invoices for the fabrication, transport and installation of the machete safe disposal bins.

The great machete bin mystery has captivated Melbourne, and millions of people now are invested in this mystery. I would like to thank all of the people that have contacted my office and the millions of people that have been watching this mystery unfold. What do we know so far? We know –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! All sides of the chamber, come on!

David LIMBRICK: Millions of people are invested in this mystery. What do we know about the mystery so far? We know that the government said that there is a \$13 million budget, and we know that the government said that there are about 40 machete bins being installed. But the reason that people are interested in this mystery is not because of the machete bins. It is not even because of the \$13 million, I do not think, it is because it is emblematic of the needless secrecy that this government always engages in.

Some of the things that we have uncovered here that we think we have good evidence of – firstly, we know that the bins were only about \$2400 each, or \$2800 including delivery probably, which is far cheaper than the retail price. I actually got a quote for a machete bin and it is about \$4000 from a reputable manufacturer, so they are cheaper. The other thing that we have uncovered is very good evidence that at least some of them were made in a Mount Gambier prison in South Australia, and maybe the government can clear this up for us, whether that is true. We also have evidence that some of them at least were potentially made in Ravenhall; maybe the government can clear that up. Maybe the invoices will clear that up.

Members interjecting.

David LIMBRICK: On a point of order, President, can I please just finish my speech?

The PRESIDENT: Please let Mr Limbrick finish in silence.

David LIMBRICK: Thank you, President. I appreciate that.

I think that if the government was just straight up about this and said, ‘This is what we did and this is why we did it,’ the Victorian people would actually be totally fine with that. In fact if you told the Victorian people, ‘We only need these bins to run for a few months, so we got them on the cheap and we actually did some contracts with some prisons because we didn’t want to waste taxpayers money,’ I think that the Victorian people would be happy with that and if they said, ‘With the rest of the money, what we are actually going to use it on is this, this and this,’ and they itemised it. Now we know that a bunch of it is going to be used on advertising. I have already uncovered a whole bunch of ads on the Department of Justice and Community Safety Facebook page. If the government was just up-front about these things and explained it, there would not be this needless speculation. When the government is quiet about these things and remains silent, everyone thinks something shady is going on.

Until the government comes clean on this, people are going to continue thinking that something shady is going on. I would urge the government right now – if they wanted to, they could surprise me and stand up and spill the beans on exactly what is going on and tell everyone in Victoria. Just knock this on the head, there will be no more speculation and you will ruin the machete bin mystery series. I somehow doubt they will do that. Anyway, I will give the government a chance to speak, and maybe they can tell us or maybe they will not. But I look forward to their response, and I really look forward to getting these invoices, because I think they will shed some light on both how much some of these things have cost in reality and who actually made them.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:06): I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Mr Limbrick’s name, and I thank Mr Limbrick for bringing this to the house. Of course, as is the government’s usual position on documents motions, we do not oppose this motion, but it gives me the opportunity to actually talk about some facts. But it is interesting, Mr Limbrick, because whilst you talk about everyone ruining the magical machete mystery bin series, what is really going on is the fear and misinformation campaign that is being perpetuated by those opposite, because they are not interested in facts; they are interested in just whipping up fear in the community and making people afraid. The thing is, it is shameful. It is disgraceful. It is all on those opposite. It is the worst opposition we have ever had in history. Mr Limbrick, you talk about there being no information on this publicly. Let me just go through. I am going to give a number of people a special mention of and shout-out a couple of organisations as well. In terms of this machete amnesty program, it was detailed in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in June 2025. So it is not secret. It is actually out there. PAEC

hearings are not secret. They are broadcast and live streamed. So let us just follow the timeline and the details. That was June 2025, and the elements that were to be funded as part of the \$13 million program included a public awareness campaign and an education campaign and then of course the cost of the bins, which we now know is around about \$2400 per bin.

Nick McGowan interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Listen, because you are not interested in the facts. First of all, let us turn to the misinformation campaign. Let me count the number of ways that those opposite got it wrong. We can start with the member for Kew, who posted on her social media accounts about the real cost being posted in Parliament. Then we go to Jane Hume in federal Parliament, who doubled down on all things anti-family, anti-worker and non-police. Then Wayne Farnham – ‘I am a builder’ – in the other place also doubled down whilst on a sojourn with the member for Bulleen in South America. Then we have the member for Warrandyte in the other place, Nicole Werner, demonstrating her inability to do maths because she just divided \$13 million by 45 and came up with a ridiculous \$325,000 and talked about how that is the cost of a Ferrari. I would not know what the cost of a Ferrari is, and neither would people out in the western suburbs. But the member for Warrandyte certainly does. She has done her research clearly. Then Ms Crozier, Mr McGowan and Chris Crewther in the other place joined in on the Ferrari analogy and continued to double down on the falsehood. So that is the Liberals. Then we had the media doubling down. We had the lies perpetuated by 3AW, the cheer squad for the Liberal Party; Channel 7; Sky News; and also Tim Watson and Gary Lyon from *SEN Breakfast* radio. I want to give a special shout-out to *Media Watch* and AAP FactCheck, who took all this apart and methodically and forensically dissected the lies about this from the worst opposition in history. An honourable mention goes to AAP FactCheck for calling out those opposite who got this so wrong.

What I can tell you, and what we do know, is that in the first week of this amnesty operating – the very first week – we had 500 returns from only half of the 45 bins have occurred. The reason for that is because the public education campaign is working extremely well, and people are aware of it. They are not listening to the worst opposition in history or those shock jocks in the Murdoch media, the cheer squad for the Liberal Party. The public education campaign is well underway, evidenced by the returns, and it is funded from the \$13 million which was set aside for the program, including the cost of bins, which, as I said, was around \$2400 each. Mr Limbrick said it was all secret and they want to know where the bins were made, because he has got some conspiracy theory about it. But the point is I can tell you that these bins were made in Australia – that is a win – and they were made in Victoria, so there you go.

Despite those opposite always talking down Victoria, what we are doing is we are seeing real action on machetes, because we know that people are returning them and they are cooperating with the amnesty. As I said, the government does not oppose this motion. I will leave my remarks there. Hopefully the next speaker will get to complete their remarks in silence.

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (10:12): I rise today to speak on the motion put forward by Mr Limbrick. As my colleague Mr David Davis said, it is a very simple, straightforward motion. It is seeking agreement for the release of all invoices for fabrication, transport and installation of machete safe deposit bins. We support this motion put forward by Mr Limbrick because it is very important. Transparency for every government is a serious thing. What we always seek with these motions is transparency in public expenditure. We believe taxpayers have the right to know what things cost and what measures are taken by the government to get the best deal for the taxpayer. This means doing your due diligence with procurement and deciding, having looked at different places. With this motion, basically we are asking for the invoices for the fabrication, transport and installation of the various bins.

At the moment what we have got is \$13 million allocated to this program, and there are no other divisions relating to how much these bins cost. I know the crossbench has been saying this is misinformation. If you do not come forward with information regarding invoices, regarding how much it cost, people will speculate and assume that is all the costs for the physical bins at the police stations

at the moment. The reason why we are asking for clarification in relation to how much these bins cost is because our state debt at the moment is at \$146 billion. We are paying \$20 million per day in interest alone. It is in the best interests of the public to know what is spent on these bins. I understand it is a very important initiative in relation to curbing the crime rate and getting machetes out of our community, as we on this side have advocated for for a long period of time. We support getting rid of the machetes, but how the expenditure on these bins was arrived at is important in relation to what has been bought with public funds. Transparency is all we seek –

Nick McGowan interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Mr McGowan, you are louder than your colleague who is making a contribution.

Trung LUU: All we ask is for clarification of the invoices for what has been spent on these bins. Having spent 20 years or so in the public service, I understand procurement – you have got to have invoices before you spend money. I am sure the government have those invoices in their possession. All this motion is asking is for the government to produce the invoices so we know what has been spent on these bins. In relation to the manufacture, where was this money spent? I understand that part of the \$13 million allocated to this program went to the education program. All we want to know is what has been spent on this bin, how much it cost. It certainly would not cost \$325,000 per bin, but we just want to know what it actually cost for installation and where it has been made. Clarification is all we ask. ‘Is this program value for money?’ is another question, and Mr Limbrick has mentioned the possibility that any bin would cost around \$2000 or \$4000 per bin. That is a reasonable price, and if you compare it to a Salvation Army bin, there is no difference between the machete bin and a Salvation Army clothing bin. There is not much difference between the two. So we just want to know what it cost per bin in relation to a place outside for machetes. It is also questionable in relation to how effective these bins are being placed outside of police stations opposite a CCTV camera. I do not know: if an offender has committed a crime, would he be willing to go in front of a police station on CCTV footage and deposit one of these in a bin?

As I have mentioned, this motion is a very simple motion asking for just a simple invoice of the fabrication, the transport, the manufacture and the installation of the machete safe deposit bins outside of police stations. Clarification and transparency of any government is a vital key.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:17): I rise to speak on Mr Limbrick’s motion seeking documents with respect to the machete amnesty program. The Liberal Party’s attitude to this program would be comical if it was not such a serious issue. The Liberal Party’s perpetuation of lies in our community that seek to trivialise an exceptionally serious and important issue in our community is a disgrace and should be condemned, because they are –

Nick McGowan interjected.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, President, Mr McGowan’s interjections are constant. They occurred through my contribution and they have also continued to occur through Mr Batchelor’s contribution. I think he has been on his feet for about 20 seconds. I just point out that continuous interjections are unruly, and perhaps Mr McGowan should be brought to order so Mr Batchelor can complete his contribution in silence.

The PRESIDENT: I uphold the point of order, and I also ask the whole chamber if we can let Mr Batchelor speak in silence.

Ryan BATCHELOR: What we have seen is members of the Liberal Party – and my colleague Mr Terpstra has detailed several Liberal Party members, including the member for Kew, the member for Narracan and the member for Warrandyte – who have been out on social media peddling misinformation and garbage about what the machete bin program costs, and in doing so they seek to undermine an exceptionally important community safety initiative that this government have taken to

get machetes off our streets, because we know that they have devastating consequences in our community and we want to see them off our streets. The Liberal Party wants to trivialise it. The Liberal Party see –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Mr Welch, you are very loud.

Richard Welch: He is being very provocative.

The PRESIDENT: No. Everyone needs to let Mr Batchelor get his contribution in, even if you do not like it.

Ryan BATCHELOR: The Liberal Party, despite having knowledge that what they are saying is false, continue to perpetuate mistruths in the community about machetes. They are undermining efforts to keep our community safe. They should be ashamed of themselves and they should stand condemned. In their contributions and in their torrent of interjections they have demonstrated the lack of seriousness with which they take this issue. They could have listened to the evidence given to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee about this program. They could have listened to the contributions that we made in this chamber on the machete ban. They could have listened to the information that was presented to the community through the media about the cost of this program, about the cost of the machete bins, but they chose to ignore it all. They do not see community safety as an issue to be taken seriously; they see community safety as an issue to score political points over, even when they know that what they are saying is not true.

Mr Limbrick has credibility on this issue. He has stood up in this chamber, and he opposed what the government did on machetes on principle. He is the only one with credibility in this debate on that side of the chamber to be asking questions about this program, because he did not support the policy. The Liberal Party did one thing when they stood up here to vote for a bill, and they do another thing on social media and on the streets when they seek to ridicule and trivialise a program that is trying to get dangerous weapons off our streets. The fact that these bins only cost \$2400 and that they have, as Ms Terpstra said, had almost 500 machetes put into them when they have been up and running for less than a week demonstrates their success. Frankly, the question I have got to ask is: even if they did, and we know that they do not, cost \$300,000-odd, would the Liberal Party oppose the bins then? Do they oppose the program? Do they oppose the ban? Do they oppose the amnesty? Unless their actions back what they do in this place, we cannot listen to a word they say, and on community safety they are being hypocrites.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (10:22): I rise in support of this motion. There have been a lot of interjections going on around here about this. Yes, it is about money. But let us not lose sight of the fact that this is also about people being killed with knives. Earlier this week there were two boys killed. We still have not got to the bottom of this, so I think this should be treated with a little bit more respect. Yes, it is about money. It is a lot of money, and I think the government has something to answer for, but for God's sake, let us just remember there are lives at the end of this discussion.

Motion agreed to.

Waste and recycling management

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:23): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes:

- (a) the four-bin waste and recycling system is soon to be introduced to municipal collections across Victoria;
- (b) that many municipal councils have expressed concerns about the cost of the 'fourth bin' and its likely impact on council collections;

- (c) that this scheme is to be introduced in parallel with the government's container deposit scheme;
- (2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within four weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution:
 - (a) all documents relating to the cost impact of the 'fourth bin' proposal;
 - (b) all documents received from local councils by the Minister for Environment or the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) discussing or examining the implementation and impact of the scheme;
 - (c) all briefs to the Minister for Environment concerning the 'fourth bin'; and
 - (d) all documents examining the costs and impacts of the scheme and consultancies regarding the scheme and/or its impacts commissioned by the DEECA, the Department of Treasury and Finance or the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

This is a straightforward short-form documents motion. We are simply asking for information that should be readily available to the Parliament and the taxpayers of this state. The government has it on hand and should disclose it in the interests of good governance, transparency and accountability. In the second-reading debate for the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Bill 2021 I warned the government about the issues we foresaw with the fourth bin's impact on councils and ratepayers. I also warned that the lack of substance made our debate in Parliament deeply flawed. It was an example of government by regulation, not legislation, with ministers completely failing to provide any detail about the scheme's operation. Releasing and examining the information on which they based these regulations is paramount.

I believed that a uniform approach to transitioning kerbside waste collection was inappropriate, and I stand by those concerns. Ms McLeish in the other place pointed out the fourth bin would become a requirement regardless of cost or common sense. Mr O'Brien of the Nationals expressed concern about a one-size-fits-all approach for rural councils and some inner-city councils where a fourth bin would be impractical, and he encouraged the government to listen to and consult with councils and regional Victorians. We moved amendments to the legislation, but they were defeated. We asked questions in the committee stage, but they were evaded. Interestingly, the then local government minister was quoted in *Hansard* as saying:

... there is the availability for councils to have that flexibility. It does not have to be a four-bin system for every council ...

Which is it – flexibility or mandate? In the interest of supporting the overall aim of the legislation, we did not oppose the legislation, hoping that the government would do the right thing by the local government sector. But what have we seen since? Not pragmatism but inflexibility, not cost savings but cost burdens and not a circular economy but a mounting pile of complaints from councils. The government's mandated fourth bin is becoming nothing but a purple-lidded pantomime. The scheme has a price tag of at least \$640 million over 10 years, imposed on councils, charged to ratepayers and delivered with the subtlety of a dump truck. Households are already under enormous pressure. Power bills are soaring, mortgage repayments and rents are going up and grocery prices climb every week. And what does Labor think is the answer? Another bin, another bill, more bureaucracy, more cost shifting.

It is no wonder councils across the state are in revolt; 33 have joined forces against the government on this issue. During my own extensive tour of Victoria's councils, many of the over 40 councils I have met with personally have raised concerns about this initiative. According to *Herald Sun* data from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, only 25 councils have started a kerbside collection service for glass. That means nearly 70 per cent of Victoria's councils have just over a year to implement the new system. Clearly they are holding back on signing costly contracts in the hope that this government will reconsider their mandate. According to Maroondah mayor Kylie Spears this service will cost councils on average \$4 million to implement and an average of an additional \$27 per household every year to run. That will be the largest increase to waste charge passed on to the community ever.

Yet Labor barrels on regardless. They never admit what they have got wrong, they never stop to listen to the people who must deliver these schemes and they certainly never reveal the real costs until it is too late. That is why this motion matters. It seeks the documents that will show Victorians the truth: the costings, the ministerial briefs, the letters from councils, the consultant reports – everything this government is hiding while it pushes ahead with its political decisions. Every dollar wasted on this is a dollar stolen from local roads, community infrastructure and core services. Budgets are tight, and too many councils are financially unsustainable. The last thing they need is 1 Treasury Place dictating a half-baked scheme that drains their coffers and clutters up their communities. That is the difference between us and them. We are for choice; they are for control. We are for ratepayers; they are for themselves. I commend this motion to the house.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (10:28): These changes are part of a broad sweep of changes that come in response to, if you remember, some years ago, massive piles of commingled rubbish on fire, smoking out Melbourne; the export of recycled rubbish to China; and the complete unaccountability of us as consumers for the waste from the products that we buy. I find it a bit rich, picking off one aspect of that broader sweep of the circular economy policy and programs that we have, to rip into the purple bin scenario. The rationale for collecting glass is a logical one. It is an important way to improve the quality of our household recyclables, keeping valued materials out of landfill. Currently glass collected through the mixed recycling bin contaminates all other materials in the bin. Shards of broken glass become embedded in plastics and paper, making them harder to recycle and of lower value. This results in recyclables ending up in landfill instead of being reused. By collecting glass separately, the plastics and paper we recycle will no longer be contaminated by glass and will be of greater value. In addition, greater volumes of glass will be recycled, with jars and bottles transformed back into jars and bottles multiple times, reducing the use of virgin materials and reducing the greenhouse gas emissions from the glass manufacturing process.

On the issue about costs for councils, these include direct savings from the introduction of the purple bin in recycling gate fees and landfill levies and opportunities for efficiency improvements in their entire collection services. So they do save money. I think it is very important that we see this in the broader context of the circular economy in our state.

I just want to close by talking about Warrnambool City Council, who ran a trial in February 2020 of the purple bin and whose council unanimously supported the introduction of the purple bin in July 2020. That is more than five years ago. As a resident of Warrnambool, when we built our garage I think it was two bins then. It is a bit disappointing that I now have to try and figure out a location for four bins, but that really is the only concern in this.

This is what the *Standard* reported:

On Monday night the council unanimously voted to give all households four bins after declaring the trial a success.

...

Mr Schneider –

the CEO at the time –

said the results of a survey sent to households involved in the trial showed the majority of residents supported the addition of the glass-only bin.

Some of the feedback was that the bin was a little bit noisy. I have to confess here, in our house we have nicknamed the purple bin the bin of shame. So when you sit in the house and the bin collection comes on purple bin night, the amount of volume of noise of the glass going into the rubbish truck is proportionate to the consumption of perhaps beverages during the fortnight.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:33): The Greens will support this motion, as we do with documents motions. In the interest of transparency I want to be clear at the outset, though, the Greens have supported the four-stream waste system, however that is implemented, from the

beginning when it was recommended by the Greens-initiated inquiry into recycling and waste management in 2019. The committee recommended a standardised four streams of waste comprising mixed recycling, glass, food and organics and residual waste. Regarding a separate glass service, the committee's final report stated that:

... while the costs for such a scheme may be considerable, the overall benefits to Victoria's waste and resource recovery system are greater. The Government should provide funding and support to councils to implement a separate municipal glass recycling bin.

Glass is infinitely recyclable, but currently a huge proportion of it is not, and failure to separate it from other waste streams is a big part of the problem. Glass is also a key contaminant, preventing the proper sorting and recycling of other waste streams when they are commingled, so keeping glass separate, whether it is in kerbside bins or arrangements like community drop-off points, is an important part of improving Victoria's waste system. I note that a number of councils have raised concerns about the cost of rolling out a glass service by the 2027 deadline. I am all too aware of the financial constraints of councils due to prolific cost shifting from this state government and a state-imposed rate cap. Given the regional electorate that I represent, I am also sympathetic to councils who point out that what works in the city might not work in the country.

When the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Bill was debated here in this chamber in 2021, my former Greens colleague Dr Samantha Ratnam rightly pointed out that some local government areas might not be suited to a four-bin kerbside pickup system and asked for confirmation that councils would be able to retain some flexibility in how they offer recycling services as long as they are increasing material separation and recycling rates. The minister at the time, one Honourable Shaun Leane MP, representing Minister D'Ambrosio in the other place, confirmed that as long as councils ensured they were providing four separate waste streams, there would be flexibility in how the councils could do this based on the circumstances unique to the area. Under the draft waste and recycling service standard that is currently under review, kerbside bin collection is the preferred model, while acknowledging that municipalities would retain the right to propose alternative arrangements if kerbside collection was not reasonably practicable, including for geographically dispersed areas like much of my electorate or for households that do not have space for four bins. Alternatives can already be seen in some areas of inner-city Melbourne. My Greens colleagues tell me in their electorates there have been numerous examples of well-utilised community glass drop-off points for higher density areas.

If councils are experiencing government or departmental pushback against their proposals for flexibility based on the genuine need of their local area, that is really concerning and it needs to change. I have also heard that some councils may not be aware that flexibility is an option at all, which brings into question the government's commitment to really making this work. I am aware that there have been calls for the separate glass waste stream to be scrapped altogether and replaced with an expanded container deposit scheme. While it would be great to see an expansion of the types of waste and containers that the container deposit scheme will accept, at the moment it is just not an equal trade. Surveys also show that there is strong community preference in many areas for kerbside glass services where practicable. The reality is we need both. We have a serious waste and recycling problem, and there is no magic silver or purple bullet. It is going to take many different approaches, significant investment and genuine commitment to waste reduction and a truly circular economy. We have got a long way to go. So I would urge the Victorian Labor government to step up, listen to the findings of the government's own committee following more than 700 submissions from councils, industry experts and environmental organisations, and provide adequate resourcing to support councils to roll out a four-stream waste collection, whatever that looks like.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (10:38): I rise to speak on Mrs McArthur's excellent documents motion on the four-bin waste and recycling scheme here in Victoria. It is an important motion, particularly because of the concern that it is causing in the state of Victoria and the concern it is causing councils. You have had 33 different councils band together to oppose the

implementation of this scheme. As we have seen over and over and over again, the state government loves to outsource its management of programs, the funding for these programs, and lump it all on local government, which means that they have less resources to be able to meet the needs of their communities. That is what is happening at the moment. That is what we see when they make local government become a tax collector for the emergency services levy, waste levies and other levies. As someone dealing with two sets of nappies at home, fortnightly rubbish collection is a big inconvenience, and an inconvenience, I know, for many families around the state.

In a past life, before I was a member of Parliament, I worked at a distinguished think tank, the Institute of Public Affairs. I commented at the time of this announcement that the Labor government was conscripting all Victorians to become unpaid rubbish sorters, and it was true. It went viral. The ‘I stand with Dan’ people went out and said, ‘This is ridiculous,’ but it was actually true. You only have to look at the impact these kinds of schemes have had on the City of Yarra, where every fortnight the streets of Yarra look like a Third World country. You have got people like Peter from Richmond, who has complained almost 500 times to Yarra City Council about overflowing rubbish in places like Lennox Street. I know Ms Ermacora – she has gone now – mentioned that they are going to have to figure out a way in their home to deal with a fourth bin. Try asking the many residents I have spoken to in terrace housing in Richmond how they are going to fit in a fourth bin or how they currently cannot fit a fourth bin into their terrace housing. But again the government has said, ‘We’re going to do this policy, here’s a whole bunch of money for it, \$640 million,’ and outsourced all the responsibility to local government.

We know through the many, many councils that my colleague Mrs McArthur has met with, including many in my constituency and electorate, that they are not happy about this. They believe they do not have the proper funding to resource this, they have not been given enough lead-up time to prepare for this. We are seeing councils struggle with state government incompetence and cost shifting in so many areas – we had a whole inquiry about it – whether it be maintenance of arterial roads, funding for roads, funding for maternal and child health, which has been cut in the growth areas. Over and over again, cost shifting on resourcing to local government or cuts to services of local government, and then they are just pushing off, at massive cost, different programs for local governments to deal with, like this four-bin system. I think it is worth retrieving documents on this.

I commend Mrs McArthur for putting it forward, because – and they might laugh at it – it is something that mayors and CEOs are raising all across the state; it is something the community is mentioning all across the state. I think this is really important. Victorians ought to expect transparency from this government. I am guessing in about six months, after three extensions, the clerks will stand up and say ‘no documents are found’ or ‘cabinet in confidence’ or ‘executive privilege’ or something like that, but it is worth putting these documents motions forward to get answers.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:43): I am pleased to rise on what is an important motion, 1071. I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the Allan Labor government’s new emergency services tax, implemented from 1 July 2025, listed on the 2025–26 municipal rates notices currently being received by Victorian home owners and businesses, is a tax on households;
- (2) further notes that the state government’s emergency services tax:
 - (a) will hit many Victorian families and small businesses hard during a cost-of-living crisis marked by increased state government taxation, charges and rising energy costs;
 - (b) will impact harshly in Melbourne and country Victoria;

- (c) sharply targets agriculture and primary production with higher charges;
- (d) harshly impacts small businesses with a new tax on top of already surging taxes;
- (e) will place pressure on municipalities adding to budgetary challenges and collection difficulties in an environment where council taxes are tightly rate capped, but the state government household tax increase is not capped;
- (f) will impact families on fixed incomes more sharply; and
- (g) in some cases, makes up more than one half of the total bill posted to the household or business by the local council.

I am just going to talk carefully through these, but for the community to understand, the state government, just before the end of the financial year, passed the new emergency services tax. It is a badly named tax; it is really not about emergency services. Yes, it will fund emergency services, but most of them were already funded. There was a fire services levy, but then the bulk of many of the emergency services was funded from consolidated revenue – from the main bucket of money that the state uses to fund all of its services, whether they be health or roads or whatever. What this new source of money will do is fund the emergency services, but the money that the state government has put to those services previously will be pulled back into the central budget. That is the truth of what is happening here. It is a pea and thimble trick. There is not more emergency services funding provided – there is not. There is a rejigging of the funding and an ability for the government to claw back money and deal with its huge budgetary problems.

In essence, every single rate notice in Victoria has got a new and large levy on it. People are going to their letterbox, opening their council rate notice and getting a terrible shock. It is not the council rates that have gone up so much; it is this massive levy that is being paid by every family, every business and every landholder in the state. It is a new tax. It is a property tax. Let us be clear: it is a special tax that has been put on to clobber families and to clobber businesses. And whilst the government claims that it is an emergency services tax, nothing could be further from the truth. They are not more adequately funding emergency services.

A member interjected.

David DAVIS: No, they are not. I am sure Mrs McArthur will have something to say about the fire units in country Victoria, in western Victoria, and the difficulties that they face. They are not being dealt with by this. In fact the state government is pulling back the money which will go into consolidated revenue in effect. It is just a circle that is occurring here, enabling the state government to take more tax out of the community. They are being clobbered with this significant tax.

It will hit businesses too. All of those small shops on the high streets and all of those small factories – all of them – will have very significant increases in the tax applied to them, and they are going to feel it. They are feeling it. They are telling us now. Many of the members of this chamber have people coming into their offices saying, ‘My goodness, this is actually a very, very large tax.’ It is a shock when people open the envelope with their council rates. The council rate is on the top and down the bottom is the state government’s so-called emergency services tax. It replaces the fire services levy. The fire services levy was a modest levy. This is a much larger levy – a new tax that is being applied to every household, every business, every piece of land in Victoria.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: We have actually said we will. Yes, we have. That is what we have said. We have said that does need to be repealed. We have said that it is actually a nasty hit on the community and it is a nasty hit on families, and yes, it needs to be gotten rid of. It is a bad tax. It is a tax that hurts families. I am interested in whether you are going to keep hitting families across Southern Metropolitan Region. In our region people are being hit quite hard by this tax. They can feel it. I tell you what, it is not at all popular and nor is any Labor member who stands up and says, ‘I am in favour of this tax.’ No-one is thinking this is a good tax.

I want to pick up the context of where we are. We have got a massive cost-of-living crisis, and we have got 63 new and expanded taxes under this government – a massive increase in taxation under the Allan Labor government and the Andrews Labor government. They have been in power for almost 11 years now – 11 long years, 11 dark years – 11 high tax years, as every year there is a new sequence of taxes, and this is a new tax that is being applied. Those taxes are hurting. They are making it more difficult for the community. There are rising costs more generally, and energy costs are one of those. Far from energy costs going down under Labor, they are going up, up, up, and people, families and businesses are all being hit hard.

The context of this new tax is massively rising state government tax, massively rising energy costs and massive increases in the cost of living for each and every family, and piled on top of that is Jacinta Allan's household tax, which is what this is. It is a special tax on every single household and every single business in the state. It is a nasty tax; it is a hurtful tax. It is a tax that will make it harder, and it hits in the country and it hits in the city. Wherever you are in Victoria, you are being clobbered by this new and impactful tax. Country Victoria is reeling at the moment. There are really challenging conditions in terms of the dryness of parts of the state. There are really challenging conditions in terms of the ability of farmers to make a living, and they are under attack, I might say, from the government on some of its powerline policies and so forth as well. But country Victoria feels this very much, and it is very clear that fertile agricultural land has been targeted by this tax for very significant increases. They are not modest increases from the old fire services levy; they are very big increases, and that is actually hitting country Victoria very, very sharply.

I also want to pick up the issue with councils. Councils are being forced to wear this. It is true there was a fire services levy on rates notices, but it was a much more modest tax.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: This is a massive increase that you are putting on. I brought up with the Treasurer here in this chamber a massive increase in the fee that a Whittlesea-based business was being clobbered with. I will talk through the Chair. I am being provoked here, and I want to come back to the example that has been elicited from me by the interjection. I want to point out that in that Whittlesea-based business that I raised with the Treasurer, more than a third of the bill is now the emergency services levy. It has gone up 60-odd per cent in that particular case, so that is a huge increase.

Ryan Batchelor: Are you getting rid of it all?

David DAVIS: I am sure, because I actually had the forms in front of me, and I raised it directly with the Treasurer. She did not have a satisfactory answer, but I actually had the forms. I had the old forms and the new forms, and it is clear that there is a huge increase in the charge.

Ryan Batchelor: Are you getting rid of the whole charge?

David DAVIS: I have been very clear: we do not agree with this charge. We think it is wrong. We think it is hitting families, and we think it is hitting businesses. We have said we are going to get rid of it. That is what we have said, and you can understand why, because of the impact that it is having on so many families and businesses. For families who are on fixed incomes – I have been talking to a number of pensioners; I have been talking to a number of people who are on retirement incomes of various types, but they are fixed – these are massively rising costs. They own their own home and good on them. They have saved and they have scrimped; they have worked hard for their whole lives, and they have retired. Now those pensioners in many cases are being hit very hard by these big increases. Every dollar that comes through on the rate bill from the state government is a special present from Jacinta Allan: you will pay, and we are going to take it out of your fixed income. That is what they are doing, and that is a direct hit on the living standard of those people on fixed incomes.

It is wrong, it is nasty and this is what Jacinta Allan is about. She has been doing this all the way through this period, as part of the government that has done it, with Tim Pallas at first and Daniel

Andrews. They have been there for almost 11 years now. Taxes have gone up, charges have gone up, families have been hit, businesses have been hit and this is the coup de grâce on top of it all – another big hit on families; \$3 billion over four years. It is a very significant hit on the bottom line of very many Victorians. As I said, in some cases the share of the bill of these charges is very large; the fixed charge part of it is quite large. Councils are having to put out a rate notice with their small component and then a large component from the state government. They are wearing some of the odium of this, that is true, and that is not quite fair, because they are not the levier of this particular charge. I think that Victorians know that this is not the right way to go.

Victorians know that these costs are impacting. They know that it is not the right way to clobber households and so forth. The state government needs to tighten up. It needs to stop its waste. We have seen more than \$50 billion of cost overruns in projects. This is not the cost of the project, this is the cost of the overrun on the project: more than \$50 billion – \$50,000 million – over the government's term in cost overruns on projects. That is because of the state government's incompetence, its failure to control project costs and its hopeless cost containment measures.

I can go through the list, as people know I have done in this chamber before. Look at the Metro, which started south of \$9 billion – it is now north of \$15 billion. We will find out eventually what it actually costs, but it is a huge increase. It is a project that might be a good project at one number, and then you have got this huge surge in cost because of the state government's model of commissioning these projects and its failure to control cost. Or look at the North East Link, which started, again, well south of \$10 billion but is now north of \$26 billion – \$26,000 million. This is why the state government is so desperate for money – because it has had all these cost blowouts and it has not been able to contain the costs on its projects. I say the state government is culpable, and sadly, with the taxes and charges, families and businesses are paying the price of Labor. They are paying the price of an incompetent government that cannot manage money, an incompetent government that cannot manage the state's finances and an incompetent government that cannot manage projects, and the consequence of that is families are being hit and hit and hit again by large cost increases, and this tax is the most recent of these large cost increases.

Families, I think, are very entitled to be angry with this government and to say, 'Our standard of living is being hit, our standard of living is being reduced.' Businesses are entitled to be angry and to say, 'Our costs are being hit. It is much harder for us to compete internationally, it is much harder for us to bring products to market and it is much harder for us to sell products, because the state government has put all of these additional charges onto us' – including this new one on top of the other 62 charges. So these charges – these increased taxes, these expanded taxes, these expanded charges – that have been put on are having a big effect.

It is interesting. In the chamber yesterday I quoted the former head of the ANZ Bank, and he said Victoria was the toughest place in Australia to do business. Well, that is true, and so many businesspeople say that. They point out the difficulty of doing business here. They point out the costs and they point out the additional taxes, the additional charges and the high level of regulation. And the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, to their credit, with their work on regulation very much made out the case that Victoria has the worst regulatory approach of all the states and territories in Australia and that those regulatory costs are very significant for business. That is part of the context in which these new taxes and new charges are being applied. I think the community is entitled to be very angry, I think councils are entitled to be angry and I think that families and businesses have had enough of this government.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:58): In Victoria the taxes are too damn high, and I think that pretty much everyone knows this. Certainly the people in my area, in Frankston and Cranbourne, know it when they get their rates notice; the farmers know it when they turn up out the front of Parliament; the firefighters union know it; the opposition know it; and I think even the government know it. Victorians have reached the limits of what can be extracted from them through taxation. I think that even the Treasurer knows this. I know that sitting with the government and with

the Treasurer at the moment is this Silver review. What I think should have been done with this emergency services levy is that rather than having a new tax the government should have looked for savings in other areas, and I am certain there are lots of savings to be made. In fact that is what I anticipate is in the Silver review – I do not know what is in it yet – and I look forward to reading that when it comes out. But I would say this: the Treasurer, I know, is trying to come up with a response to this review and some sort of plan, and I would urge the government and I would urge the Treasurer to be bold here and to actually, rather than go through things with a magnifying glass, get out the chainsaw and do what is necessary in this state and cut waste from the budget, because as I say and as everyone knows, the taxes are too high. Unlike the opposition, when the government does this – if they do it, if they have the courage to do it, if the Treasurer has the courage to do it, to get out the chainsaw – I will not be criticising the government and asking why they are making these cuts. I will cheer the government on if they do it. I urge the government to do this, to do what is necessary.

The government is too big. The government is funded by taxes. There is so much waste in Victoria. I cannot believe when the government says we cannot cut expenditure. No-one believes that there is not waste that cannot be eliminated, that there are not unnecessary things that the government does. I have said for ages now one of the most important and primary functions of the state is protecting people from violence. The government has gotten so big that it cannot even focus on the primary functions of the state and manage them well. I say what the government should do is stop all these extraneous things and start focusing on the real basic stuff and get that right before they do anything else.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (11:01): I am very pleased to rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion about the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. I want to start just using a little rubric that Mr Davis mentioned in his analysis of what is happening with this new fund. He said it is impacting on metropolitan Melbourne and it is impacting on regional Victoria. I want to use that to draw a comparison to something else that had pretty significant impacts on metropolitan Melbourne and on regional Victoria, and that is the October 2022 flooding event – 81 per cent of the local government areas in Victoria were impacted by a flooding event that was the worst in the state's history.

This chamber asked the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee to do a pretty in-depth response and inquiry into that flooding event. As a member of that committee I was very pleased to spend time listening to communities across the state, here in metropolitan Melbourne and also across regional Victoria, about the impact that that flooding event had on their communities. What they told us was that it was devastating, that it was a devastating impact that the flooding event had on them, their livelihoods and their businesses. The universal cry that we heard from them out of that inquiry, the universal theme, was the gratitude that they had for the SES volunteers who came out and sandbagged their homes, who helped protect the levees, who did everything they could to help those communities in what was the worst flooding event in Victoria's history not three years ago.

That inquiry, having travelled the state, heard that evidence. What did that inquiry recommend? It recommended a lot of things – a nearly 500-page report the Environment and Planning Committee of this chamber tabled. Recommendation 49 from that inquiry is:

That the Victorian government increase funding for training of volunteers to boost the capacity of State Emergency Service units in the Shepparton and Echuca and Moama Search and Rescue squads to respond during emergencies.

If people go and look at that report and look at the extracts of proceedings at the back of that report, they will not find any dissent from the members of the committee to that report and to that recommendation.

More recently, the Environment and Planning Committee has done an inquiry into the resilience of our built environment to climate change. I will not go into that in detail other than to say that the evidence that we heard from climate scientists about the changing weather patterns in the state of Victoria should make us concerned about the increased frequency and severity of natural disasters in

this state. Our temperatures are increasing. The mean average temperatures are increasing and we are having hotter summers. We are having longer bushfire seasons. This year's bushfire season has been brought forward a month from its normal start date. The end date has not been brought forward, but the start date has been brought forward. We know that the storm events that we are seeing with increasing frequency across Melbourne are being driven, according to the evidence that we received in our committee, by the changes in the climate here in Victoria.

With that comes increased frequency of natural disasters, and what the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund does is increase funding to the agencies that support us during those natural disasters – increase funding to the Victoria State Emergency Service, which is the primary agency responsible for responding to flooding events and to storm events. Just as the former fire services levy was a recommendation by and arose out of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, we have a significant piece of work done by the –

David Davis interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: No, I am not, Mr Davis – just listen. What we saw from the detailed inquiry into that flooding event was that we needed to increase funding to the SES. What did the government's response to the report into the flooding event do? It detailed the \$250 million investment in additional support to the Victoria State Emergency Services and to the CFA that is coming as a result of the additional funding that is coming as a result of the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. That is what the government is doing – it is responding to the changes in our climate. It is responding to the concerns of our communities, who want to make sure that the emergency services are there for them when they need them. And I have got to say that this government is there for the emergency services volunteers when they need it.

That stands in stark contrast to those opposite, because what they want to do, what the Liberal Party wants to do, in the words of Mr Davis earlier in this debate about this additional funding, about this levy and its additional funding, the fund and its funding, is, and I quote Mr Davis, 'We are going to get rid of it.' All of the funding that has been made available to support our emergency services is going to be abolished by the Liberal Party, because when they say 'scrap the tax', what they mean is cut the funding. 'Scrap the tax' means cut the funding, because there is not a magic pudding here. There is not a magic pudding that allows the Liberal Party to all of a sudden magically find the close to \$6 billion over a term of government, about \$4.6 billion over the rest of the forward estimates, to fund support for emergency services in this state.

When they say 'scrap the tax', they mean cut the funding, and they have got form, because they did it the last time they were in government. They cut funding to the CFA the last time they were in government, and what they are telling us now – Mr Davis, in this chamber just now – 'We're going to get rid of it.' If you get rid of the levy, you get rid of the funds that it provides. That means you get rid of the support that is being provided to our CFA volunteers. That means you get rid of the additional support that is going to our emergency services volunteers. That is what their plan is. Their plan to scrap the tax is a plan to cut the funding.

It is going to leave Victorian communities vulnerable to the increasing natural disasters that we know are here. It is not that they are coming, it is not that the climate change is something that we need to get ready for in the future – the changes to our climate are occurring now. Our summers are hotter, the bushfire season is longer, winter storms are more extreme because of the changing climate. And what we have from those opposite is hypocrisy, because when it comes to supporting our emergency services volunteers, hypocrisy, thy name is Liberal.

Out in their communities, the Liberal members are willing to go out and talk about how great our volunteers are. Recently we had Mrs McArthur get dressed up in orange and post a little video about Wear Orange Wednesday to support the SES. She said in January that she wanted to say a huge thank

you to all the volunteers of the CFA, the SES and relief centres that had given up their time to protect the people and properties of western Victoria. We saw Ms Bath say, in August:

Whether it's storms or floods, road rescues or supporting other emergency services during crisis, their professionalism, courage and commitment are nothing short of extraordinary.

Mr Davis earlier on talked about southern metropolitan Melbourne, which has been hit pretty hard by storms recently. We had the member for Sandringham say:

Thank you to the incredible volunteers from the SES Moorabbin Unit who are working night and day to help those who need it.

When our community needs help, they are there for us – in any conditions.

My response to that to the SES volunteers across our state is that the Liberal Party is not there for you. The Liberal Party is not there for you, because they want to cut the funding that comes to support your activities, because when they say 'Scrap the tax' they mean cut the funds, and they have not detailed anywhere how they are going to do anything other than cut this – than scrap the tax. The hypocrisy that we see from members of the Liberal Party in this debate is breathtaking, because what we see is that in here they will get up – Mr Davis and I am sure others – and bloviate until they are red in the face about the impact of the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, and then, just like the hypocrites they are, they will go out and pat our emergency services volunteers on the back. Unless they support our volunteers and support this fund, they are demonstrating that they are the hypocrites they are.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (11:11): I rise to support Mr Davis's motion and to speak on the critical issue that affects every Victorian household and business – the cost of government. We have heard the term 'cost-of-living crisis' tossed around for years, particularly in the context of taxes, housing affordability, energy bills and inflation. But let me tell you something: what we are truly facing in Victoria is not a cost-of-living crisis, it is a cost-of-government crisis. And the new emergency services tax, as highlighted by Mr Davis's motion, is just the latest example of the government's failure to control spending, driving up costs for everyone. The government likes to blame rising prices on external factors – the weather, global markets, even wars, or in the case of the most recent tax hikes, the supposed need to fund essential services. But let us be clear: prices do not rise by magic, they rise because of decisions made here, right here in this Parliament. Every time the government imposes a new tax, adds more regulation or mismanages spending, it compounds the financial burden on every Victorian. This emergency services tax is no exception.

Take a moment to think about the real cost of government here. The Allan Labor government has once again turned to the taxpayer to solve its own fiscal problems. This emergency services tax, set to appear on municipal rates notices from 1 July 2025, is a direct consequence of Labor's budget mismanagement. While the government claims that the tax is necessary to fund emergency services, the reality is that it is simply another attempt to cover up their financial missteps. And it does not stop there. As this motion points out, the tax is going to hit households, small businesses and especially farmers, who face so many other challenges at this time. This is not just another levy; it is a tax on struggling families and businesses, many of whom are already dealing with higher energy costs, increased taxes and inflation.

The question must be asked: why are Victorians being asked to foot the bill for a government that has failed to control spending? The cost of government is what drives inflation, and inflation is what drives the so-called cost of living. The \$2 billion patch-up job for a broken budget does not address the fundamental problem – government spending that is out of control. The emergency services tax is just the latest in a long line of taxes and levies introduced by this government to try and balance the books – over 60 of them, over 60 taxes, new or increased – in this state. But this tax, as we all know, is not just about funding the CFA or the SES. Rather, it is about filling the Treasury's coffers to pay for the government's inefficiency. To make matters worse, there is no guarantee that a single cent of this tax will even make it to the volunteers who rely on adequate funding to do their jobs. In fact with

\$165 million in cuts to the CFA and Fire Rescue Victoria budgets this seems to be less about funding emergency services and more about shoring up Labor's bottom line.

Let us also take a look at the broader picture. The cost of government does not just show up in the form of taxes like the emergency services levy. It is in housing costs, where stamp duty and excessive regulations drive up prices and stifle development. It is in energy prices, where a rushed, poorly planned transition to net zero is causing bills to skyrocket – let alone the impact on rural Victoria, where you want renewable energy zones and transmission lines absolutely decimating prime farming land but also the environment. Do not talk about how you care about the environment, because you clearly do not. It is in construction costs as well, where union deals and government-imposed red tape make projects more expensive and delayed. What we are seeing is a pattern. Government spending causes inflation, and inflation makes everything more expensive for everyday Victorians. The emergency services tax fits squarely into this pattern. It is an example of the government's inability to address its budget crisis without making Victorians pay for it. It does not stop with farmers or businesses. This tax will hit every household across Victoria, including those on fixed incomes, as Mr Davis has outlined, who will be the hardest hit by this extra burden. As Mr Davis highlighted, in some cases this tax will account for more than half of a family's total council bill. This is not just an inconvenience, it will be the last financial straw for many. I have councils in my electorate where they already had a 40 per cent increase in arrears before this tax was introduced. Now with the drought across rural Victoria they have no hope of paying their rates, let alone this tax.

Furthermore, the municipalities that are being tasked with collecting this tax are facing their own financial pressures. Local councils are already struggling with rate caps and budget constraints, yet they are now being asked to act as the unpaid tax collectors, the debt collectors for a government levy they did not design and have no control over. This is classic cost shifting on steroids. This is the cost of government once again being offloaded onto local communities, forcing them to absorb the administrative burden and collect bad debts, all at the expense of local services. I want to ask the Labor government and those on the other side of this chamber: are you going to be standing by the local municipalities that have to claim somebody's house because they cannot pay their rates and this levy – this levy you are going to extract out of local government rates whether the ratepayer pays it or not? This is the cost of government once again being offloaded onto local communities. Growing arrears caused by these hikes will see councils lose out on their own revenue. Surely the most important thing, the most important role of government, is to keep the citizens safe.

This government, as we know from everything that is happening at this moment at this time in this state, is failing dismally to keep people safe, but their solution to keeping people safe is to apply another tax. Victorians are being taxed now to keep themselves safe. Surely that is the core responsibility of government: to keep people safe. You are failing on all fronts and now you want to tax people to actually keep them safe. It is actually criminal what you are doing.

In conclusion, the emergency services tax is not just another levy. It is a clear example of the cost-of-government crisis we face here in Victoria. It is the latest in a long line of tax grabs from a government that has lost control of its spending, and once again the burden is falling squarely on the shoulders of every Victorian. The Liberals and Nationals have made it crystal clear: we will scrap this unjust tax, reinstate the fire services property levy and ensure that emergency services funding comes from a well-managed state budget, not from the already stretched pockets of struggling families. This is not a cost-of-living crisis, it is a cost-of-government crisis. But more than that, it has become a cost-of-Labor crisis. It is time for this government to take full responsibility for its mismanagement, stop shifting the burden onto taxpayers and put an end to this endless cycle.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (11:21): I rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion. The Greens will not be supporting the motion, as we believe in the importance of stable and secure funding for our essential emergency services in the face of the climate crisis. I think Mr Batchelor has well outlined the disasters that this state has experienced and the urgency of the need to be better prepared.

I have also spoken to that previously in relation to this matter. What that means is that our emergency services need to be ready to respond and support our communities.

However, I did want to take this opportunity to raise concerns about how this levy is being implemented by this government. In particular I want to acknowledge the concerns raised with me by many councils across the state, including in my own electorate, since the levy was passed. The government has made a number of promises, including on the record, in regard to how this levy will be implemented, including the support that they said they would provide to council. But from what I am hearing from constituents and councils, this is not being honoured. I would also like to note that I have a number of questions on notice to the Treasurer asking for clarification on these matters, and I am still waiting for responses to some of those.

Firstly, while we would have liked to see this levy being collected by the state, we understand the rationale and practical limitations of doing so. We accept that could not be the case, but given that situation, it was incumbent on the state government to ensure strong support, practical and financial, to assist councils with implementing this on behalf of the state government – and rightly so. Councils want assurance about support and reimbursement for costs they encounter as a result of doing work for the government. This government has an extremely poor track record when it comes to shifting costs onto councils. We had a whole inquiry that clearly outlined that that is the case. Some councils are facing an existential threat because of the issue of cost shifting, and I do not really think this government appreciates the seriousness of that.

The cost of operating core government services such as libraries, maternal and child health services, aged care and even recently VicRoads services have been incrementally shifted onto local government to the point that they can no longer take them on. They are having to choose between providing the services that their community needs that they are committed to and having to deal with costs that they are being forced to take on by the state government with no funding to support that. Unsurprisingly, this has created an environment of mistrust, so it is reasonable that councils are seeking assurances that the state government will fully fund both the initial and ongoing costs of the delivery of this levy. In addition to the costs of implementation, there are persistent concerns that councils will have to carry the debt of ratepayers who are unable or unwilling to pay the levy. Many councils I have spoken to have received legal advice that they must pass on a proportion of whatever amount they receive, regardless of what the intention of the ratepayer was.

A ratepayer might say they will pay their rates but they cannot afford to pay the levy. The council collects that amount for the rates, but they are being advised that legally they have to pass on a proportion of that to the state, regardless of the fact that it was only the levy component that was not paid. Rural councils in particular are worried about a high proportion of rates notices that are fully or partially unpaid. We are yet to see whether that will come to bear, but they are rightly concerned about this and want to know what steps will be put in place to ensure that they are not left carrying large amounts of debt that then further put financial pressure on councils. These concerns remain despite the assurances from the Treasurer that they would not be letting councils carry debt. This is an unresolved issue that urgently needs to be addressed.

Primary producers, as we are all aware, continue to be concerned about the rate that they are paying. We were really pleased to successfully negotiate a reprieve for farmers who were drought affected, which included basically the entire electorate of Western Victoria, which had been long drought affected. We were really pleased to have been able to include that as part of the conditions for supporting the levy. We also did welcome the expansion of the exemption to all primary producers for the next 12 months, because whether they are officially drought declared or not, we know that all primary producers are struggling at the moment, and this will be a big adjustment. There does, however, remain ongoing angst in parts of rural Victoria. It is worth noting that the rate applied to different types of properties is directed and set by the Treasurer, not by the legislation that was passed in this Parliament. We continue to urge the government to work with councils and communities to ensure that rates are being set and fairly distributed.

Moreover, the crux of what I am putting on the record here today is that the government needs to better engage with councils in particular and communities in general on the levy. I do not think you would find any argument that we need our emergency services to have stable and adequate funding. It is in all of our interests that this occurs, and as I said, that is why we felt that this levy was an important part of securing that funding for those services. But it is also in everyone's interests to make it work. If this is the mechanism to fund our emergency services, we need it to work. Everyone needs to come together in good faith, and we particularly need the Labor state government to sit down with councils, to sit down with rural communities, to listen and work together to find a constructive way forward.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:28): I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Mr Davis's name in regard to the emergency services levy. I am going to talk a little bit about the history of this. I have also had the benefit of listening to a number of contributions in the chamber. I will perhaps start with why some of these reforms were important and remark on Dr Mansfield contribution as well. In recent years we have seen the huge impact of climate change, population growth and the frequency and response to emergency incidents in Victoria. We are seeing more floods more often and storms and fires that result in long-term devastation to communities. The effects of climate change mean that we may have less water over time, but the effects of the floods that we are seeing are more severe. Bigger dumps of rain in more concentrated periods of time will often mean that our local drains are not able to cope with the deluge and you will get ponding and increased levels of water. And it can catch people out; these things can happen quickly.

I live in close proximity to the Yarra River. In the last deluge in October 2022, I think it was, I saw in my own community the Yarra River rise to a level which I thought was going to cover one of the quite significant roads, which would have meant that where I live would have been cut off from being able to get out. I note that. It was quite interesting. Large parts of Bulleen around the Yarra were also inundated and over into the back of Ivanhoe in those parklands. Whilst a lot of that is parkland, a lot of those areas are within a flood zone for very good reason, because the Yarra does flood. I note the flood inquiry that was launched did not look at the Yarra, which was very disappointing as it should have. It is a very important river because the Yarra River does swell in times of deluge like that.

I watch all the emergency services notifications and apps to make sure that I can see where the inundation is occurring, because it does affect our roads. We have to be realistic about what is happening in our climate. As I said, the impacts of climate change are incredibly real – more intense floods, more severe storms. That means trees down, damage to properties from trees coming down, winds are quite severe and being whipped up and of course fire. What we did was we listened to our emergency services people who were saying that they needed support to ensure that they have the best equipment that they could have on hand to ensure that they can help Victorians in time of need.

That is why from the 1 July 2025, which is now behind us, the essential services levy replaced the fire services property levy. Despite what those opposite say, it is not a new tax. The tax existed before as the fire services property levy, but the application of that tax has changed. There are people who did not pay it before that are now going to be captured by that tax. The reason for that is it is a broader emergency and disaster response. It is similar to other Australian jurisdictions. The dedicated funding ensures our hardworking emergency services workers have the tools and resources they need to do what they need to do when it happens. When we are faced with storms, we need those volunteers to be able to come out, whether it is to remove fallen trees and the like or to help sandbag or whatever it is – fighting fires – we need those volunteers. People say, 'Oh, well, the people who are impacted, if they are out in the bush they are going to be protecting their own property.' But as we know, when we see those really severe floods and storms and fires happen we often see many volunteers come from interstate. You will often see the ADF come out and assist as well.

Our emergency services, the way that they are managed is they scale up depending on the severity of the incident whether, like I said, it be fire, flood or storm. It is a bit of a furphy to say, 'Yes, of course if people are volunteering, they protect their own properties if they are part of a local brigade. But, as I said, those who are in the command centres make decisions about where the resources are needed,

and that is when they are able to scale up and flex up and bring resources in from other areas as well. There are important exemptions with this tax. If people are in local areas and they do volunteer for some of our emergency services, then they can be exempt. We are always looking for more volunteers. That is something that was talked about in the flood inquiry, that it is quite difficult to recruit and retain volunteers, especially in the SES.

A shout-out to all of our emergency services workers who turn out for Victorians each and every day; they do really important work. The more people we can get to volunteer for these services is obviously critical, because the strength of these services depends on having appropriate levels of staffing or volunteers to be able to staff trucks and turn out and clear trees, do on-water rescues and all the rest of it. It does not matter how many times we tell people not to drive through floodwaters, people do it every time there is a deluge. 'Do not go out on our waterways when they are swollen', people do it. Even in my own electorate in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, the Manningham SES regularly do mock rescues because we have the Yarra in Manningham and other river areas as well. They regularly have to rescue people from swollen floodwaters, so they do really important work. I can think of nothing better than supporting those emergency services workers in the work that they do, because they are turning out for Victorians.

Our government made a decision to make sure that we could fund them appropriately. As I said, this tax is funded from a broad base of properties across Victoria. This ensures all Victorians make a fair contribution to our emergency services while keeping the impost as low as possible for each individual property owner. Previously people who owned farming properties were exempt, but this new iteration of the tax is going to apply to everybody. But as I said earlier, there are exemptions. If people do not want to pay the tax, they can go and volunteer. It is simple. A lot of these people in regional areas may already be volunteers, so they would be able to claim the exemption. It is only fair that this tax apply to Victorians equally, because we are all beneficiaries of this service.

Those opposite hate the word 'tax'. They double down on the word 'tax'. I heard Mr Batchelor's contribution about how the Liberals have said that they would scrap this tax, which begs the question: how would they pay? How would they fund our emergency services and the important work that they do? There is no answer to that. All they do is go, 'We hate tax.' Not every Victorian hates taxes, because taxes fund our public schools, they fund our public hospitals and they make sure we have got roads to drive on and all the rest of it. If you keep doubling down on taxes and spreading that rhetoric, we will not have government services. I know what those opposite want. They actually do not want any government services. They want their rich mates to come out and provide services at a cost. That would mean you would have wealth inequality in our community and you would also have inequality of access to services. That is what we do not want. We want all Victorians to have the services that they need when they need to access them. Again, this goes back to what the emergency services and volunteers (ESV) levy is about. It is about making sure that this tax is applicable to all Victorians who are eligible to pay it under the rules and that this funds our vital emergency services work.

As I said, at the heart of the reform is making sure that the funding is secure. It was what the bushfire royal commission recommended we do for fire services and what thousands of VICSES members have been asking us for. I have visited a number of SES volunteer brigades in my own electorate, and they tell me all the time, 'We need up-to-date and effective equipment to make sure we can do our work when we need to do it.' I support our volunteers, and as I said before, I will give a shout-out to our hardworking volunteers and emergency services workers, who turn out for Victorians each and every time there is an emergency or a disaster. Every dollar raised by the ESV tax will go towards vital life-saving equipment, vehicles, staff, training for volunteers, community education and recovery support for when Victorians need it the most. That is in stark contrast to the contributions that we have heard from those opposite about this. It is a lie to talk about government blowouts and all the rest of it. It is just the rhetoric that they have. It is their go-to rhetoric when they do not have any facts at their fingertips. We heard earlier today in this chamber about the complete debacle that was the opposition, the worst opposition in history, in their stance and take on machetes. Again, they are very low on

policy, very low on ideas. They have no alternative to this. But what we are doing is making sure that our hardworking VICSES volunteers and all of our other very important volunteers have the funding that they need to do the vital life-saving work they do. We will not be supporting this motion.

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (11:38): The question on everyone's minds is: why does the government hate farmers so much? Why, in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, has it chosen to slug the very people that put food on our table and clothes on our backs? Why has it decided that the men and women who rise before dawn to feed Victoria should now be treated as the cash cow of Spring Street? Instead of backing the bush, the government is bleeding it dry. In my electorate of Western Victoria the so-called emergency services tax has landed with a thud. Families from Ararat to Bacchus Marsh are opening their rates notices and seeing for the first time a separate state government tax sitting alongside their council rates. Farmers cannot pass these costs on. Every extra dollar dragged out of regional Victoria by this government is a dollar that is not spent in regional communities. It goes to Melbourne to be spent on Melbourne projects, and it all gets wasted on cost blowouts like the Metro Tunnel, over \$13 billion; like the North East Link, over \$16 billion, and the Auditor-General had a lot to say about that; and like the West Gate Tunnel, initially priced at \$5.5 billion – now the cost is closer to \$10 billion. People in regional Victoria are lucky to get a road fixed. Labor's message to regional Victoria is clear: pay up, shut up and do not expect a thing in return.

But we cannot ignore the toll this is taking on people's mental health. In regional communities across my electorate I hear the same story over and over. People are stressed. They are anxious. They are worn down. They dread opening the next bill. They feel like no matter how hard they work they are failing to get further ahead. When a farmer outside Ararat sees another tax on their rates notice, this is not just a number on a page, it is another weight on their shoulders. When families in Ballarat or Maryborough talk about skipping meals or cutting back on heating, it is not just financial pressure, it is mental pressure. We have got a government that have broken the state budget, they have broken the confidence of the Victorian economy, and now they seek to break the spirit of regional Victoria. We know that regional Victoria has fewer local mental health services than those in the city have. Not one new local was announced in the Grampians region in the last round of announcements. This tax makes it worse. It fuels despair in communities already under pressure, and it shows just how out of touch this government has become.

But we cannot forget that in Western Victoria, in my electorate, emergency services do not just mean paid departmental employees, they also mean our amazing volunteers. In every corner of our region the CFA and the SES are the backbone of local safety. They are the mums and dads in Ballarat, farmers in Ararat, shopkeepers in Maryborough, tradies in Bacchus Marsh, locals who drop everything in the middle of milking, in the middle of dinner, in the middle of the night to protect lives and property. Yet this government now tells those same volunteers and their communities that for the privilege of volunteering they need to pay even more tax. The people who give their free time are now asked to pay twice – once with their service and once with their wallet. You cannot put a price on courage, but Labor are certainly trying to tax it. This tax will not buy any more CFA volunteers. It will not put more SES members on the ground. All it does is erode goodwill in the community where service comes from the heart.

This government has the gall to cap council rates, but it will not cap its own taxes. Councils across my electorate are bound by the rate cap, forced to justify every single cent they extract from ratepayers, and rightly so. But the state government does not bind itself to that same standard. The result? Councils are forced to be the unwilling tax collectors of the state. They are the ones posting out the notices. They are the ones copping the phone calls. They are the ones wearing the anger from local residents. Councils send the bill, but Labor sends the pain. What is worse, it is regional communities that are disproportionately impacted. The bill might come from the local council, but it is Labor's hand in your pocket.

We know that this tax is not really about funding emergency services, it is just another attempt to fund Labor's big black budget hole. The government tells us that it is there to fund emergencies, but we

know that that is just not true. Victorians previously funded emergency services through land tax, stamp duty, insurance levies and payroll tax. It is called consolidated revenue. Every Victorian supports our firefighters and first responders, but we were already paying for them without the need for a new tax. This new tax is not about supporting emergency responses, it is about attempting to save the government from a self-induced, self-inflicted emergency.

Over the last decade Labor have introduced or increased dozens of new taxes. Victoria is already the highest taxed state in the country and carries the largest state debt in the country – \$200 billion of debt, which equates to \$1.2 million in interest repayments every single hour. And what do we get for that – a health system in crisis, crumbling infrastructure and roads, and services stretched to breaking point. This new tax does not fix those failures, it only deepens them.

Why does the government hate farmers so much? Why does it punish volunteers? Why does it raid families already struggling with the cost of living? Western Victoria does not need a new tax. It needs a government that helps households, not punches down on them. It needs a government that is respecting farmers, not robbing them. It needs a government that values the CFA and SES volunteers, not taxing them into oblivion. And it needs a government that understands that financial pressure is also mental pressure, that taxing people into despair is no way to govern. This tax must be scrapped. We have committed on this side of the chamber to do that, because we know that it is the right thing to do. If this government will not fight the fire of the cost-of-living crisis burning through family budgets in this state, the least it can do is stop pouring petrol on it by inflicting another tax on Victorians at a time when they can least afford it. Show some compassion, show some care, show that you actually listen to regional Victorians and scrap this tax.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (11:45): I rise to oppose this motion. I want to start off by acknowledging farmers across Victoria. It is, as many of the speakers so far in this debate have acknowledged, a difficult game. It has been for many decades, and it is getting more difficult, particularly when we see the impacts of droughts in the last 12 or 18 months in Victoria and indeed around much of Australia. In light of that, I absolutely support the decision that was made not to increase the rate on agricultural primary producers when the value is being set, as occurs on an annual basis.

The Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund has been established in a way where it looks at property values, which I think is a good way to implement it. The issue for farmers is they can have high asset values but obviously have years where cash flow is severely restricted or very minimal. Again, I support the decision that has been made not to raise the rate for primary producers this year. I also know it has been a difficult year for volunteers with a lot of this conversation going around and going through needing to apply for rebates for the first time.

I do think it is important to face up to the bigger conversations that we need to have and why we need to have these conversations. Climate change absolutely underpins the need for this legislation that came through this year. We know that farmers are incredibly hit by it, but all of us are hit by it. We are on an incredibly dry continent as it stands, with only the perimeter of the nation effectively being able to be farmed, with increased flooding and increased peak temperature days impacting ambient soil temperatures, killing plants and decreasing the productivity of livestock, and all this with a sea level rise. We are seeing coastal inundation with increased flooding and increased water coming down our rivers and into our areas of housing and indeed agricultural paddocks and whatnot impacting livestock.

We are seeing more and more pressures on the homes, the businesses, the infrastructure in all of those spaces. 2019–20 was the most catastrophic event we have seen. Unfortunately, all the science tells us it is only going to get worse. We need to be able to, for our emergency services, provide them with the best possible equipment to save lives and protect property. I absolutely acknowledge that CFA volunteers are there on the front line defending their neighbours' properties and defending regional and rural towns. I want to acknowledge SES volunteers are also doing that throughout the state, as we

have seen greater impacts from wind events, fires, floods and of course the continual impacts of stronger and stronger droughts. So it is important that our volunteers are equipped with the equipment to deal with this. The reality we have got to face is that with these increasing impacts, there are increasing costs and increasing difficulties in dealing with the immediacy of fires, floods, windstorm events et cetera. There is also the rebuild – the build back – which can take significant time, particularly when we are building back better to ensure that our public and private infrastructure is equipped for future events, which, as I have just said, are getting worse.

Those costs are flowing onto all of us in insurance. We saw insurance up 16.5 per cent last year – as I said before, from 2019–20 – when effectively the Top End of Australia was in floods and New South Wales and Victoria were under ferocious fires. The costs impacting us all – to deal with it but then respond, and where we are able to, build back and build back better – are increasing. I think we absolutely have to acknowledge that as a starting point. As the baked-in increases in the amount of moisture in our atmosphere and the baked-in increases out of our ambient soil temperatures are having greater and greater impacts, that is something we all have to deal with. In some years it will be worse than others, but year on year it is going to be worse and worse.

That is why I think the cost-of-living measures that the Labor government has made are so important to communities, particularly regional and rural communities. We are investing in early education in those early years, those formative years of a child's brain development, getting parents back into the workforce and getting them working in their communities that need a local workforce to keep towns ticking. That early education in our schools – the infrastructure that we have made and investments in primary schools and secondary colleges, ensuring that from three years old onwards our kids are getting a world-class education – sets up not only that family to be back in the workforce but that child to go on and be an incredibly productive participant in our economy. We should want our state, all our regional towns and our rural towns, to have dynamic, thriving, resilient economies, and that is what education does for us.

The investments we have made in health to ensure that people can age in place with their communities, can access pharmacies and can get virtual EDs are another way of keeping those cost-of-living pressures down, again for regional and rural communities, as is the regional fare cap, which is seeing massive reductions on V/Line trains and bus services from regional Victoria to anywhere around the network. Connecting regional and rural Victorians into education, into health services and to each other is so incredibly important. I am very proud of those cost-of-living measures and what they have meant for communities, what they have meant for families and what they have meant for local economies. And although there are challenges of meeting the workforce needs in our regional and rural towns, I think it is a good problem that we are having demand that we need to meet as opposed to economies that cannot offer jobs. The fact that we are training young people to fill need in local workforces is an incredible positive, as opposed to not having the jobs to put them in. I will leave my contribution there as I have run out of time.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (11:55): We have just heard a lovely outline of all the wonderful things that the Allan government is doing. We have heard the government members over there talking about their passion and their love for farmers. Meanwhile, right across this state there are rallies, there is frustration and there are trucks and tractors in the streets. Indeed there were trucks and tractors at the bush summit only last week, where we saw the bubbling over of frustration by emergency services volunteers – CFA and SES – and farmers. We heard just before the member talking about trains. Well, my goodness, they are an anomaly at some stages on the Gippsland line. In the last decade they have never met punctuality targets. The only time they met punctuality targets was back in February a couple of years ago when buses replaced the trains.

In relation to education, we hear about the importance of education, yet this government is turning its back on teachers, and teachers are leaving the profession through pure frustration and the loss of appetite to be in our regions, and this government is doing nothing to stop that. We have just heard about bushfires, and the 2019–20 bushfire season was one of the worst on record. Well, we have

bushfires in this state – we are one of the most fire-prone states in the world – and what does this government do? It cuts funding. It cuts funding from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and it cuts funding from Parks Victoria. It is one of the worst neighbours in history. It cannot manage public land management, it has got proliferation of pests and weeds, it is not doing targeted fuel reduction burns and it is not serving these vulnerable communities – the communities that we know and love – in regional Victoria.

The government is talking about the importance of funding our SES and our CFA. It is very, very important to fund, but out of this new emergency services tax, how much is it actually delivering to CFA? Let me give some instruction to those on the opposite benches. Only 20 cents in every dollar collected by the government on this emergency services tax goes to the CFA and goes to the volunteers. They have got machinery, equipment and trucks that are outdated, that are past their use-by date and that certainly could almost have plates on them that are 25 and 30 years old. This is an absolute indictment of this government. It stands there and says ‘We care about volunteers, we care about the regions,’ yet it is underfunding CFA, it is underfunding the SES and it is giving 20 cents out of every dollar from this new tax grab to the CFA. Let me consolidate that with some information. The VFBV, the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, who are the people who passionately care about our regions, have actually provided some information. It is the 2025–26 forecast funding for the new Victorian emergency services tax, and it clearly states that the percentage of the total tax collected, the forecast funding –

The PRESIDENT: Sorry, Ms Bath, I have to interrupt debate.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Disability services

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:00): (1045) My question today is for the Minister for Disability, Minister Blandthorn. Minister, eight years ago the government made a commitment to participants, families and relevant unions that state-run group homes would not be privatised with the transition to the NDIS. Despite this, homes were transferred to five non-government providers, each receiving a share of \$2.1 billion to bridge the funding gap between NDIS pricing and the enterprise agreement, which includes essential staffing ratios, qualified supervision and safety measures that have made Victoria a national leader in disability support. This subsidy is set to expire on 31 December this year. Without a clear plan nearly 5000 participants, 7500 workers and five service providers responsible for operating 580 group homes across Victoria face an uncertain future. What is the government’s plan to ensure the continuity and quality of care for participants and stability for workers and providers beyond the ending of this funding arrangement?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:01): I am happy to answer this question again for Mr Bourman, as I answered it recently for Mr Ettershank. Obviously when we transitioned to the national disability insurance scheme, well on a decade ago, there was discussion at the time about how we transfer what was a comprehensive system of Victorian disability supports into a national system. As I think that is important in a number of areas, it was certainly important in terms of having a national disability insurance scheme. The Victorian government has spent \$3 billion this year into the national disability insurance scheme. In the transition of supported disability accommodation and the associated services with that into the NDIS the Victorian government did come to an arrangement where, in order to withdraw government services and provide for community services in the delivery of those services, in addition to our \$3 billion this year – year on year, our contribution to the NDIS as co-governance of the scheme – we made the commitment that we would provide a transition payment. We worked collaboratively with the unions at the time in the establishment of that payment, and we have worked collaboratively with those organisations.

Ultimately, pricing and supports and the plans which individuals achieve through the NDIS are what pay for their accommodation. We have supported the transition of those services for a significant period of time. It has always had a natural ending, and our role now is to ensure that the Commonwealth does its bit in a national disability insurance scheme and make sure that the Commonwealth ensures that people's plans are adequate to meet both their accommodation needs and also their service needs more broadly. So we continue to advocate, and many in this chamber would have seen me advocate at length for a better deal from the Commonwealth in relation to disability services in Victoria and better deals for individuals who have plans under the NDIS and ensuring that those people who have plans and are entitled to have a plan continue to be entitled to have a plan. But ultimately this is a national scheme. We pay \$3 billion a year. These organisations were provided with their transition payments, and it is on the Commonwealth to ensure that services, including accommodation services, are adequately funded to meet the needs of people with disability to ensure that they can live in dignity.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:04): I thank the minister for her answer, and I might make a comment that if LCV and the Shooters and Fishers are on a unity ticket, there is still considerable concern out there. In my electorate alone, three group homes have closed in Bairnsdale, Traralgon and Orbost, with reports of further closures imminent due to financial unsustainability among the not-for-profit providers. Workers are now facing the possibility of a one-third reduction in their wages, whilst critical safety standards for residents may be abandoned as of 31 December. How does the government intend to address this impending crisis for both participants and workers in my region, and does the government accept that it has a moral obligation to these people as the provider of last resort?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:04): I thank Mr Bourman again for his question. I think this whole Parliament is on a unity ticket in ensuring that people with disability get the services that they are entitled to, and in a national disability insurance scheme much of that comes from the packages and the plans that are associated with individuals who have qualified for the NDIS. Absolutely I think there is great concern out there in the community. I am probably amongst the chief concerned about those people who will miss out in terms of what the Commonwealth is talking about in further refining assessment eligibility and the decisions that they have made in relation to pricing. Indeed at our last disability ministerial council the pricing issue itself was of grave concern to state ministers right across the country, because while we have made a commitment to what can be the reform of a generation in the NDIS, similar to that of Medicare at its time, the Commonwealth does have to do its bit – and we are all committed to doing our bit – to make sure that the scheme is sustainable but also that it is providing for those most in need through adequate plans and through fair pricing for providers.

Construction industry

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:05): (1046) My question is to the Minister for Industrial Relations, and it concerns the shocking allegations in the *Age* today that a military veteran helping ex-soldiers to get jobs on the North East Link was forced to pay a gangland-linked figure in order to gain access through the government's social procurement program. Given the government's response to date has failed, will the government take further action to stamp out this sickening fleecing of taxpayers money and gangland involvement on Victorian construction sites?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:06): I thank Mr Mulholland for his question. At the outset, we have zero tolerance for any corruption, any illegal activities and indeed any threatening behaviour on our worksites or any worksite for that matter. Mr Mulholland, you might not be familiar with this, because you have had some time away from the chamber, but in your absence we have passed legislation to implement some of the Wilson recommendations. So we are getting on with eradicating this type of behaviour. We are setting up an easy way for people to come forward, and anybody that wants to come forward I commend. This is the behaviour that you want to stamp out. You want people to come forward, whether it is through the media or whether it is through the opportunity that we have created

through the WIV to provide a safe place for people to come forward. They can do it anonymously and it can be directed to the right authorities, and in many instances that will be Victoria Police.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:07): Minister, do you accept that extortion, fleecing of taxpayers money and gangland involvement are still occurring on the government's Big Build?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:07): Mr Mulholland, you or anybody who has information or allegations that they wish to make should make them either through the WIV or to the appropriate authorities. In relation to the way you characterised that, much of that would be illegal behaviour, and therefore police would be the appropriate body.

Ministers statements: construction industry

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:08): I rise today to update the chamber on the work that we are doing to fight for subcontracted tradies and clean up payment practices on Victorian job sites. Victoria is the fastest growing state in the country, and as we grow we want to make sure that we are growing well. Subcontracting tradies keep Victoria's building industry growing, and the government is fighting to ensure that they get paid fairly and promptly for their hard work on the goods and services that they provide to building and construction projects. For too long, hardworking tradies who deliver safe and high-quality homes for Victorians have been targeted by bad faith employers who move the goalposts and withhold money when subcontractors claim payment for their work.

That is why we initiated the parliamentary inquiry into the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002. Today we make good on that promise by the introduction of the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025, enacting 15 of the recommendations from the parliamentary inquiry to make sure that subcontracted tradies can have confidence that they will be paid on time and to the full agreed amount for their work. This is a game changer for Victorian subcontractors and consumers. It will also build confidence in the building industry, and it is one aspect of the nation-leading reform that we are driving, complementing the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025.

Unfortunately, the Liberals and Nationals opposed the buyer protections act, which is about making sure that we are protecting the hearts and wallets of people who were otherwise burnt by the Porter Davis collapse and a number of other instances from May 2023. The Building and Plumbing Commission is continuing its work as a tough new regulator to make sure that we are bringing together a range of reforms to put consumers and buyers at the very heart of a robust building system. On this side of the chamber we are fighting for consumers, for tradies, for workers and for the Victorian building industry. I would encourage those opposite to get on board while we continue that work.

Waste and recycling management

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:10): (1047) My question is to the Premier. The recent upper house debate detailed the undesirable consequences of the expansion of waste-to-energy facilities in Victoria. Affected communities are horrified by the government's recent decision to award licences for seven new waste-to-energy facilities in their neighbourhoods, close to schools and childcare centres in some cases, and locking in contracts to burn over 3.5 million tonnes of waste annually. Legislative Assembly MPs Lily D'Ambrosio, Bronwyn Halfpenny and Ella George have shown great courage and moral integrity in standing with their communities to oppose these massive incinerators, attributes that are much appreciated by their constituents. I ask: will the Premier guarantee that these MPs will not be punished for siding with their community in the face of this dangerous government policy?

The PRESIDENT: I am struggling with this one.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Once again, I am happy to hear points of order, but where I might be struggling is that I am not too sure if that is an accusation against a sitting member, as far as the Premier is concerned.

David ETTERSHANK: On a point of order, President, it is absolutely not an accusation of anything. It is seeking a reassurance that when government local members get up and say their piece on behalf of what their constituents are telling them they will not risk any damage as a result. That is all we are seeking. I guess that is how a democracy should work.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Ettershank, I will give you a chance to rephrase it if you like. Would you like to rephrase the question in a way that maybe the question can be put?

David ETTERSHANK: I will have a punt. Perhaps I can leave the initial few paragraphs in place and just sort of indicate that we seek a level of comfort from the Premier as to the government's response to these actions that have been taken in reflecting the views of their community.

The PRESIDENT: I am not keen to put the question, I have got to say. I am happy to take other points of order before I knock it out.

David Davis: President, on a point of order, let us be clear about this: this is a government-administered program that the member is talking about.

Jaclyn Symes: Which program?

David DAVIS: This is the waste-to-energy program. The waste-to-energy program is a government program, and there are different levels of waste that have been set, going from 1 million to 3.5 million – I think I am right on levels – so there has been a change. Government MPs have shifted their position away from the government's policy position. I think the member is well entitled to ask whether they will be targeted or victimised or allowed to speak. That is entirely reasonable.

The PRESIDENT: I still think it is making an accusation against a sitting member, which is not within the standing orders. I am sorry, Mr Ettershank. I will not put that question.

David ETTERSHANK: On a point of order, President, sorry, reflecting my naivety on procedure here, but do I also lose my supplementary?

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

Construction industry

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:14): (1048) My question is to the minister for housing. Noting the story on the front page of the *Age* today detailing corrupt kickbacks on Big Build sites, I ask: can the minister assure the house that pay-for-play arrangements involving gangland figures receiving kickbacks for access to the government's social procurement programs have not occurred on big build housing projects for which she is responsible?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:15): Righto. Mr Davis, you have used some sporting terminology there that I am not familiar with, but I am going to take the heart of your question on face value. There is zero tolerance for unfair, unlawful or otherwise inappropriate industrial relations practices on any government worksite in the state. There is zero tolerance for any unsafe workplace or industrial relations practices on any government worksite in this state. I would urge anybody – including you, Mr Davis, and I note that you had a matter come to you that you did absolutely nothing about in referring that to the federal ombudsman or to an appropriate body for the

purpose of investigation and/or prosecution – on the opposition benches, anybody in this chamber, anybody in the other place, anybody in the community who becomes –

David DAVIS: On a point of order, President, this is question time for the minister. It is not for her to detail what everyone else around the land and in the chamber should do. It is a question to the minister about whether she can provide that assurance about her portfolio.

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

Harriet SHING: Mr Davis, again, I am in the middle of talking about the importance of making sure that people are in a position to report and to disclose and to provide information that might be relevant to any allegations of unfair, inappropriate, unlawful or criminal or indeed unsafe practices or industrial relations practices on worksites that the government has any interface with. Mr Davis, if you were serious about being part of the solution, you too would be sharing that message about the work and the processes that we have available as they relate not only to the Wilson review and not only to the work that is happening within the broader remit of federal industrial relations reform. You understand, Mr Davis – or at least I would hope you would after the many, many years that you have spent in this place, including during the time that we referred the large bulk of our industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth – that in fact it is the Commonwealth government that is also taking action to stamp out a rotten culture in the building and construction industry and that the Prime Minister has been crystal clear, the Premier has been crystal clear and the investigators and people heading inquiries have been crystal clear that there is absolutely no tolerance for any behaviour of this nature.

I have no tolerance for any of this, and I would hope that it is beyond any doubt that this will not be tolerated or acceptable. It is very clear in the projects and in the contracts and in the work that head contracts have responsibility for that in fact action is taken –

David Davis interjected.

Harriet SHING: Mr Davis, I am going to take you up on that interjection. You just said words to the effect of ‘your housing projects are riddled’ –

David Davis interjected.

Harriet SHING: All right, Mr Davis, you just then talked about social procurement practices being riddled with inappropriate practices. If you have got specific allegations, then rather than just inviting cavalier interjections from around the chamber, if you were actually serious about doing anything on this, you would in fact be reporting these for investigation. What a disgrace you are, Mr Davis, in withholding any information that you might have relevant to these matters.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, the minister has not answered the question directly. She has ignored the question and she has gone around the block five times pointing to everyone else but not answered the simple question.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister was being relevant. Sometimes it was really hard to hear her because of the interjections.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:19): What is clear from the minister’s answer is she will not provide that assurance to the chamber about the government’s social procurement programs on the big build housing projects for which she is responsible. I therefore ask: has the minister been briefed on allegations concerning corruption in the social procurement programs in the big build housing programs, and if so, when?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:20): Thanks, Mr Davis, for that supplementary. One thing that you are very, very good at is confusing just about everybody who listens to the way in which you frame questions because of the preamble that you invite and take on with

every opportunity available to you. I could not be any clearer: there is zero tolerance for this. It is part of my work, and it is my expectation that there is a very, very strict set of obligations and commitments to ensure that contractual obligations are met, to ensure that –

Members interjecting.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, it was a very specific question about whether the minister has been briefed. Now, she might have been, she might not have been. She can say yes, she can say no, or she can say, ‘I can’t recall,’ but the fact is the question was: has the minister been briefed on these corruption matters inside the social programs that relate to the big build on housing?

Members interjecting

Harriet SHING: Mr Davis, again, I think you are confusing the work that is occurring across the Big Housing Build and the delivery of at least 13,300 social housing homes with a range of other whole-of-government programs. My expectation is that all standards and commitments and responsibilities are met. This is part of my job and part of the work that I do every day.

David Davis: I move that the minister’s failure to answer whether she is briefed is taken into account on the next day of meeting.

The PRESIDENT: I cannot put that question. Would you like to rephrase it?

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:22): I move:

That minister’s answer be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

World Suicide Prevention Day

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:22): Today is World Suicide Prevention Day, an important day for all of us to come together to raise awareness and to take action with our communities to prevent suicide. But I also want to acknowledge that for many in our community today will be a day of profound grief and loss. For every life lost to suicide there are many more people who are deeply affected, and the impact on family and friends can be devastating. Each and every suicide impacts all of us in our communities. Every life lost to suicide is one too many. Suicide is not just a health issue; the causes are complex and can include many other factors. In Victoria the Allan Labor government is taking strong action to provide early and compassionate support for Victorians who are experiencing suicidal distress. Our hospital outreach post-suicidal engagement, or HOPE, program is providing up to three months of person-centred support after a suicide attempt or crisis. More than 14,500 Victorians have been supported through the HOPE program across 40 sites, including four children and youth-specific services, with over 377,000 service contacts delivered by clinicians, wellbeing workers and peer workers with lived experience. Outreach workers provide support throughout this critical period where the risk of another suicide attempt is highest, ensuring Victorians and their families are supported through recovery, connection and care in their local community. I am pleased to inform the house that the program is achieving some strong results for Victorians, including improved health and wellbeing, strengthened social connections and reduced rates of self-harm and re-presentation. Today is a reminder for all of us that preventing suicide in our community is everyone’s business.

Northern Victoria Region

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:24): (1049) My question today is for the minister representing the Premier. Over the past months my constituents in Northern Victoria have been expressing their desire to be heard by this government, very loudly in some cases, on matters that deeply affect them. From the emergency services and volunteers levy to the VicGrid reforms, my constituents are very concerned with the direction this government is taking. All they want is a chance

for their concerns and opinions to be heard. Premier, why won't listen to the constituents in Northern Victoria on issues that are affecting them?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:25): Ms Tyrrell, I will pass your question to the Premier for direct response, but I would just comment that as a regional Victorian herself she is speaking regularly to members for Northern Victoria. She lives in a Northern Victoria electorate. I think you will get a response back about her numerous engagements with locals in Northern Victoria on a regular basis.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:25): I thank the minister for passing that on. This coming weekend, on 14 September, farmers, CFA volunteers and other concerned members of the community are planning to rally in the Premier's own city of Bendigo. This is another desperate attempt by our communities to have their voices heard. Premier, will you accompany me to this rally in your home town of Bendigo and listen to their concerns, or is a business junket to China more important than your constituents?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:26): I reject the premise of the question and the way you have framed it, Ms Tyrrell. I would also probably point out, as a former agriculture minister, that the relationship with China is really, really important for country constituents, so to describe it as a business junket when it is actually integral to the economic prosperity of country Victorians I think shows a lack of respect for farmers in your regard. But I will pass on your question to the Premier.

Working with children checks

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:27): (1050) My question is to the Minister for Children. I refer to the new administrative orders implemented by the Premier yesterday in which she shifts responsibility with respect to the Worker Screening Act 2020 to you, Minister, as Minister for Children to be jointly and severally responsible. I therefore ask: now that you are responsible for this act and responsible for the safety of children, will you tell the house when the loophole that enables overseas workers with criminal convictions to work with children will be closed?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:27): I thank Mr Davis for his question. It was actually a week ago that the Premier signed the change to the general orders that gave me the responsibility for the working with children check. But it is a responsibility that I indeed asked for, Mr Davis, because, as many in this house have attested to on all sides of the chamber, I am absolutely committed to ensuring that we do everything that we can to protect our children. In relation to the question around international checks, I have this week spoken with the office of the Minister for Home Affairs, and I have also asked both relevant departments, including the new working with children check responsibilities but also the Department of Education and those responsible for child protection, as to how these international checks are currently undertaken. The advice I have from all of those, including the office of the Minister for Home Affairs, is that our international police checks in relation to the granting of visas when international workers come in in order to work with children do, firstly, an international police check for the 12 months previous that that person may have been in another jurisdiction. That said, I have also spoken to the Commonwealth and they completely agree, and Minister Burke and his office I know are very committed to ensuring that we work together to ensure that the policy work that has happened in that space has well and truly kept pace with the evolving nature of those workforces, the evolving nature of technology and a range of other things that I think need to be worked on, so absolutely we agree there is more to do, and we are working on it.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:29): The minister would not answer the question, the simple question of when the loophole will be closed. Minister, I note it is National Child Protection Week, and I note that you have a duty of care under the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, particularly clause 6 but also your new direct responsibility for working with children checks, and I ask: when will you implement all of the recommendations of the Glass inquiry and the rapid review?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:29): There are a number of questions in that supplementary question. But firstly, as Mr Davis has acknowledged that it is child protection week, and indeed I spoke to you yesterday, that is absolutely the case. I thank those who work in our child protection system on the front line. I can advise the house that in relation to those who work in child protection and international recruitment, when it comes to the provision of statutory child protection, in addition to the safety screening undertaken by the Department of Home Affairs, for DFFH child protection staff, international police checks are required for applicants who have lived in an overseas country for 12 months or longer in the past 10 years, and I am further advised that this is the case for all offshore recruits to child protection. Every recruit under this program has received this check. So I make that in answer to one of your supplementary questions. In relation to the other supplementary question, as the Premier and I and previously the Attorney-General have explained at large, the bills that we will be pleased to present to the Parliament later this year will acquit the rest of the recommendations of the Ombudsman's report.

Ministers statements: TAFE sector

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:31): It is great that our TAFEs are recognised with their own National TAFE Day this month, a day that acknowledges the incredible work and commitment of the Victorian TAFE teachers, trainers and support staff and celebrates our TAFE students, many of whom could not have studied if it was not for free TAFE. Yesterday I was pleased to host TAFE students and leaders to launch the annual free TAFE advertising campaign with my parliamentary colleagues, because free TAFE makes it real. I spoke with Narissa, who travelled in from Bendigo to help us celebrate free TAFE. Narissa is studying a diploma of nursing at Bendigo TAFE. She was a manager in retail but found free TAFE, where she could reskill without the financial burden of tuition fees. Through her studies and placement opportunities Narissa is hoping to secure a part-time job in the hospital while she completes her studies. This is a great example of real outcomes that free TAFE delivers. I also had the opportunity to meet 17-year-old George from Geelong, and I mention George's name because he is already doing his third free TAFE pathway qualification: a cert III in IT, a cert IV in cybersecurity and he has commenced his certificate IV in training and assessment. George was quick to point out that his friends are starting to worry about HECS debts and the job market, whereas he did not need to worry about tuition fees, and he has already secured an IT job that will lead to a rewarding career. I encourage prospective students, parents and families to go and see what TAFE has to offer in the upcoming open days. Find your passion, aspire to a great career and make it real with free TAFE.

Community safety

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:32): (1051) My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, Victoria continues to see racially motivated hate and violence against our diverse communities: this past year two Muslim women assaulted while shopping; a Sikh security guard beaten while at work; and temples, mosques and synagogues targeted in racist attacks. Most recently, right-wing neo-Nazis assaulted First Nations women at Camp Sovereignty, a sacred Indigenous burial site. We know this is not an isolated series of events. It is a persistent pattern of harm directed at black and brown First Nations communities. It is clear that your government's anti-racism strategy action plan 2024–29 is failing to deliver needed outcomes. Minister, what social cohesion initiatives will you be undertaking right now to ensure that racist attitudes, behaviours and beliefs are recognised, challenged and rejected?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:33): While I thank the member for that question, I do not agree with the premise of the question, and I reject the assertion that the anti-racism strategy is not an effective way in which we can provide support to our diverse communities. But it is not the only thing that the government is doing, in any event. We are conducting a range of work, including the fact that we have brought legislation to this place to strengthen our anti-vilification laws through the anti-vilification and social cohesion bill. We are of course in receipt now of the Lekakis review, the Victorian multicultural

review, for which we asked George Lekakis, a highly respected Victorian, to go out and engage deeply with the community about what supports they need in order to not only feel safe and feel that they belong but also enable them and their communities to thrive. I look forward to sharing more with the house soon on the government's response to that important review.

The anti-racism strategy is a significant piece of work over a number of years, and it is already providing support to local groups in a practical way, including through the LARI grants, which are the local anti-racism grants for communities. There are a number of wonderful programs that are being funded through that program. We have important work that is underway with a number of different parts of our diverse community to tackle Islamophobia and to tackle the scourge of antisemitism, and that work does not have an end date because it is going to need to be constant. A number of these issues will form part of the ongoing work for me as the minister and of my portfolio.

But I think really what is most important here is that we are listening carefully to communities about what they need in order for them to be able to build their capacity, particularly those communities that are more newly arrived in Victoria, who do need additional support to be able to provide their communities with all of the access and support that they deserve. So we will continue to work hard at this. I am very happy to regularly update the house about the work that we are doing in this regard, but we have been very clear that there is no place in Victoria for hate and extremism, and we will continue to stand up and champion our diverse communities right across the state.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:36): Thank you, Minister. Just to put it on the record, I did not say your anti-racism strategy action plan was ineffective, I said it was failing to deliver the needed outcomes for multicultural communities. They are having to wake up every morning and think about their safety. This is happening. It is real, what is going on for black and brown communities.

I note that the funding under the anti-racism strategy action plan that you speak about – 'Goal 1: Racist attitudes, behaviours and beliefs are recognised, challenged and rejected' – only mentions a one-off funding allocation of \$150,000 to be shared among multicultural and multifaith organisations. Surely you do not agree that that is an adequate amount of funding, given the heightened spate of race and hate violence targeted towards multicultural communities. Minister, will you commit to ongoing funding so that you are not just listening, you are putting action behind your words?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:37): Thank you for the supplementary question. I have got to say that it is disappointing, the tone of the question. What I would say to the member and to everyone in the house is that the entire multicultural affairs portfolio is focused on supporting communities, and the entire output funding year on year is unashamedly focused on what it is we need to do to continue to support communities, whether that is through our grants stream for infrastructure, so that they can have places where they can feel safe and belong and come together to celebrate their culture and their diversity and their background, or whether it is through our festival and events grants. All of this output funding actually goes to supporting our diverse communities. The anti-racism strategy is but one.

Youth crime

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:38): (1052) My question is to the corrections minister. Minister, in March this year you said:

This initiative complements existing programs such as the South Sudanese Australian youth justice expert working group –

and I note that was established in 2022 –

which provides targeted support to multicultural youth. We back these programs because the evidence shows that they work. By addressing and preventing harmful behaviour we are making our community safer and giving young people a real chance to build a better future for the long term.

Minister, given the horrific attacks on two children who were tragically murdered on the weekend, the community is not safer, harmful behaviour is not being prevented and, tragically, children are dying. Do you now concede that the program is not working?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:39): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. Ms Crozier, again, from the outset I do want to send my deep condolences and sympathies to the families, friends and schoolmates of those children who were lost to this senseless crime. Crime affects everyone in the community, and I think we are all in this place also hurting after what has occurred at Cobblebank, but for you to try and link that to the positive work we are doing out in the community I feel is very unfair and especially very disappointing in light of what has occurred. We do have a strong relationship, and I stand by the work that the South Sudanese expert working group is doing. I talked about this yesterday, the work that these grassroots organisations are delivering – practical, culturally appropriate programs to support young people live happy, healthy lives in their community. Of course there is always more work to be done, and I am the first to say that, and that is why I am committed – and the Premier has made that clear – to having community solutions, community-led solutions, because we want to empower those communities. But some examples that I am happy to share and that I talked about include NextGen Unite, an organisation that I was out at with Mr Lee Tarlamis just last week. They are a group that uses music to bring people together in the south-east, and they are connecting with so many young people, having a positive impact on their lives. That is an organisation that is kicking goals, I understand. They would be happy for me to share that they are looking at partnerships with major organisations like the AFL, but it started off with our seed funding that kind of got them going, and they have been able to kind of professionalise and rise up. There are organisations like Nas Recovery Centre, which is community based, doing culturally appropriate alcohol and drug rehabilitation support. There is case management, working with families in community, delivering real outcomes. Of course there are kids that are falling through the gaps, and I am committed 100 per cent – the whole government is committed – to doing more. We are going to support every community that is affected. Right now the South Sudanese community is hurting, but I will stand with them every and each day of the year.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:41): Minister, you are right – that community is hurting. They are suffering, and to hear from the parents of those children was just heartbreaking. The entire Victorian community is suffering as a result of the failures of your government. The Premier said she was reconvening this group, so Minister: how many talkfests do we need before the government does something?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:42): I reject that mischaracterisation of what the Premier has announced. I think the Premier has been very clear that the police commissioner – the new police commissioner – and I and the Minister for Police will go out to the community and hear from the community about what solutions they want to see. I think it is clear we have done a lot of work in this space, but there is more to do, and we are committed to doing that work with community-led solutions. We cannot dictate what is the best approach; every community needs an appropriate response, but community safety is always the priority of this government. We have already made a number of legislative changes to strengthen community safety, and we are committed to rolling out further programs to support and wrap around all these communities.

Geelong City Deal

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:43): I would like to update the house on the work underway as part of the Geelong City Deal. A recent announcement is the Geelong-born, internationally acclaimed artist Rone is currently in the middle of creating a stunning 88-metre-wide mural in celebration of the local community at the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre waterfront development. The mural features the faces of 14 locals, who I am sure will be well known to Minister Tierney, and

celebrates Geelong's rich social and cultural history. Located on the southern wall of the precinct along Smythe Street, it will create a lasting piece of public art that is truly about celebrating Geelong. The waterfront development is set to bring major economic benefits to Geelong, with a thousand-seat theatre, two large event spaces, meeting rooms and conference facilities. There is space for food and beverage, a public plaza and a 200-room hotel under the internationally renowned Crowne Plaza brand. The development is also setting the pace for work opportunities for people who have experienced barriers to employment, so not only is this going to be a major employer for the region, there is ability to make sure that, through our investment, people who might be falling through the gaps will no longer be doing so. One such example is a joint Victorian government, industry and community program which will bring together an opportunity for 43 apprentices and more than 37 hours of training delivered in mechanical, carpentry, plumbing and electrical trades. When the project is completed, the number is expected to reach 45,000 hours, showcasing the skills and job creation power of the project.

The Twelve Apostles visitor experience centre project is also well underway, one that will transform how domestic and international visitors experience Victoria's most famous coastal landscape. The project is already delivering benefits during the construction phase, creating up to 90 full-time positions. A range of local companies, including operators from Warrnambool, Colac, Geelong and Ballarat, have also been involved, providing a boost to the local construction sector and supply chains in many parts of the state. This is all part of the \$676 million Geelong City Deal investment from our Labor government in partnership with the federal government and the City of Greater Geelong to revitalise the region and its economy.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:45): Minister Symes will get Ms Tyrrell two responses in line with the standing orders, from the Premier.

Anasina Gray-Barberio: On a point of order, President, I have eight questions on notice that are now overdue. I have emailed the relevant ministers, and I am now requesting an explanation in the house. The question numbers are 2036, to the Treasurer for the Premier; 2038, to the Minister for Children for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence; 2037, to the Minister for Children for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence; 2039, to the Minister for Children for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence; 2050, to the Minister for Children for the Minister for Women; 2049, to the Minister for Children for the Minister for Women; 2048, to the Minister for Children for the Minister for Women; and 2047, to the Minister for Children for the Minister for Women.

The PRESIDENT: Minister Erdogan, I ask you for a commitment to follow up those particular questions for Ms Gray-Barberio.

Enver ERDOGAN: President. I will make sure they are followed up with the government.

Katherine Copsey: President, on a point of order, I have several questions on notice that are overdue. I have emailed the relevant ministers and am now requesting an explanation in the house. The overdue questions are numbers 2024, 2025, 2026, 2027, 2032, 2035, 2042 and 2043.

The PRESIDENT: Minister, would you be able to please follow those ones up as well?

Enver ERDOGAN: I will accept them. Would it be possible for the Greens to collate all the numbers into just in one email so then I can follow them up in one group? Thank you.

Sarah Mansfield: On a point of order, President – this is a coincidence; we did not coordinate this – I have 18 unanswered questions that are now overdue. I am happy to provide that list to the minister to follow up rather than read them all out.

The PRESIDENT: The minister is nodding his head, so thank you.

Constituency questions

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:47): (1818) My constituency question is to the Minister for Community Sport. How is the Allan Labor government improving sport facilities in Caulfield Park? There is a major event happening this weekend: the official opening of the Park Dome at the Caulfield Park Sports Club. With a \$600,000 contribution from the Allan Labor government, this upgrade is going to elevate sport, community and connection across Caulfield and the surrounding suburbs. The new Park Dome is more than just a structure. It represents our commitment to bringing inclusive sports participation to the community, providing covered, year-round access to bowling greens, to local sporting groups, members of the clubs, athletes and their families. This Labor government values and encourages community sport. It brings people together. It makes our communities healthier and it enriches people's lives.

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1819) What I want the Minister for Planning to do is to release the plans that she is proposing for high-density, high-rise development in many other areas of Southern Metro, specifically the areas that have not been released. The government has designated a whole series of centres across Southern Metro. They did not consult properly, I might say, on the early changes, they did not consult properly on the planning amendments and they did not consult properly on the maps that have been released today. What the maps show – they are chilling – is massive high-rise development in huge swathes across our suburbs. This will see loss of vegetation. It will see loss of heritage and loss of livability. This is an assault on our suburbs by Jacinta Allan. It is a nasty assault, and the loss of amenity in our areas in Southern Metro will be shocking.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:49): (1820) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and my question is about active transport in the City of Boroondara. I recently met with the mayor, CEO and councillors and one of the advocacy points that they raised with me was several active transport gaps, including the Box Hill to Hawthorn strategic cycling corridor. This corridor is identified in state policy and in council's 2022 bicycle strategy as a high priority link from the Box Hill metropolitan activity centre to the Hawthorn–Glenferrie major activity centre, and includes key shopping strips at Surry Hills, Canterbury and Hawthorn West and many schools and other local destinations. The department's preferred alignment follows the rail corridor, and it has been examined in a high-level study. From Hawthorn it would continue to the CBD through Yarra and Melbourne. It is designed for off-road or on-road sections as space allows, and it would deliver a safe, low-stress route for commuters and family users alike. Minister, council is keen that you meet with their representatives to discuss this corridor and other active transport priorities they have identified in the municipality. Will you meet with them, please?

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:50): (1821) My constituency question is for the Deputy Premier in the other place in his capacity as Minister for Education. One of the challenges in public education today relates to workforce recruitment and retention. The final round of the Victorian government's secondary teaching scholarships is now open for applications for students undertaking a degree in secondary teaching. As this program winds up, what is the Deputy Premier's assessment of how successful it has been in attracting young people and people seeking a career change to the teaching profession? Further, what similar programs funded in this year's budget will continue to help Victorians enter the teaching profession, and how will schools in the Southern Metropolitan Region be able to benefit from this?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:51): (1822) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Why has the government delayed the start of construction for the Gunns Gully Road and Hume Freeway interchange, and when will work begin? Gunns Gully Road is a planned six-lane arterial road that will run west to east from the Hume Freeway to eventually join Merriang Road. This road is vitally important for my constituents. It will take traffic off the chronically congested Donnybrook Road and will provide essential alternative entry and exit points to the housing estates along Donnybrook Road. The minister said earlier this year that the Department of Transport and Planning was finalising agreements with a housing developer to deliver the Gunns Gully Road and Hume Freeway interchange and that construction works were expected to commence by mid-2025. Spring is here, mid-2025 has passed, but the work has not commenced. This is another Labor planning failure that makes the serious traffic problems in the northern growth suburbs even worse. The minister must explain the reason for the delay and confirm when construction will begin.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:52): (1823) My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment. My constituent is a resident of Hampton Park. They have raised concerns about the monitoring of emissions at Veolia's Taylors Road landfill in Dandenong South, a hazardous waste containment site. While licensed by the EPA, there are concerns that the EPA's monitoring leaves many harmful emissions unmeasured. In particular, my constituent is concerned that harmful carcinogens, neurotoxins, PFAS and ultrafine particles are all not being monitored, leaving residents with inadequate air quality and putting their health at risk. So my constituent asks: will the minister consider expanding the emissions monitored by the EPA at the Taylors Road landfill site in Dandenong South?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:53): (1824) My constituency question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. There has been an opening of a rather high-profile and low-price retail outlet in the south-east, in the Cranbourne area, which has drawn the attention of Consumer Affairs Victoria, I understand, on a number of occasions due to some potentially faulty or unsafe products being sold. Minister, I ask for an update on how Consumer Affairs Victoria is ensuring that constituents in Cranbourne and in the south-east can shop at retail stores with the confidence that any products that they purchase are safe.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:54): (1825) I had the great pleasure of meeting recently with the Metro East Bicycle User Group. They are a fantastic group that advocate on behalf of all bike riders, including the Whitehorse Cyclists and Bicycle Network Victoria. They came to me recently to discuss of course the government's proposed plan to ban e-bikes from public transport. They raised with me several legitimate concerns not only for young people but also for those who are more elderly like me in respect to using the public transport system. Many will ride to a certain location and then rely upon the public transport systems, the trains in particular, to get them home. They are very concerned about this proposed ban. What I seek from Minister Gabrielle Williams in the other place is an update for the Metro East Bicycle User Group and obviously for the groups more broadly than that in respect to where this plan is, whether the planned ban on e-bikes will proceed and when it will proceed, because there are very many Victorians who are concerned that this will limit their capacity not only to interact with the transport system but more broadly to actually participate in society.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:55): (1826) My question today is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. I have been contacted by a resident in my region who works with

local small businesses to help them transition to solar energy. They have raised concerns from their experience of the processes in applying for and receiving a certificate of electrical safety when installing solar. My constituent has highlighted that they find the process lengthy and the costs higher when compared with those of other states. They are reporting to me their experience that small businesses are experiencing cash flow pressures due to the time taken in this approval process, which holds up rebates and Solar Victoria incentives. Minister, can I ask: what actions are you going to take to ensure that the application process for certificates of electrical safety is streamlined to ensure straightforward and timely applications to help our local businesses transition to clean solar energy?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:56): (1827) My question is to the Minister for Police, and I ask: given the recent implementation of the statewide machete ban and the ongoing concerns about youth violence in my South-Eastern Metropolitan Region, particularly with statistics showing that a knife seizure in Dandenong South last year saw police seizing a record 930 knives, will you provide a breakdown of the number of machetes and other dangerous bladed weapons seized by Victoria Police in the local government cities of Casey, Greater Dandenong and Frankston during the recent amnesty period in our machete bins and the breakdown costs of the machete program and targeted resources so that we can have scrutiny of how much this program is costing per machete for my constituents in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region?

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:57): (1828) My question is for the Minister for Environment. The current *Macedon Regional Park Strategic Management Statement* was written in 2009, and even though the area has changed drastically it has not been updated since. In its 2021 central west report the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council: recognised this and recommended that as a high priority a new management plan be prepared. Since the last management plan was created 16 years ago the Macedon Ranges has undergone an exponential growth in population and in tourism. To echo the words of the hardworking Mount Macedon Landcare president Kate Lawrence:

We need a master plan based on wide community discussion and deliberation so we can balance the needs of the environment with the needs of tourism, fire protection and cultural history of the ranges in a cohesive and considered way.

So my question is: will the minister provide an update on the creation of a new comprehensive management plan for Macedon Regional Park?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:58): (1829) My question is to the Treasurer. Farmers in the Eastern Victoria Region are under extreme pressure. Feeding costs are soaring, drought has meant that there is no hay and often milk prices have not covered the cost of feed. Many are being forced to cull their herds just to survive. Now the emergency services levy – although it is postponed, many have reached out to me saying that it is hanging over their heads and stressing them out. Farmers have told me that it will make food costs higher and drive more people off the land. Treasurer, my question is: will you release all assessments on the impacts that this levy will have on the financial viability of farmers in the Eastern Victoria Region? And while I have got 20 seconds left I want to say that I was disgusted at Ms Terpstra, who, when were talking about this in the last debate, said, ‘If you don’t want to pay the tax, go and volunteer. Simple.’ I think that is so out of touch with how people in Eastern Victoria Region are feeling.

Northern Victoria Region

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:59): (1830) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. My constituents ask: will the minister direct the Department of Transport and Planning to fix the dangerous condition of Katamatite-Yarrowonga Road? My

constituents have recently raised the dangerous road surface of Katamatite-Yarrowonga Road in my electorate of Northern Victoria. They report that the road is riddled with potholes, rutting and uneven surfaces almost the entire length from Katamatite to Yarrowonga. In fact parts of the road are so uneven it is like driving a roller-coaster. Deep potholes are scattered along numerous sections, causing drivers to swerve to avoid them or risk damage to their vehicles. The bridge over the number 3 channel just east of Katamatite is incredibly dangerous, as it is not only narrow but also rutted and potholed. These conditions make driving the road a dangerous expedition undertaken by many cars, trucks, buses and motorbikes every day. So my constituents ask: will the minister direct the Department of Transport and Planning to fix the dangerous condition of Katamatite-Yarrowonga Road?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:00): (1831) My constituency matter is for the minister for transport. Our Lady's Primary School on busy Elgar Road, near the corner of Canterbury Road in Surrey Hills in my electorate, has well over 200 students and families from Surrey Hills, Box Hill and surrounding areas, many of whom need to risk crossing busy Elgar Road to enter the school gate. Late last year Our Lady's contacted VicRoads to request a traditional 40-kilometre speed limit on the road during school pick-up and drop-off hours in line with other schools on major thoroughfares, but as yet there has been no outcome communicated to the school community. The school is genuinely concerned about the dangers to schoolchildren, their parents and crossing supervisors on this road and about a number of recent near misses involving that traffic. Could I ask the minister to advise on the status of this matter and work with the school and school community to address this significant risk?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (13:01): (1832) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I have received an email from a 17-year-old student in Bendigo. To quote directly:

... i am for the victorian driving age to be lowered to 17 years of age. I myself am a fellow 17 year old and i am currently completing year 11 ... while also completing a school based apprenticeship 2-3 days a week. My parents have to take time out of work just to get me to and from work and are always struggling with time. With the early starts and late finishes it makes it really hard for my family to get me to and from work. It would be great even if us Apprentices both part time and full time could get the bare minimum of an apprentices driving license just to be able to get to and from work or just lower the driving age to 17 for all!

I would really benefit from this and im sure many other victorian apprentices would too!

Minister, why does Victoria continue to delay probationary drivers licences until 18 when every other Australian state allows young people to drive at 17, as do other countries such as the UK, America and New Zealand?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (13:02): (1833) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it concerns the unacceptable build-up of rubbish and debris along median strips in the outer north, particularly on Somerton Road. I am regularly contacted by constituents, particularly from Greenvale, who are frustrated at the mess and debris on Somerton Road. Piles of litter, dumped rubbish and overgrown grass not only look terrible but create safety hazards that put my community at risk and in danger. Also it undermines pride in our local community. Local residents know how to spot the difference between a local government road and a state arterial road. Just look at the state government roads: they have usually got more potholes and more rubbish. Minister, these roads are your responsibility. I ask you to direct your department to urgently clean up debris and remove rubbish on Somerton Road.

Sitting suspended 1:03 pm until 2:06 pm

*Motions***Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund****Debate resumed.**

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:06): I rise to continue my contribution on the notice paper motion 1071 standing in Mr Davis's name. Before question time I was speaking about Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, a very amazing group of, naturally, volunteers who represent our CFA and do an amazing job. They have put some context around the disingenuous nature of this emergency services tax, and I will quote from one of their media releases:

It is VFBV's view that this highlights the disingenuous claims that the new tax would inject significant new money into emergency and volunteer services in order to deal with increased demand.

We have all heard today from other members about increasing demand. The requirement through the legislation is that the forward year funding is to be allocated via the *Government Gazette*. Gazetted on 30 May this year, it just shows how different a scenario the rhetoric we hear from the Allan government is to the reality of the services that we need. Twenty-five per cent of the whole of the emergency services tax will go to the volunteers. Let me give you some context around that. The CFA will get 20.3 per cent, which is around \$312 million. The State Emergency Service volunteers will get a little under 5 per cent, at \$72,963,000. This is showing you that the remaining value, 75 per cent of this tax – which once was the property services levy there to fund emergency services, to fund the CFA – is now going to core government services Triple Zero Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria, Forest Fire Management Victoria and Fire Rescue Victoria, in terms of funding those institutions. They are a core government industry. They are core government business, and the funding should come out of core government funding. But no, this is the realm where we sit with this government. When you boil that down, in actual fact 20 cents from every \$1 of this new funding imposed on businesses, on homes, on industry, on farmers – on anyone who owns some property and has a building or a farm – through the emergency services tax will be hit. Twenty cents in the dollar will go to the CFA. If you ask the CFA and go out in the regions as we do – I come from Eastern Victoria Region, as you know – there are ageing pieces of equipment and ageing trucks.

Some of them are over 25, 26 or 30 years old. There are ageing pieces of infrastructure, old sheds that the local CFA are begging to be upgraded. We hear from those opposite about gratitude. Well, this does not feel like gratitude. This feels like a slap in the face. I was at the SES recently in Leongatha, just the other day, and like many in the CFA, they are a volunteer family. What they have to do, oh so regularly, is struggle and scrape to find the money to actually support the SES to buy normal equipment. This is not good enough. It is unfortunate. The Nationals and the Liberals have agreed that we will scrap this tax when we get to government in 2026.

Members interjecting.

Melina BATH: I note that those on the other side are getting a little bit engaged. That is because it is actually hitting home. I want to give you another example that actually ends up very much supporting this motion put on the notice paper by Mr Davis. It is from the Victorian Farmers Federation. We also hear from those on the government benches about the importance of our rural industry, the importance of our ag sector and the importance of farmers. Well, this is what the farmers are telling the government, and the government is not listening. This is what they have said. The VFF has done an extensive survey, and it highlights the depth of concern across the agricultural sector. It said that 95 per cent of the respondents – hundreds of people, hundreds of farmers – have said that they are concerned or very concerned about the emergency services levy. This is not just me standing up and saying that; this is a representation of a diverse survey right across the state of Victorian farmers. Ninety-five per cent are also concerned about new taxes – again in this motion put forward by the Liberals and Nationals. Ninety-six per cent are very concerned about road and freight, and there

are other concerns around rising energy costs and of course the transition to renewables. I ask this house to support this very important motion. This tax needs to be scrapped.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (14:12): I rise to strongly oppose the Liberal Party motion. It is based on misinformation, it is based on scaremongering, and it risks leaving Victorians less safe in the face of floods, storms and bushfires. Those opposite have run a fear campaign. They call the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund a ‘household tax’, they say it punishes farmers and small businesses, they say it is unfair, but every part of their case falls apart when you look at the facts. Let me just say, from 1 July 2025 the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund replaces the fire services property levy. We did this because Victoria needs a modern funding model for the reality of the types of emergencies we experience today: fires that burn hotter, floods that hit harder, storms that tear through homes. This is not some new tax. It is a reform that makes sure our emergency services, like the CFA, VICSES, Fire Rescue Victoria, Triple Zero Victoria and Emergency Management Victoria, are properly funded. Every dollar goes straight back into life-saving gear, vehicles, training and community education. The Liberal Party know that, but instead of telling the truth, they spread lies to whip up anger. They try to confuse people into thinking this reform will hit the regions harder or that it unfairly targets farmers. Let me be clear: it does not.

One of the biggest lies we hear from those opposite is that regional Victorians are hit harder. Residential homes in the regions are charged the same as residential homes in metropolitan Melbourne. Businesses in country towns are charged the same as businesses in the suburbs. There is no difference. The facts are simple: 27 per cent of the levy is collected in the regions, 73 per cent in Melbourne. That reflects where the land value is and where the population is. The Liberals need to stop pretending that country people are being singled out, because they are not. They are claiming that we are punishing farmers – again, that is not true. Only around 10 per cent of the levy is raised from primary production land, and in 2025–26 there is no increase for primary producers. Why? Because we recognise the tough drought conditions Victorian farmers are facing. In fact many farmers, I need to say, are also CFA and SES volunteers, and for the first time in Australia those volunteers can apply for a rebate on their family home or farm. That means a farmer who is also a CFA volunteer will also pay less and in some cases will pay nothing under this levy. The Liberals like to show up for the photo op, but when it comes to action, they cut funding and they leave volunteers scrambling with outdated trucks and old gear. I reject this motion, and I urge those in this chamber to vote against it.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:15): In closing, I absolutely commend this motion to the house. That was an outrageous rant by Ms Watt on the motion before the house. The reality is this emergency services levy disproportionately affects farmers and volunteers. That is the long and the short of it. I was amazed that Ms Terpstra stood up there and said that SES volunteers in her region allegedly asked for this tax. That is unbelievable.

I remember this clearly because it is seared in my mind. On the Tuesday of the sitting week that the emergency services levy came through, the intersection of Spring Street and Bourke Street was filled with emergency services volunteers and it was filled with farmers that were saying that they cannot take this tax. It was absolutely filled. This government says it listens to farmers, it listens to volunteers. What I want to say is: stop gaslighting. Stop gaslighting the opposition, stop gaslighting the crossbench that stood against this and stop gaslighting the people of Victoria who firmly stood and said no. That was not something that just ended on that Tuesday. By the way, this was something that the government did not have the numbers for. They had to kick it down the road – push it from the Tuesday to the Thursday – because there was a whole lot of opposition to this. It was not people playing politics, it was people standing for average Victorians that cannot afford another tax. Do you think we make up the stories about people that come into our offices and say this might force people off the land? Do you think we make up these stories? My gosh, I think it is time for you guys to get a grip.

There were a few things that I thought were particularly offensive in these speeches. One was when Ms Terpstra, who I mentioned before, said, ‘If you don’t want to pay the tax, just go and volunteer.

Simple.’ Those were her words. The other thing was when she said that volunteers asked for this tax. That is completely at odds –

A member interjected.

Renee HEATH: It is a lie. It is completely at odds with what the volunteers that filled Spring Street and filled Bourke Street said in their thousands. It was amazing that apparently these people asked for more. You have rudely ignored protesters. You have rudely ignored farmers who feed the state in one of the worst droughts that this state has ever seen. Rather than giving them the help they need, you have loaded them up with another tax. I just do not know how you can take yourselves seriously. It is Labor being Labor. I found the behaviour in some of the speeches absolutely disgusting and appalling.

I am not ashamed to say that I stand with the thousands of farmers and I stand with the thousands of volunteer workers who have come to this place in desperation to ask that this tax be axed. The other thing is, if Ms Watt is serious in saying that this does not disproportionately affect farmers, why have you given farmers a one-year reprieve?

Sheena Watt interjected.

Renee HEATH: Because you recognise they are in drought? Just picking up that interjection. You recognise they are in drought. There is a drought, but even farmers in the areas that have got too much water – for instance, East Gippsland – are recipients of this one-year reprieve. It is because you know that it does disproportionately affect farmers and it does disproportionately affect volunteers. You guys should be ashamed of yourselves for the stunts you have put on today. I commend this motion to the house.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (17): Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (22): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion negated.

Bills

Safer Protest with a Registration System and a Ban on Face Coverings Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of David Davis:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:26): I rise today to make a contribution on the private members bill introduced by Mr Davis, the Safer Protest with a Registration System and a Ban on Face Coverings Bill 2025, a bill that Mr Davis brought before the chamber a couple of weeks ago that attempts to create a protest registration system and a ban on face coverings in Melbourne and Victoria. Mr Davis’s second-reading speech that he gave in the chamber on 27 August provided an overview of some of the protest activity that we have seen in the city in recent times and made some broad remarks about how this bill would go about trying to address some of the concerns that he spoke of. At the heart of it is a concern that he expressed and I think others in the community have expressed about the impact that some of the things that have been said at some of the protests are having on members of the community. Honestly, I would take the concerns of Mr Davis and the Liberal Party

about the things that are being said at protests in our community more seriously if they had the courage to stand up in this Parliament and vote for laws that criminalised hate speech, but they did not. The Liberal Party had an opportunity earlier this year to actually make a difference to the conduct of the civil discourse in the state of Victoria. They actually had an opportunity to vote for laws that made it a crime to vilify people on the basis of who they are or what they believe in, they had a chance to stand up for the multicultural communities who have been the subject of racial vilification and they had an opportunity to stand up for the religious groups that have been the subject of vilification and hate speech, but they walked away from them when they had an opportunity to take a stand when they stood in this place earlier this year and voted against the government's laws that would have criminalised hate speech in this state – laws that passed and will come into effect later this month, no thanks to the Liberal Party. So you will forgive us that we are not particularly capable of believing the sincerity of the words that the Liberal Party have to say in a debate about community safety when they trivialise it or in a debate about making people feel safe in our community when they are against trying to seek protection from words and vilification and when they vote against laws that make those words a crime.

No-one from the Liberal Party has had the courage to stand up since then and apologise, let alone explain why. They took a decision earlier this year to vote against laws that would have criminalised hate speech in this state. They have never done it. They can come in here and introduce this bill. I am sure we will hear contributions later in the debate imploring the government to do something. My message to the Liberal Party is you had a chance to stand up against hate speech in this state, and you sat down. You had a chance to lend your vote to your voice, and you did nothing. In fact it was worse than doing nothing – you voted against it. You voted against the communities that are on the receiving end of the hateful words that can spew out on our streets. When you come into this place with bills that pretend to care, you will forgive us for not believing you.

That is the reality of what we are facing today. That is the reality that sits behind this piece of legislation. Let us not forget what has preceded it. Let us not forget the actions of those who purport to care, but when it comes to the crunch, when their vote is on the line, they walk away from multicultural communities. They walk away from religious groups. They walk away from creating a Victoria where people feel more safe and more secure in practising their religion, in being who they are.

That is what the Liberal Party has done in this chamber, in this city, in this state, over the last few months, and that is why it is very hard to take the posturing and the grandstanding that we see from them at the moment. I made the point earlier today in my contribution on the short-forms documents motion about the Liberal Party's attitudes to the machete ban, the way that they have sought to trivialise important measures that are designed to improve community safety, that they have sought by their actions and their words to misrepresent wilfully, in the face of corrections, information in the community that is just false. They stand there on social media, out in the community, wherever anyone will put a microphone in front of their faces, and they continue to trivialise and undermine the government's responses to community safety here in Victoria. I talked about it earlier today in the way that their actions and their words are trivialising the efforts that this government is making to get machetes off our streets, and we see it again now with a piece of legislation that they are trying to use as a cover to hide from their failures to stand up when it counted against hate speech, their failures to put their votes where their voices are when it matters.

They have no credibility. We do not believe them, members of the community should not believe them, when they say one thing out there and do another thing in here, because that is when politicians get bad names. It is actions like that that give politics a bad name – when you say one thing to the community when you meet them and shake their hand and you do the exact opposite when you get the chance, when there is a vote on a law that will criminalise hate speech in this state. That is their track record. That is the context for this bill. That is why it is so, so difficult to take them seriously in this debate here today.

The Labor government have very clearly said – the Premier and the Attorney-General – that we are committed to making sure that there is safety at our protests, that there is peace at our protests and that the right of Victorians to protest peacefully and safely within the law is protected. And for actions that go beyond the law, there are consequences. One of those consequences, which starts later this month, is if people go to protests and racially vilify people they will be committing crimes – not because of what the Liberal Party has done, but because of what the Labor government has done. That is what is going to happen to protests in Victoria when our anti-vilification laws come into effect later this month.

What we want to do with the laws that the government has committed to developing and that are underway – in fact it was in December last year that the government committed to dealing with violent, hateful and dangerous participants in public demonstrations through a range of measures. I will go through these now, because I think what the government's approach is demonstrating is that we take the underlying issue seriously – the damage that the speech causes to others – because we have passed the laws to criminalise it. We are working constructively with people like Victoria Police and community organisations in the development of these laws, and we will take the time to do the work, the consultation, the thinking and the drafting to get it right. We are not going to use vulnerabilities in the community – fear in the community – to exploit for political gain the way that the Liberal Party seeks to do again and again and again that is manifest in what we are seeing here today.

In December last year the government committed that we were working on legislation to deal with violent, hateful and dangerous participants in public demonstrations by things like prohibiting the flags and symbols of listed terrorist organisations; by empowering police to unmask violent, hateful, dangerous individuals who attend protests and, cowardly, hide behind masks; and by addressing the use of dangerous attachment devices. We also committed as part of that to introducing new laws to protect the rights of people to gather and to pray free from fear, free from harassment and free from intimidation, and consultation has begun. Targeted consultation has occurred with police and with faith leaders, with legal and community groups across the public sector and with community and union stakeholders on what those safe protest laws will look like, work that is being done thoroughly and comprehensively, and laws will be introduced soon, because we do need as any part of any civic and civil society to find where the balance exists between the right of individuals to come together collectively as part of a protest in any democracy and to protect those who feel impacted by those protests.

One of the key elements that we have as part of the laws that are being developed is developing laws that will allow Victoria Police to unmask violent and hateful demonstrators. We have seen quite recently the use of masks in the cowardly attempts by neo-Nazis to strike fear into the community and in their unwelcome parades on our streets. We had last month the midnight run through the city of masked goons, and other incidents recently of people with masks spewing vile hatred on the streets, and the laws that the government is developing, that we will bring into this chamber and that we are working on with people like Victoria Police, will make sure that those thugs – those goons, those cowards – are unmasked and that they put their face to their words and face the consequences of their actions.

That is what this government is working towards, that is what this government is working on, because we actually put the first part of that equation in place with our anti-hate speech laws, which again I will remind people are laws that criminalised hate speech in Victoria that the Liberal Party voted against. Because there is no point, I do not think, dealing with the laws to regulate protests or dealing with the laws to regulate masks at protests if you do not have the anti-vilification laws in place to protect those you are actually trying to protect; otherwise it is just false. That I think sums up the problem with both the Liberal Party on this bill and the Liberal Party more broadly.

One of the reasons why we are taking care with these laws and taking the time to develop them properly is because they are complex. They do involve the balancing of different rights and interests, and we are taking soundings and advice from many in the community. We did see and read with interest the comments from the new Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police in July and his response

to questions about proposals for a protest registration scheme. Chief Commissioner Bush said to the *Age*:

We've had a look at it, and it's not something we're going to drive towards ... We've had a look at other jurisdictions that do that, and it's not the game breaker.

The majority of people that protest, do so peacefully and they are more than entitled to, and we support that.

That is what the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police has said, and it was not just once. He reiterated the position when he spoke on ABC Radio Melbourne on 28 July. The Chief Commissioner reiterated that position by saying:

We've had a look at that. We've had a look at what our neighbour jurisdictions do. We don't believe it's something that will make a material difference, so we're not going to pursue that line.

That is a pretty clear statement from the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police about what the tools are that they think they need to deal with this issue, and what is proposed in this bill is not one of them. So we need to I think bear some due consideration to those words in the development of policy as we move this forward and as we decide how we are going to deal with this.

I will make the broader point that the efficacy of the bill that is proposed is questionable in terms of the harm that it is trying to address. One aspect I think is that we need to take a step back and think about the sorts of people denied under the registration scheme the Liberal Party proposes. It would be interesting in the course of this debate if the proponents of this bill and if those who support this bill could give us examples of the types of people who they think should be denied the right to protest, because one of them I expect would be the neo-Nazis that we have been seeing on the streets. But I think it defies credulity to think that neo-Nazis are going to stop because they cannot get a permit. I do not think that they are going to stop because they cannot get a permit. Despite the laws in New South Wales, we have seen examples of neo-Nazis marching in Sydney.

The other aspect of the bill that we think is a problem is the reintroduction of some of the move on related powers that were repealed in 2015 because of their impact on peaceful protests, particularly in certain industrial disputes. We certainly do not believe in handing more powers to those who seek to disrupt particularly working people's rights to withdraw their labour and establish picket lines in accordance with federal industrial laws. The other element of the bill that I wanted to touch on in a bit of detail is on the question of face coverings. The bill seeks to make amendments to the law with respect to face coverings and offences with respect to wearing them. I articulated earlier that the government, in its statement in December, made commitments to working on measures relating to face coverings, because we should not fool ourselves that masks give anyone who wears them a free pass to break the law. There should be no place to hide, whether it is behind a mask or otherwise if you are a racist that is stirring up hate on our streets. But this bill is not going to target them. It is not going to deal with them. It is going to target other people wanting to engage in peaceful protest. These laws would make it a crime for a person to wear a mask at a protest in a number of circumstances that we think are unacceptable. One of the outcomes that is clear on the face of these laws is that it could possibly criminalise the wearing of a mask as a part of a costume at a Mardi Gras parade or a Pride parade. That is certainly not something that we think –

Richard Welch: Is that a protest? Mardi Gras is not a protest.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Mr Welch, it is your bill, and it is your job to explain it. And if it is not right, get up and say it.

Members interjecting.

Renee Heath: On a point of order, Acting President, once again Mr Batchelor is being angry and nasty, but he also knows that he is not allowed to speak to Mr Welch directly; it has to be through the Chair. Secondly, he is not allowed to point.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): I ask Mr Batchelor to direct his comments through the Chair.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Acting President, through you, if Mr Welch is so insistent that something I am saying about the terms of the legislation that the Liberal Party is proposing is incorrect, I encourage him or anyone else on their side to get up and clarify it, because it is their bill we are talking about, not ours. If they want to get up and clarify whether their bill would criminalise the wearing of masks at Mardi Gras or a Pride parade, at the Midsumma Pride parade –

Renee Heath interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: It is your bill. It is the Liberal Party's bill so they can get up while they are making that explanation and address the issue I raised at the start of my speech as to why they voted against the criminalising of hate speech. I would also like an explanation from the Liberal Party as to why they voted against the criminalisation of hate speech in this state earlier this year, because they are not willing to do that. They are not willing to admit that they made a mistake back then, probably as they have just made another mistake here with the terms of this bill that would make it a crime to wear a mask at Midsumma.

What the government is working on, as we have demonstrated, is that we will be bringing into the Parliament, as soon as possible, proportionate laws that deal with the issue of face coverings at protests, with appropriate exemptions, including for health, cultural and religious reasons, laws that will build on the work we have already done to improve social cohesion. That is where I want to end the debate here today. We do have challenges with social cohesion in our community. I do not think anyone who bore witness, whether in person or through the media, to the events that took place in Melbourne on 31 August can deny that we have got a problem with social cohesion in this state and we have got a lot of work to do. I know that the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, amongst many in the government, is taking this issue very seriously and working tirelessly with our multicultural communities, with our faith groups, with civil society, with the police to end the hate.

One of the ways that we can do that as a community and as leaders in our community is to stop using these incidents as political weapons in this Parliament, to stop the attempts at pointscore that we see from those opposite on a regular basis about issues of social cohesion and community safety. They could join with us in an attempt to rise above some of the language that is being used to divide our communities. Sadly, some of that language is being used by senior members of the Liberal Party to divide our community, to make some groups in our community feel unwelcome and unsafe. They should lend their voices to condemn those amongst their own ranks who seek to sow division in our community, and hopefully, again, they take the opportunity that this debate affords them today in this place to do that very thing. I think that would be an indication that they are willing to stand up and stand above the petty division that is befalling too many in our community.

What we are trying to do in the government, led by the Premier, minister and others, is to work on strategies, not just one thing – not just on a piece of legislation and say, 'Job done,' not just on one particular strategy or grants program and say, 'Job done,' not just with one part of our community and say, 'Job done.' Across the board the task we have collectively as community leaders to rebuild trust, to rebuild respect and to rebuild cross-cultural understanding is more important now than ever, because what we are witnessing on our streets, the way that nastiness and divisiveness are slipping through the cracks and fissures that are emerging in the fabric of our community, should be alarming to us all and should be a concern to us all.

Instead of trying to break those cracks and fissures a little wider, instead of trying to let more of the unrest bubble up and bubble through because they might see some short-term political advantage in it, instead of giving a pass to some of the terrible comments that are being directed at people who come here because our country is great and they too want to build a better life, I think what we need from everyone in our community, in the Parliament, in the debate today, is to rise above some of that rhetoric

and to do all that we can to make sure that everyone feels valued as part of Victoria; that everyone feels that they belong in this great state, whether it is supporting our First Nations communities through the simple act of an acknowledgement of or a welcome to country at the beginning of proceedings, right through to making sure that we absolutely condemn neo-Nazis for violently attacking First Nations communities in this state; that we support our multicultural communities when they come under attack from so-called leaders in the community; and that we stand up against antisemitism, against Islamophobia and against all forms of racial discrimination and racial vilification. That is what we can do.

What we have got before us today is a bill that will not do that. It is a bill that will not solve the problem that it is trying to. On its terms it will not do that. But broader, and that is where I started, it is coming from an opposition that has no credibility on this issue, because of their actions in this place. They have no credibility on protest laws when they vote against laws to criminalise hate speech. They are seemingly more interested in cracking down on the protests than on what is being said, and I find that to be an upside-down set of priorities. That is why we cannot take them seriously, that is why this bill does not stand worthy of support and that is why the government is getting on with the job of dealing with these issues around protests. Laws will be brought forward by the Attorney-General to do so, and more importantly, people like the Minister for Multicultural Affairs are leading our work trying to improve social cohesion across this state. We will not be supporting this bill.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:56): There are a few things to say, and I believe my colleague Mr Davis covered a lot of it in my absence. There are a lot of things to take in from the contribution we just heard, and if I could describe it in a two-word summary I would say, ‘Spare me.’ I mean, when we look at the anti-vilification laws – and he spent a lot of time on the anti-vilification laws, which is not what this is about – I suggest the member should put his piety in a box and show some humility, because when it comes to what he was talking about, the machete ban, it was he and his colleagues who opposed my bills in 2023 and 2024, which would have seen a ban on machetes and would have seen machetes off our streets. Arguing against it, he had colleagues say that we were just after a *Herald Sun* headline and that no-one is really concerned about this – absolutely spare me the sanctimonious nature of what we just heard from Mr Batchelor.

Mr Batchelor spoke about the anti-vilification laws; we supported the criminal elements of the laws, but we were not going to support the civil element, which we wanted removed: a reasonable person with a protected attribute to judge the offence instead of the reasonable person test, which had been in place for a long time. Mr Batchelor spoke about supporting religious leaders. If I had been eating Weet-Bix, I would have choked on them, because he spoke about supporting religious leaders, and the government gave rock-solid guarantees to religious leaders regarding the anti-vilification laws and then went off and did a deal with the Greens political party to narrow the religious freedom defence as part of the anti-vilification laws. They did a dirty deal with the Greens, and the same religious leaders on whom they spent over \$10,000 of taxpayer money trying to schmooze and host at Shrove Tuesday events were absolutely appalled that the Labor Party would do a deal with the Greens political party to narrow the religious freedom defence, to narrow the scope of religious freedom in this state. That is what they did. I use the term ‘narrow’ because that was how it was described in committee by Mr Puglielli, who was part of the negotiations by the Greens.

The Labor Party say they support and listen to religious leaders. They went and did a deal with the Greens to narrow the religious freedom defence in this state. So spare me the sanctimony of Mr Batchelor, who comes in here and gives moral lectures to us full of absolute hypocrisy, who talks about opposition claims about machete bans and how Labor’s machete ban is working. It is the same Labor Party who for years opposed any attempt – and Mr Batchelor stood up in their spot – to impose a machete ban as we introduced bills and motions to try to get the government to deal with this issue. Really it is just astonishing what we heard in the previous unfortunately 30-minute contribution – 30 minutes that we will never get back thanks to the sanctimony of what we just heard, but we have come to expect nothing less from the Labor Party. He was talking about opposing the anti-vilification

laws, and as I said we only opposed the civil elements because of four words inserted in there, and the government, being basically stubborn in not wanting to negotiate with the opposition, then went and weakened religious freedom. Also now in law, thanks to a deal with the Greens and the crossbench, the police and courts will have to consider the social, historical and cultural context of the perpetrator committing the hate. We are an egalitarian country where everyone is equal under the law, but under those laws not everyone is equal. That is what the government did – shamefully that is what the government did – and it is rightly what we ought to oppose, because when the government passes unequal laws there are winners and there are losers. The social, cultural and historical context of the perpetrator committing hate or the perpetrator committing a serious criminal offence should not matter, but that is what we get under this government, who does dirty deals with the Greens political party and the crossbench.

It is important to speak on this bill, a proposition the Deputy Premier supports. We know through countless media briefings that the Deputy Premier supports a bill like this, so it is important to introduce it and to get on record from many other members why they would oppose a simple bill such as this. This weekend there are four protests that are planned by extremists at a time when a cop killer is at large and the police force is 2000 police short of its capacity. Our bill will allow for police to be better allocated to deal with these protests. Since October 2023 there have been over 500 protests in Melbourne, diverting 22,000 police shifts away from frontline crime prevention. Fifty per cent of crime is unsolved in Victoria, the highest ever, and it will only get worse while hundreds of police are being diverted to babysit extremists and a certain amount of losers and a rabble, a noisy minority who would seek to divide Victorians. I have, as the local member, spoken to many CBD traders who are really feeling the impact of regular disruption in our city. Protest activity has increasingly involved fires being lit, roads blocked, Australian flags burnt and attacks on citizens and police officers. The Allan Labor government promised to ban masks at protests over 267 days ago but has failed to deliver, so we will. Victorians deserve the right to protest lawfully and peacefully, but not at the expense of public safety and at the expense of frontline police being ripped out of the community. I have chatted to many police officers around Broadmeadows and Craigieburn who have had this exact experience, where they were forced to go into the city instead of patrolling the community like Hume, where there are two aggravated carjackings a day. They should be out on the streets monitoring the local community.

Under the protest registration system organisers must provide purpose, time, location and participant details to Victoria Police. Police can recommend changes to reduce risk to public order, safety and infrastructure. There will be a ban on face coverings, so neo-Nazis like Thomas Sewell and other cowards will not be able to have face masks. It prohibits masks at protests; lawful excuses, like religious attire, are excluded and protected. And it of course strengthens move-on laws. This government got rid of the move-on laws, shamefully. This would target repeat offenders. Courts can impose exclusion orders banning offenders from protest areas for up to 12 months. And of course it would safeguard free speech. Mr Batchelor made some wild claims about Mardi Gras. He should know that Mardi Gras is in Sydney. But beside that, peaceful protesters at authorised events would be protected from obstruction charges and protected from those rules around face coverings. It would guarantee lawful protest while maintaining community safety, and I think that is particularly important.

We have seen a lot of disruption in our CBD. Most of it is peaceful protest – the lion's share of it is peaceful protest – but there is a small, noisy minority that will go out of its way to seek to divide Victorians, to seek to cause hate and division. One such example we saw the other weekend – and you could see it coming a mile away – being the March for Australia rally. Not everyone at that rally was there to cause trouble, but you could clearly tell that the people behind it were. The singling out and targeting of our Indian community in particular was a shameful episode, something that I spoke out very strongly about in the days before the rally itself. I do believe people who single out and target our Indian community here in this state have probably never actually met a member of our Indian community. They are industrious, entrepreneurial, vibrant, life-loving people. They are patriots. There

is somehow this mood to hijack the Australian flag – that that is Australia and that is not Australia. I just want to say I am run off my feet every single Australia Day attending events with our Indian community, our Nepalese communities, our multicultural communities, who are so proud to be Australians. They consider themselves Australian. They love Australia and the opportunities that it has provided to them. So for these losers to single out the Indian community and target the Indian community is an absolute disgrace, and the scenes that we saw at the rally targeting sacred sites, again, were shameful.

A member interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Again – I will take up the interjection – I thought the senator's comments were deeply regrettable. And I have spoken to many people in our Indian community who feel the same. I do think that she should apologise. I do think that she should apologise because, firstly, it was wrong; but secondly, when you make a mistake – and she said that she made a mistake – you should admit that mistake and actually say the words that are required. That is what decency is about. As the Leader of the Opposition said this morning, we do think she should apologise. We love our Indian community in Victoria, and frankly the claims made by the pollster in question are wrong. If 85 per cent of Indians supported the Labor Party, the Labor Party would hold the seats of Berwick and La Trobe and other seats across the country. The Indian community come to Australia with an open mind. The Indian community come to Australia, start a business and sometimes hold down two or three jobs to get ahead, to buy a house, to take part in the Australian way of life. They are a great community. I will not stand and the opposition will not stand for attacks on our Indian community, because they are a great community. I have many lifelong friends in the Indian community. I have many lifelong supporters in the Indian community and close friends in the Indian community who contribute a great deal to the Australian way of life. But I am very pleased to support this bill, and I am looking forward to hearing the debate.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (15:11): I also rise to briefly speak and express my strong opposition to the bill before us this afternoon, which describes itself as creating safer protests with a registration system, and it is hard to see a bigger oxymoron. By its very nature, protest does not ask for permission. Protest is not meant to be convenient. It is meant to bring about change, and sometimes that does not always come at the times that we would like it to. So we really should call it what it is, and it is a blatant attack on our fundamental right to protest that means so much to so many of us.

I have said this before, but long before coming into this place I was an activist. I will always be an activist before I am a politician. It is through those movements that I was led to politics and I was led to being a member in here. It is not guaranteed that I will always be a member of this Parliament, but it is guaranteed that I will always be an activist and I will always engage in protest. It is so fundamentally important to me and the many, many communities that I represent, and any attack to tear it apart should terrify all of us who care about bringing about change, no matter what side of politics we are on.

The protest registration system created in this bill requires that the Chief Commissioner of Police only register protests which they are satisfied will not be highly disruptive to the public. I think this proves just how little the opposition understands about some of these protests and some of the people engaging in protest and just the very nature of civil disobedience. I know that this bill if passed would be an attack on my core base, my core community, the animal protection community, who regularly engage in civil disobedience, but they are not highly disruptive to the public. They are not violent. They are not harming anyone. In fact they are trying to stop harm. They are trying to stop violence in the work that they are doing.

We know that New South Wales has had a permit protest system in place since 2022, and it really is hard to see a major difference that it has made to the lives of its citizens over there. Both the government and the opposition have argued that their respective changes – because of course the government have flagged changes to protest in Victoria as well – are in response to rising antisemitism

in communities and Nazis on our streets, and I do not think anyone at all is saying that should not be addressed. But this bill and the government's bill, which I am apparently going to see at some point, are not the response to solving these problems. You only need to look at how these laws that are similar to this one before us today are applied in New South Wales to see who they are actually being directed towards, and they have the very same problems as us when it comes to social cohesion, when it comes to rising antisemitism and when it comes to seeing literal Nazis on the street. Their permit system has not stopped that.

After successfully denying their request for a protest permit, New South Wales police arrested 173 people for blockading coal exports from the Port of Newcastle, but when Nazis stood on the steps of Parliament, police were nowhere to be seen. I think it is really timely to remind people that there are already laws to stop Nazis on our streets; they are not being used and not being exercised. Of course nobody wants to see these people walking among us. It is terrifying – I probably know better than a lot of people in here just how terrifying it is – but these laws are not going to stop these people. They are only going to embolden these people, who want to be challenged. I am also not sure how exactly anyone can see a registration system as effective. Mr Mulholland touched on this as well. We saw Thomas Sewell on the streets on the weekend. This man is beyond any comprehension and any control. I cannot see him applying for a permit for his next goose walk down Bourke Street with all of his mates to make sure it is done in a legal, cooperative way.

David Ettershank interjected.

Georgie PURCELL: That is exactly right, Mr Ettershank. These people are not going to see these laws and a new protest system in place and suddenly start complying with the law and being citizens that are engaging with the laws of our communities and caring about social cohesion. Even Victoria's brand new police commissioner opposes the introduction of a protest permit system. It has been mentioned elsewhere and is worth noting that neo-Nazis still joined in the racist March for Australia in Sydney despite protest organisers having a permit. That did not stop Nazis there. Police already have considerable and broad powers in Victoria. Officers can arrest or detain protesters if they reasonably believe a criminal offence is being committed. The removal of face coverings is something the police can already enforce and have enforced. In fact at the recent, revolting, racist March for Australia the CBD was declared a designated area, giving police the powers to search individuals for weapons and of course direct people to remove their face coverings.

The proposed ban on face coverings must be called out for what it is and what many people have already highlighted, given that the government has flagged they also plan on doing this: it is dangerous, and it also impacts many, many vulnerable communities that have multiple reasons why they must cover their faces. There are a wide range of reasons that people might choose to cover their faces. One is that, for immunocompromised people, wearing a face mask when in a large crowd keeps them safe and protects their health. Banning face masks at protests limits the ability of persons with a disability, elderly people and those with health conditions to participate. That is not fair. It is an attack on democracy. Protest should not just be for the healthy and able-bodied, it should be for everyone. This is a clear infringement on the rights to peaceful assembly, freedom of association and freedom of expression, as granted under our charter. The penalty of a \$6000 fine or three months imprisonment proposed in this bill for not removing a face covering is simply outrageous.

David Ettershank interjected.

Georgie PURCELL: It is, Mr Ettershank – it is ridiculous. Here is something that perhaps will shock precisely nobody. Under this bill I would be a criminal, because something that I do every single year without fail – in fact I have done it for the past 12 years – is cover up my face, head out to the wetlands and go on duck rescue. I cover up my face for a range of reasons. I cover up my face for safety. I cover up my face because it is bloody cold out there on the wetlands at 4 o'clock in the morning and I cover my face because I do not feel safe around shooters. I think I have canvassed very well in this place the reasons why I do not feel safe around shooters and the threats and the attacks that

I have received from the duck-shooting fraternity. But under this bill I would be the one penalised, not them, for their appalling, misogynistic and frankly dangerous behaviour.

There are so many in my community that choose to cover their face because they are professionals, they have jobs but they have issues that they care about and they do not necessarily feel safe revealing their identity, and I do not blame them for that. This is not some tinfoil hat issue. I have had the Game Management Authority follow me around the wetlands with a superzoom lens trying to work out who we are, because they want to target us, not the duck shooters. By enforcing these laws, which would make us feel unsafe and like we cannot engage in these issues that we care so deeply about, that would be fundamentally an attack on our democracy, on our right to protest, and like I said from the outset, that should concern every single one of us, because no matter what side of politics we are on, we all deeply care about our issues, we all deeply care about our communities, and every single one of them engages in protest as a form of opposition to government decisions and laws that are being made.

It is ironic that this bill has been put forward by a political party that actually regularly claim to stand for liberty and that claimed Victorians' right to freedom of speech was at high risk in the recent anti-vilification laws that we passed in this place and that they in fact voted against. Today's bill was introduced by the opposition, but as I have said, we know that the government concerningly intend to introduce their own shiny new protest restrictions, and we will basically be here again in a few months time saying the exact same things about those laws. These laws before us today do not work and the government's laws do not work. They do nothing to repair the growing cracks in our struggling social cohesion, which I think every single one of us knows we need to do something about. This is not the solution – in fact it only makes it worse. I encourage everyone to vote against this bill before us today.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:21): This bill does not make protests safer, it does not strengthen community safety and it does not target the real danger on our streets. The Allan Labor government has already made clear its commitment to both safety and democracy. We are introducing laws that will give police the powers they need to deal with violent, hateful and dangerous participants in public demonstrations. We are doing this by prohibiting the flags and symbols of listed terrorist organisations, empowering police to unmask violent, hateful and dangerous individuals who attend protests and cowardly hide behind masks and addressing the use of dangerous attachment devices. This government also recognises that the right to protest is a critical part of any democracy and that we need to get the balance right. I will cover off a little bit more on that later.

Our approach is balanced, proportionate and informed by the advice from Victoria Police. It protects the right of ordinary Victorians to gather, to march, to raise their voices and protest. It also makes sure that hate and violence are never given free rein. On that I too would like to refer to the criminal anti-vilification laws that come into effect later this month. If the opposition were actually concerned about hate, why didn't they support them? I will tell you why: because they are peddling division to get votes – trying to get votes – from it. They say they want safety, but the truth is their bill would tie peaceful protesters up in red tape while leaving the real threat untouched. These are the people who want to dismantle our democracy, yet this bill creates loopholes they can exploit while restricting the rights of ordinary Victorians to peacefully protest. We only need to look to Sydney, where despite strict registration schemes, 30 Nazis marched openly, handed out flyers and led chants. Permits and paperwork did not stop them. Neo-Nazis are not out there applying for protest permits.

The government's goals are twofold: to ensure community safety and protect Victorians from undue disruption but also to defend democratic rights. The Chief Commissioner of Police himself said that mandatory protest registration is not the answer. He said:

The majority of people that protest, do so peacefully and they are more than entitled to, and we support that.

That is the voice of common sense, and it is the advice this government is following to achieve our goals. You really have to wonder what are the goals of those opposite. This bill is from a party that hates migrants. We had federal MP Jacinta Nampijinpa Price criticise migration to this country and then from right across the chamber, 'We love our Indian community.' My question to you is: do you

love this state? Do you love Victorians? Because 50 per cent of us are from another country or are children of someone from another country and quite frankly all of us, except First Nations people, are migrants. We are all migrants except for First Nations people. I think the existential question is for you across the chamber. This is from a Liberal Party that peddles conspiracy theories. You only need to refer to Mrs Deeming's speech last sitting week to see that. This is from a Liberal Party that compared Daniel Andrews to horrific dictators.

The last time this chamber sat Mrs Deeming compared the Labor government to an authoritarian regime such as those created by Lenin, Mao and Saddam Hussein. And Mrs Hermans likened the former Premier to Stalin. Let us look at what authoritarian regimes actually do. Totalitarian leaders throughout history have spoken openly about crushing protests and harnessing zealots to destroy democracy. Take Mrs Herman's example of Joseph Stalin. Stalin said:

Ideas are more powerful than guns. We would not let our enemies have guns, why should we let them have ideas?

He knew the power of protest, and he feared it. These are the words of a dictator who sought to suppress democracy. What is more, he and others like him used violent fanatics as an excuse to do so. Tolerating or enabling extremists is not just grubby politics. In their book *How Democracies Die* historians Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt warn us – this is very ironic – that:

One of the great ironies of how democracies die is that the very defense of democracy is often used as a pretext for its subversion. Would-be autocrats often use economic crises, natural disasters, and especially security threats ... to justify antidemocratic measures.

Sounds concerningly familiar to me.

Those opposite have dared to compare Dan Andrews, a democratically elected Premier who won resounding mandates from the people of Victoria, with dictators. These are not slips of the tongue; they are deliberate.

Attempting to recast democratic government is tyranny. It is reckless, it is offensive. It diminishes the real suffering of those who lived under true totalitarian regimes and distracts us from the discourse about those who are doing it tough in this state. For me and many other Victorian citizens of this great state, this is not abstract. My grandfather-in-law was imprisoned in the Buchenwald concentration camp by the Nazis in World War II. His crime was helping to feed and hide Jewish people from his local neighbourhood. He was part of the Dutch underground resistance movement, helping Jewish people escape that persecution. He was not even a Jewish person himself. He was just a decent guy standing up against the wrong thing. He saw firsthand what happens when fanatics are emboldened and when governments fail to act against them. He knew the price of standing up for others, and he paid it with his freedom and with his mental health. He suffered PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder, until the day he died in Melbourne at 94 years of age. I had quite a long number of years where I knew him and loved him and his wife, who put up with that trauma.

When I see neo-Nazis marching openly in our cities, I think of him and I think of the millions who suffered. I know that the responsibility we carry in this chamber is not theoretical; it is deeply human and deeply moral, and the opposition's bill is absolute hypocrisy. It creates permits and exclusions that will not deter violent extremists and threatens the rights of ordinary Victorians who march for climate action or workers rights or women's safety or for peace. It is really just a tokenistic suggestion that they actually care about this stuff, that they are not peddling conspiracy theories, not hiding away from condemning Nazis and in true, deepest form actually not liking migrants, being racist and failing to condemn it categorically. 'It's unfortunate what she said. It could've been reframed better.' That is not a condemnation. This government will not follow the path of those who suppress protest and encourage fanatics. We will legislate with balance and with principle to protect both the safety of our communities and the right to dissent, and that is the responsibility of a democratic government.

On my grandfather-in-law further, the legacy of his experience in World War II goes down the generations in the family. They migrated to Australia post Second World War, and they did so for the very same reasons that millions of other people migrated to Australia after various wars – many wars actually – and that is the devastation and horror that was living in Europe at that time after World War II. People were hungry, people were devastated and people were traumatised. They literally left their world and came here to another world for safety and for a democratic life with respect. I am very, very proud to have visited Buchenwald concentration camp with my husband 30 years ago. We were a young couple, and we walked through the gas chambers that were still there. It is real, and we have to stand up against this and never let any of this come forward. I am really proud that my daughter and her partner a few years ago also visited Buchenwald concentration camp, and I can tell you that, like us, they did not do so out of being tourists.

[NAME/S AWAITING VERIFICATION]

It was about the burden of Peter van Weis's experience in Buchenwald concentration camp and the lessons we all want to hold in our hearts and in this democracy, and in my case now in this chamber, to make sure that nothing like that ever happens again. It was an unpleasant experience, and it was not pleasant for my daughter and her partner as well. But they are important stories to tell, and I am unbelievably sad to have to tell this story today in this chamber against behaviours that just imply and facilitate and do not condemn and literally just loosely stand for nothing and therefore let the doors stay open. That is really what we get from those opposite. With that, I stand very proudly against this bill, and I am very proud of all of the people in this chamber who also stand against this bill.

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (15:34): I rise today to speak on this bill, the Safer Protest with a Registration System and Ban on Face Coverings Bill 2025. I support this bill, but after having just listened to the contributions made in the last hours I just want to make some comments before I continue speaking on the bill. No wonder we are in a crime crisis. No wonder we are having an increase in violent crime at the moment. I feel like we are in a bubble. We are talking about legislation put forward in the chamber at this moment, but we have heard nothing but smokescreens, diversions, going on about migrants, going on about Nazis, going on about activists and how to benefit themselves whether this legislation passes or not. We are here to make legislation for the community, for those people out there who voted us in here. We are here to make legislation for the benefit of our economy, not the benefit of what the outcome of this particular bill will have on ourselves.

The facts are we are in the middle of a crime crisis. This weekend itself there are four protests planned within the CBD. From October 2023 to February 2025, 17 months, there have been over 500 protests, diverting over 20,000 police shifts away from the front line. Those are the facts. The facts are: protesters' activities are increasing, involving more violence and creating firebombs. The facts are: they are blocking roads, sticking themselves with glue onto freeways and highways, stopping traffic. The facts are: these protesters have started burning our national flag. I do not know about you, but patriotism is a little bit in my heart, having served in the police, having served in the Australian Army. Patriotism means a lot to me when people start burning the Australian flag. These protests are now increasingly an attack on innocent citizens walking past and also an attack on our police officers, on police horses and on police dogs. That is what the facts are.

This legislation we are talking about, in summary – before going into detail – is just about creating a better system where people can protest safely and people can protest in a manner where there is more safety for those around them. It introduces legislation which gives peace of mind to those who protest, as they will know they will be protected against these authorities. Also, this legislation puts forward and gives police the opportunity for those who break the law and gatecrash these protests to be identified and brought before justice. That is it in a nutshell in relation to what these protests are about – nothing about migrants, nothing about discrimination, nothing about Nazis. It just so happens a group of people are wearing masks, whether they are Nazi believers, whether they are animal activists or whatever they are. It is not about those groups. It is about providing police powers and providing a system where people can protest safely and where there is safety for the community. It does not disrupt

business, it does not disrupt ongoing bystanders and it does not cause fear for the safety of those in the community. That is what this legislation is all about – nothing about discrimination and nothing about what happened in the last legislation put forward about this.

In this chamber we must speak on this legislation itself and stop cutting it apart in relation to what you agree about on this legislation put forward and what you do not agree on; speak on the legislation itself. This legislation, as I mentioned, has two main parts. It introduces a registration system, so the organisers of protests can register with the police, speak to the police, put a proposal for the time and place they would like to have this demonstration or protest and at the same time give the police the ability to assess the risk for their safety and for the community's safety and also the resources that can be put forward to protect the protesters and the community in case something happens. We have got to understand we are in the middle of a crime crisis. We do not need extra police pulled off their shifts to look after another protest. There are 1100 vacancies in police at the moment. Every station across Victoria is between 23 per cent and 33 per cent manpower down, per station, across the board. That is why you see so much less police outside patrolling, looking after the community. That is where we are with the situation at the moment, besides the debt. I am not going to even talk about the debt in relation to what has been cut from the police budget. But that is what this is – legislation to assist police to assist those who want to protest in a safe manner. That is all it is – nothing about discrimination.

The bill recommends changes in public order safety and infrastructure. This legislation allows those who want to protest to nominate a definite route to where they want to protest. At the same time it gives the police time to assess whether it is safe or not and also to put out barriers to protect the route the protests want to take. It also gives the police time and the ability to assess the risk and also negotiate and communicate with those protestors that maybe there is a different option because of A, B or C of the risks involved.

In relation to the second part of the registrations, it allows police to move people on when they are not registered. Those who do not register under this proposed legislation, it will allow police to move those people on. They will have the power to move people on. If they do not move on and if they obstruct police, obstruct traffic or obstruct the community, then that will be an offence. That is what this legislation is all about. There is nothing about discrimination. There is nothing about Nazis. I do not know where you are getting all this from. There is nothing saying 'Ban Nazis'. There is nothing in here at all about banning activists. So let us face the legislation and talk about the legislation.

You talk about banning face coverings. There is a reason for proposing the banning of face coverings. This is what the Premier Jacinta Allan back in December 2024 promised. Because there was an issue, she promised to ban masks at protests. She did, back in December, but nothing has happened yet. That is why this legislation has been put forward. She spoke then because she knew there were issues because there were protesters who were deliberately wearing masks for a reason – to cover themselves from being identified when they committed an offence. We saw rocks being thrown at police horses and at police and faeces and rocks being thrown by people who were wearing masks. They go to these protests not to protest. They go to these protests to commit an offence. That is one thing I know – they are committing an offence. If you are going to protest, that is fine. Part one, as I mentioned in relation to the registration legislation, is all about protecting your right to protest. The second part in banning face mask coverings is so that those who do not follow the legislation can be identified and brought before the court for having committed an offence. That is all it is. It is very simple and straightforward.

Then we are talking about freedom to protest. You have got freedom to protest – just register. Simple. I want to protest down the road with a group of my friends – register. The police will talk about it, and then you are up and they will make sure you are safe to protest. Register, grab the people and protest.

In relation to prohibited masks and protesting unlawfully, for the elderly and for those who are disabled and those who need to wear face masks for whatever reasons or for religious reasons, there are exemptions listed in the legislation put forward. It says it will ban or prohibit masks worn without a lawful excuse. However, there are exemptions. Because of health reasons, there are exemptions. There

are religious reasons. There are exemptions for it. So you can still wear masks if you got a lawful excuse. Do not just chop that part off and say ‘I’m unhealthy, I’ve got to wear a mask, but I’ll get charged.’ It gives you an exemption for it if you can provide a reasonable excuse, a lawful excuse.

In relation to it being cold, do not say, ‘Well, I’ll stay home. Don’t protest.’ If you think it is cold and you should wear a mask, as some member in here mentioned earlier, then if you are out there protesting give it your voice. If you are getting out your thoughts in relation to what it should be and you are worried about the cold, put a jumper on, put a hat on, put a beanie on. Going back to the bill I want to address, this bill will amend the Summary Offences Act 1966. I think it is fair to say that Victorians are tired of consistent protests in Melbourne that incite violence in our streets. We have seen that day in and day out over the last two years. Repeated disruptions in the communities in the CBD cause businesses to shut down and create economic issues and concerns. Let us think about that. It sends a very negative perception of our state. It also creates a state that is quickly becoming defined as a hate state. This is about protesting in an orderly fashion. What is concerning is the timing of dangerous protests happening at the moment, disrupting police resources.

I did mention before the cut to police funding, the \$50 million cut in the budget, which does not help either. Being soft on crime does not help this. To bring it back to what this legislation is all about, for decades we have gone soft on crime. We have gone backwards in relation to people committing offences, so this is a step forward. It is not committing anything extra in relation to charging people. It just provides that people can protest safely and in an orderly fashion and the community can go about without fear. If they walk down the street, they will know it is a protest, and they are not going to fear that someone will come and trample them or that people will throw things in their direction. This is what the legislation put forward in this chamber will do.

I suggest those who will contribute after me address what is being put forward in this legislation, what was proposed in the legislation sought to be introduced by my colleague David Southwick in the other place. It will strengthen the move-on laws so that if a group of people is assembled for protest or for whatever reason and is not registered, if they are disorderly and disrupting traffic, disrupting businesses and disrupting community, police will have the power to ask them to move on. That is what this legislation is putting forward: giving police the power to move protesters on. When they refuse to move on or they hinder the police, hinder traffic, hinder communities, then that will be an offence, not before. This will give police the power to ask them to move on.

There are people in this chamber who have mentioned New South Wales. We are the only state in Australia that does not have a registration system. Just think about that. We are the state that has the most protests in the country, and at the same time we are the only state that does not have a protest system. Someone obviously is not listening to our community. Unfortunately, it is all pointing in our direction, the Victorian state, and that basically ends up with the Victorian government. The Premier hinted several months ago that she was going to do it this way. This is basically taking her words and putting them into place. We have waited so long, and nothing has happened. It is getting worse. This is what this legislation is basically putting forward in relation to a protest registration system and banning face masks.

With the last minute, I just want to say I hope all my colleagues, the crossbenchers and the opposite side focus on the legislation put before us and support it, because you know it is right. The Premier has mentioned it, it is right, so vote for it.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (15:49): I rise to speak on the private members bill Safer Protest with a Registration System and a Ban on Face Coverings Bill 2025. The Greens will not be supporting this bill. Just a month ago I spoke to a large rally on the steps of Parliament, right here, a rally that was called to defend the right to peaceful protest. As I told the crowd assembled on that rainy night, that right is not a gift from the government. The right to protest is not something that we ask permission for. It is a right that was won. It is a right that we in Victoria continue to use, and it is a right that the community will defend.

Peaceful protest has been central to so many huge wins that we have had for this state and this country. The Franklin River was saved because people took to the streets, took to the river and said no to the dam. The Eight-Hour Day, the first in the world, was won a century and a half ago right here in Victoria because the labour movement and unions marched and would not back down. Our forests in Victoria finally are protected because people stood between the bulldozers and the trees. Rights for LGBTIQ+ people, including historically same-sex marriage, were won by people who refused to be hidden and silent but instead took to the streets to demand equality. In the last few weeks, and indeed over the last months and years, we have seen literally hundreds of thousands of ordinary Australians and Victorians take to the streets firmly but peacefully demanding that our governments take action to end the genocide in Gaza. These have been some of the biggest rallies in Australian history.

This bill seeks to create a police-run protest registration scheme. It is interesting to note that the opposition are pushing ahead with this despite the Chief Commissioner of Police clearly being on the public record that he does not support a protest permit system. Liberty Victoria also have warned against any moves towards a registration or permit system for protests in this state. They say that peaceful protest is fundamental and that linking public order incidents to a permit regime is not a justification. They oppose restrictions on protest rights introduced under the guise of community safety or social cohesion. They call for governments instead to protect the right to protest. The Human Rights Law Centre has consistently cautioned against criminalising peaceful protest tactics, including those that are temporarily disruptive, and it has criticised broad expansions of police powers which then limit people's right to participate in democratic activity.

The bill also seeks to criminalise face coverings at protests, noting that there is an exemption for religious reasons. The Human Rights Law Centre again has criticised mask bans, including the ones that are being floated by the government, as affecting vulnerable groups and limiting the rights of people who need to mask for health or safety reasons or cultural reasons to participate in protest. It is pertinent to note also that the Human Rights Law Centre has pointed out that extremist right-wing groups are thriving on the dynamic caused by criminalisation. This allows them to paint themselves as victims, drawing further attention to their causes and using the law as a platform for recruitment and provocation. We have certainly seen this dynamic, unfortunately, playing out.

It has been interesting to see that over the last months unions and community coalitions have pushed back against government proposals to tighten protest laws, particularly blanket bans on masks, on the basis that they will be used against peaceful dissent; for example, climate and workers rights rallies. Given this bill also seeks to impose stronger move-on powers, the Victoria Law Foundation's comments are pertinent. They say that the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities includes a right to peaceful assembly. By repealing section 6(5) and layering exclusions on top, the foundation argues that the threshold for removing people from protest areas and then later banning them could be significantly lowered. This would escalate the legal risk faced by people exercising their democratic right by being present at protest sites.

Let us not forget, as I have outlined a number of times in this place during different debates, Victoria Police do already have extensive powers. For example, the Summary Offences Act 1966 already gives police and protective services officers the powers to direct someone to move on if they suspect on reasonable grounds that the person is or may breach the peace, endanger the safety of someone, cause injury to a person or damage public property. These orders can be made in any public place, and failing to follow a move-on order can result in a fine or being charged with a criminal offence. I keep underlining these existing powers because they seem to be completely missing from both the context of the debate that the government is advancing as its argument and the bill that the opposition is bringing forward today. For all of these reasons, the Greens do not support this bill.

Coming back to first principles, the right to peaceful protest is central to our democracy. When people speak truth to power and when we stand up for a better world, we may make those in power uncomfortable, but the voice of people making the powerful uncomfortable is not a crime. It is how

people in this place are held accountable. Without the ability to raise our voices through peaceful protest, the power to make good change is severely hobbled. We will not support this bill today.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) incorporated the following:

I rise to make a contribution on the bill before the chamber.

The pithily titled Safer Protest with a Registration System and a Ban on Face Coverings Bill 2025 is, according to Mr Davis, about ‘balance’, about ‘protecting the right to peaceful protest’ as a ‘cornerstone of our democracy’. It all sounds pretty reasonable.

As Mr Davis noted in his second-reading speech:

... this bill is about drawing a clear line between the right to protest peacefully and the right of every Victorian to live free from intimidation, disruption, and violence.

The bill itself looks a bit more like creeping fascism to me, but I’ll talk more about that in a moment.

In Australia the right to protest and assemble is protected under international law and is an integral part of a functioning democracy. This right comes from the implied freedom of political communication found in our constitution.

Mr Davis mentioned that 500 protests had occurred in Melbourne since October 2023, so I’m assuming he is specifically targeting the pro-Palestinian rallies, which I would suggest many people have attended because they want to see an end to what both the UN and the International Criminal Court have denounced as the ongoing genocide in Gaza, and, I would say, not unreasonably, they want to see the Victorian government sever ties with the weapons manufacturers who are enabling that genocide.

I myself have attended a number of these rallies.

No doubt the recent protests have been disruptive, but sometimes democracy is disruptive and messy and inconvenient. It’s what separates democracy from authoritarianism.

I wasn’t around in Parliament to see how those opposite responded to the anti-government, anti-lockdown, anti-vaccination protests that took place in Melbourne a few years back, but I do wonder if they spoke as passionately about the right of Victorians to live free from intimidation, disruption, and violence during the protests of that era.

Regardless, this bill and some of the recent laws introduced by the government are quite chilling and put me in mind of how government abjectly failed to respond to the rise of fascism in Britain. It’s quite a fascinating example.

As we know, fascism started to take root in Europe in between the two world wars, but one wouldn’t have thought Britain was a natural home for fascism. Britain didn’t lose the war, for starters, and the impacts of the Great Depression were not as severe as in other parts of the world. But nonetheless a small group of fascists were able to tap into the genuine concerns of working people, sowing fear, propagating images of chaos and destruction.

What does that have to do with the bill before us?

Well, we’ve seen neo-Nazis doing the same thing here. We heard Thomas Sewell on the steps of Parliament addressing his fellow protesters and promising that his men would fight for ‘our survival’ against the ‘ginormous empires of the Third World’.

If the bill’s aim is to free us from intimidation, disruption, and violence, and we take last week’s anti-immigration protests as an example, how would providing for the authorisation and prohibition of certain public protests work? Would it permit everyone bar the Nazis to protest in that case? This bill does not provide guidance on how we might respond to groups like the fascists, merely a means to stop any protest – and there’s the rub.

And by the way, can we please stop calling them neo-Nazis? There is nothing neo or novel about these people or their hateful ideology and love of Adolf Hitler. They are the same excrement on the sole of your shoes that they have always been; the only thing is, it’s easier to clean your shoes.

Anyway, this bill will empower police to ‘move on’ protesters, but this is unnecessary, as police already have sufficient move-on powers under the Summary Offences Act, so why do they need further powers?

The provision enabling a court to exclude a protester from certain places is similarly redundant.

Our position on the introduction of a permit system was informed by the comments of police commissioner Mike Bush. On 28 July he was asked in an ABC interview about introducing a permit system and said, and I quote:

We've had a look at that. It exists in other jurisdictions like New South Wales. We've had a look to see if it would be effective. Where we've landed is that it's not worth bringing in.

Now there is a valid argument that the commissioner is not the lawmaker, that that responsibility is vested in the Parliament. But could I respectfully suggest to you, my colleagues, that to simply ignore that expert assessment is folly.

As for prohibiting protesters from wearing face coverings, it is not a crime to wear face coverings in public. The proposed change in this bill would hand Victoria Police extraordinary powers to arrest peaceful protesters where there is no danger to the public.

People wear face coverings for a variety of reasons. The banning of face coverings at protests will prevent people with a disability, elderly people and people with health conditions from participating in their democratic right to protest.

It will have a similar chilling effect on people who want to protect their anonymity and privacy. Who are we to say that someone who has been subject to gender-based violence, stalking, doxxing or retaliatory violence does not have the right to protect themselves or their families, for that matter, by preserving their anonymity while exercising their democratic right to protest?

And of course, there are people who wear face coverings for religious or cultural reasons.

How are we protecting these people from intimidation, disruption, and violence?

Are people not allowed to protect themselves from the unlawful and indiscriminate use of OC spray and tear gas by police – which we've seen a bit of lately – or from racial profiling, which we also know still takes place in this state?

It's already a crime in Victoria to wear a disguise with 'unlawful intent' and police have powers to remove face coverings if a crime is reasonably suspected. So why do they need more than that?

So are these new laws only there to protect certain Victorians from intimidation, disruption, and violence?

As I've mentioned before in this place, I cut my political teeth in Queensland, protesting Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen's anti-protest laws, which handed power to the police to approve or reject protest applications and to declare that a gathering of two or more people without a permit was illegal. I was one of thousands of Queenslanders not willing to stand idly by while our democratic right to protest was violated.

So I went along to those protest marches to fight for our democratic right to assemble and march, was duly arrested and charged a dozen or so times, copped a couple of very professional beatings at the hands of the Queensland police and have never looked back or regretted taking that stand.

For the second time in as many sitting weeks, I get to use my favourite philosophical baseballer's quote: 'Oh no, it's deja vu all over again.'

Because the bill before us is not the 'strong, fair, and necessary reform' that is argued by the opposition. It is yet another attempt to weaken our democratic right to protest and to restrict people's civil liberties. It hands more power to the police, enabling them to criminalise ordinary people for protesting.

We are aware that the government is in the process of formulating its own protest bill. It is my sincere hope that they have done the necessary work of consultation and engagement with the community and have developed specific measures that uphold our rights and liberties rather than impose these sorts of lazy blanket bans.

It's worth noting that, at the end of the day, extremists love these sorts of restrictive laws. It enables them to paint themselves as martyrs, while drawing ever more attention to their cause and allowing them to recruit more easily.

The laws we have in place already afford police the tools they need to deal with violent and intimidatory individuals on our streets. We do not need more.

Spoiler alert: we will not be supporting this bill.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:56): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned until the next day of meeting.

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

*Committees***Economy and Infrastructure Committee***Reference*

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (15:56): I move:

That this house

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) Victorian families are experiencing the worst cost-of-living crisis for many years;
 - (b) Transurban are projected to achieve a profit of \$2.842 billion in 2025;
 - (c) CityLink has earned nearly \$13 billion from tolls since opening in 2000, making it Transurban's most profitable road globally;
 - (d) in July 2025, CityLink's daily pass increased to \$22, three times what it was when the road opened, and increased to \$49 a day for the average family ute;
 - (e) in 2024, families chose to purchase family utes, such as the Ford Ranger, Toyota HiLux and the Isuzu ute D-MAX, with these vehicles being in the top five vehicles sold in Australia and accounting for approximately 22 per cent of all newly purchased vehicles that year;
 - (f) under Transurban's concession deed with the government, tolls will increase annually by 4.25 per cent until 2029 and then in line with inflation;
 - (g) in NSW, utes are categorised as class 2 motor vehicles, meaning they are charged the same amount as smaller passenger vehicles;
- (2) requires the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by April 2026, on Transurban's categorisation and tolling of private use of utility vehicles, including:
 - (a) the financial burden placed on owners of these vehicles;
 - (b) differences in the categorisation of these vehicles in NSW;
 - (c) whether this categorisation is justified in light of:
 - (i) the profits derived by Transurban from its CityLink tollway; and
 - (ii) toll increases from July 2025.

That is a long way of saying I would like a committee inquiry into the tolling of twin-cab utes in particular in this state. There are some notes. Melbourne motorists paid \$1 billion in tolls in the past financial year. That is a lot of money. I do not have a problem with Transurban, CityLink, whatever they are, making money; that is obviously what they are there to do. They have their responsibilities to shareholders, but we are not talking about inconsequential money, and we are talking particularly about their profit. CityLink's financial year 2025 revenue was \$987 million, or around \$2.7 million a day, up 4.1 per cent from \$948 million in financial year 2024. The revenue keeps going up. A return trip from suburbs only 20 minutes from the CBD costs \$20.80. That might sound all right if you are doing a one-off every once in a while or you are on a good wicket financially, but there are a lot of people in this world driving twin-cab utes because they cannot get another vehicle that will satisfy their needs. There is no interest like self-interest: I do have a twin-cab ute.

Sonja Terpstra interjected.

Jeff BOURMAN: Yes, I do need a bigger ute. I will take up that interjection. I will get a Dodge RAM or something and people can throw things at it. But the point of this is I have the luxury of being able to afford to pay the tolls. It is irritating to me, it is not necessarily a problem on my bottom line, but if you are a young family or a young tradie and you have got a 2006 Navara ute, for instance, and you are keeping it banded together, you are paying more than double what a similar Pathfinder would cost. That is because you need the ute.

I have noted that since the fall of the Australian car industry twin-cab utes have rocketed up in popularity, because if you have got mum and dad or dad and dad or mum and mum – whatever it is these days – if you have got two parents, a couple of kids, maybe three kids and a dog, and you want

to be able to carry something, you are kind of short of options. No longer can you go and get a Falcon or a Commodore wagon. If you want to buy something that is a big family sedan, you are looking at an S-class Mercedes or a 7 Series BMW, which is even more than I can afford. So people look around. They do not want an SUV, or an SUV does not suit them, and they look at the twin-cab utes. They are fairly economical in the scheme of things these days. Gone are the days when the great big four-wheel drives were just spewing smoke. We have got diesel particulate filters and things like that. I know my Ranger is, particularly on the open road, quite economical – more economical than a lot of the petrol cars I have had over the years. So for a lot of people they have looked at it and gone ‘I’ll do it.’ But if you want to drive down CityLink, well then, all of a sudden you are paying more than double than if you were driving a similar wagon of the same sort.

CityLink, or should I say Transurban, have been doing very well out of this particular arrangement, and again, I do not begrudge them that. That is what they are there to do, after all. Their shares rose 2.8 per cent after their financial results. But unfortunately they cut 300 jobs in May. That is 300 people looking for work that were not in April. For West Gate Tunnel tolls, interestingly, there is a cap of \$16.78 a day. For trucks it will be up to \$74 a day. This brings us also to a point about weight considerations. Trucks obviously pay more rego. They will pay more in tolls because they weigh more, and that is an argument that has been used against utes. Are they light? No. Let us have a look at an average Tesla Model Y or something like that: that electric vehicle weighs more than a ute because electric vehicles, by nature of the technology, which is the batteries, weigh heaps. Their weight sits a lot lower in the car; they handle better. But their tyres have a special rating; their tyres need to cope with extended use on that weight. So there goes the evaporation of the ‘It weighs more’ kind of thing. You get an incentive to buy an electric car now, whereas you appear to get a disincentive to buy a ute, and yet one weighs more than the other.

Back to CityLink: CityLink motorists have paid \$13 billion since its opening. Tolls have grown up to three times more than inflation since the year 2000. In Victoria utes and dual cabs fall under the light commercial classification, which is defined as any cab chassis with a 1.5 to 4.5 tonne GVM and two axles, and they incur a much higher toll than EVs and other sedans and hatchbacks. But in New South Wales they have a different arrangement. Utes such as the ones I am talking about are categorised as class A vehicles, which is in New South Wales parlance a vehicle that is defined as 2.8 metres or less in height and 12.5 metres or less in length, which covers pretty well everything that is a passenger vehicle. That means in New South Wales utes like the HiLux and the Ranger are charged at the same rate as smaller passenger cars like the Camry, which would make sense. It seems to be a matter of opportunity. This is not my first go at Transurban – I had a go in the 59th Parliament I think – but Melbourne motorists generate 25 per cent of global toll revenue for Citylink. The average increases are locked in by a government deal.

The current daily price for a car stands at \$22.31, which originally was \$7.70, I guess with inflation and all that. But still, that is a 190 per cent increase over 25 years. In fairness, I am not going to spray this government over everything it has done, because it was originally set up by the Liberal government. I think that whether this government is amenable or not to trying to change it, there are a lot of contractual problems that will come from this. I feel that the time is now, with the cost-of-living crisis. I have gone through how much money CityLink make. If they want to be a good corporate citizen, they can have a look at what they can deal with in this. Their revenue has been increasing above inflation. Again, do I have a problem with that? No. I am a good capitalist myself. But we are talking about a cost-of-living crisis. We are talking about when people are holding onto cars longer. We are talking about where people are sometimes using a twin-cab ute not only for their family but for their work, and yet if they drive up and down the CityLink, they are getting done for some quite large amounts of money. This is not going to be one of my more lengthy contributions, but what I want out of this is I want the Parliament to talk to Transurban. I want other parties that have an interest in this to have a talk, and I want them to see if we can find a path forward on this. Clearly it can be done. New South Wales have done it. Clearly Transurban are doing well out of this, but nothing can come unless we have both parties, Transurban and the government, working towards this. I am not

here to torpedo Transurban. I am not here to torpedo the government, as much fun as it can be from time to time. I am here to try and at least get some talks happening. So I commend my bill to the house. I urge everyone to support it. I will be interested to hear the Greens' view on this – why they do not support saving people money.

Members interjecting.

Jeff BOURMAN: Well, it would cover EV utes. I will put it out there that in the system as it is right now, if someone made a completely electric ute – and I cannot think of one off the top of my head except the Cybertruck, which I have not seen in Australia –

A member interjected.

Jeff BOURMAN: Well, I have not seen one, but it will cover them too.

Members interjecting.

Jeff BOURMAN: I am not going to engage with the gallery over there. But the point is that there is no discrimination. If it is about environmental concerns, well, it does not matter whether it is fully electric or hybrid, plug-in hybrid or regenerative hybrid, it is still going to get the same tolling. So I urge the house to support this, and I will sit and I will wait and I will listen.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:08): I rise to make a contribution on this motion brought by Mr Bourman seeking a referral to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on utes and tolls, and I thank Mr Bourman for bringing this motion. I am a member of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, and I look forward to a very robust committee process. Government does not oppose this motion.

Anyway, I was just sitting here trying to read my notes in preparation for making my contribution, and there was such levity in the chamber it became pretty hard to focus. There are so many different ute stories and reflections that people have on utes and what they mean to us in the Australian psyche. It was all coming out in the last few minutes of Mr Bourman's speech, so I hope I can add a little bit to it.

I note that Mr Bourman himself does have a ute. Where is he? He has he gone now. He has gone to his ute. There he is over there. But I must remark that one night I was leaving here quite late, and I happened to run into Mr Bourman in the parliamentary car park, and I did remark to Mr Bourman that I did not think the ute that he had was actually –

Jeff Bourman interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: With your ute, yes. But I had to remark, I thought, 'Mr Bourman, you have a ute, but it's actually not large enough. You need a much bigger ute.' It was too –

David Davis interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: No, it was not an electric ute, but it was a rather large ute. And I said, 'Look, you don't have a large enough ute until your ute actually doesn't fit in the parliamentary car parking space,' because some of these utes are enormous these days.

Jeff Bourman: On a point of order, Acting President, my car does not fit in the parliamentary car parking spots as it is.

Sonja TERPSTRA: I stand corrected. It does not fit. I do not know; maybe I should get out a measuring tape and double-check these things, but it looked pretty large to me. Nevertheless, I said that he should get a bigger one, because it is not quite big enough. You have got to have a big ute if you want to have a proper ute.

We are talking about utes and tolls, and I think the point of this motion is that when Transurban and the contracts were done for tolling on a whole range of classification of vehicles it was in fact the

Kennett government in 1995 that set the classification for vehicle tolling. I guess it is a legacy issue that we have that Transurban are still levying tolls in accordance with the contract that was let in those times. Of course this is the point I was making about the large utes that are on the road now, because those utes certainly were not around in 1995; vehicle manufacturing has evolved, and there are ginormous utes that we now see on the road – if I am driving my car, I think someone would run over the top of me in one of those things, because they are so large. I do not know how you can see who is next to you. I am kind of joking, but they are large. But the point is that those sorts of utes were not on the road back in 1995 when the contract was let. I think the point that Mr Bourman makes in this motion is that the committee should do an inquiry into these things and look at the disproportionate way in which tolls are levied on these sorts of vehicles. The point is well made, and I get it. But as he said, there are some contractual issues that stand in the way. Nevertheless, I am sure the committee will get to looking at all of those things and any other things that people want to bring to the committee.

What I understand is that CityLink and EastLink are allowed to charge higher tolls for vehicles classified as light commercial vehicles, which are defined as two-axle rigid trucks with gross vehicle mass of between 1.5 tonnes and 4.5 tonnes, and in turn a truck is defined as a motor vehicle with a cab chassis construction. So there are numerous examples where utes would then fall under the definition of a light commercial vehicle. For example, the Isuzu D-Max is a vehicle with a cab chassis and is a two-axle rigid truck with a mass of between 1.5 tonnes and 4.5 tonnes, whereas similar SUVs are not classified as such, because they do not have the cab chassis construction, and therefore SUVs end up being classified as cars and pay lower tolls. I guess that is the point that is being made by Mr Bourman in wanting to bring this inquiry to the committee – that obviously there is a disparity in the way that the classification classifies certain vehicles.

I was just talking to Mr Galea before about this, and I see that a number of tradies these days – my son included, who is a plumber – do not have utes. They use vans these days, for other reasons. It secures their tools – and some of their tools are very expensive as well, so it helps to keep them secure in something you can lock up. My son also did have a ute before, and he now has this van. But some of the systems where people have to get on the backs of their utes to secure their tools can be quite expensive as well – those lockable metal bins and things like that. So there are a range of things that people might need to spend money on in terms of their utes. But we do continue to see an evolution of different types of vehicles that are driven. Mr Bourman, I was listening to your contribution, and the point was well made. I mean, if you are a tradesperson and you have got a family, you might have a dual-cab ute so when you are not using your ute for work purposes on a weekend you can take the family out in it, so it has got that dual use. The point was that it is a little bit disproportionate for people who might use that sort of dual-cab ute as their family car as well.

I think part of the problem is that the state cannot unilaterally make changes to the current toll road classification system without an agreement from the toll road operators. Would they willingly or voluntarily make a change to their income stream? They may want to talk about the requirement for substantial compensation from the state or request changes to the level of tolls affecting other motorists. Again, there are commercial problems that we are going to run up against when looking at any other changes. It is nonetheless problematic, but the point is well made. There is a bunch of things that I did not know that I learned while I was sitting here preparing. I did not know this, but it is good: apparently since 2022 we have been rewarding safe drivers through the reintroduction of the safe driver discount. It was cut by the coalition in 2013, and we brought it back. I will have to look into that –

Michael Galea interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: I know, and a number of us should look into that if we are safe drivers. You might be eligible for a discount on top of any other discount that you might get. Motorists who have incurred no demerit points or have committed no road safety offences for three years are rewarded with a 25 per cent discount on their next licence renewal. There you go, Mr Galea, you may indeed. Mr Tarlamis may also qualify for some such discount because we are all exemplary drivers over here

on the government benches, aren't we? That is right. We believe in road safety, and we are always very safe drivers over here.

Another thing I did not realise was car, motorcycle and heavy vehicle licence holders of all ages benefit from a 25 per cent discount, saving up to \$80 on a new 10-year licence. I hold a light rigid drivers licence, so I can drive something a bit heavier than a car. I used to drive a small bus, and I kept that licence, but I also have a 10-year drivers licence, so I will have to check that I got my \$80 discount off my drivers licence, which is amazing. It is all about giving back to the community over here on the government benches, Mr Bourman. We want to recognise people who do the right thing and drive safely but also give some discounts to people who might be in a position to pay for longer licences.

There are other initiatives that the government has done. We have slashed costs for new drivers and their families with the abolition of learner and probationary licence fees – L-platers can save more than \$50 on licence fees. Importantly, there is also free rego for apprentices. Both of my children benefited from that. They loved it, except for the fact that my son likes to do up cars and then sell them. I said to him that he would only going to get the free rego once and that would be it. You cannot keep rolling it forward. That is something he needs to consider when he is doing up cars and selling them and all the rest of it, but they love doing that. My daughter was also able to apply for that as an apprentice, so that is something that they both very much appreciated. It means \$930 back in the pockets of apprentices like carpenters, joiners, bricklayers, plumbers, electricians and chefs so they can focus on getting the skills they need for the jobs they want instead of finding the cash to pay their rego.

The clock is going to beat me very soon, but as you can see, this will be a lively debate. I look forward to the contributions of Mr Galea and probably Mr McIntosh as well. Mr McIntosh may well have done some research about EV utes.

Michael Galea interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Yes, buckle up! There you go. He has done all the research in the world. I know there are some EV motorcycles that are on the market, and some of them are quite powerful, which is a little bit scary, but nevertheless we are not talking about motorcycles today, we are talking about utes. I guess the point is there are lots of innovations in all sorts of vehicles that are coming onto the market, and when you are applying a system of tolling that was done 20 or 30 years ago, it makes it a little bit hard to modernise that when you have got contracts in place. The government will not be opposing this motion.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (16:18): I am pleased to rise and indicate the opposition, the Liberals and the Nationals, will support Mr Bourman's motion. We do so on the basis of two points. The first is we are concerned about the charges that are being levied on motorists and those with certain types of recreational vehicles and others through the process that is operating on Transurban now.

Michael Galea: Weren't you here, Mr Davis? Why didn't you speak up then?

David DAVIS: I did. I actually disallowed the tunnel through the planning amendment, so do not even start. Your government disgracefully, and probably corruptly, on the next day gazetted the same thing. But this chamber disallowed the West Gate Tunnel project because –

Michael Galea interjected.

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

Michael Galea interjected.

David DAVIS: No, let us be quite clear.

Michael Galea interjected.

David DAVIS: Oh yes, and the Transurban tolls – we sought to disallow those too. Mr Rich-Phillips, who was here, actually sought to disallow them, so –

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, Acting President, as the driver of a 2016 Ford Territory, I am particularly interested in hearing about our larger cousins. So on that basis, I would really appreciate it, Acting President, if we could have some quiet in the chamber to enable me to learn a little bit more about this important part of automotive and tolling history.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): I do not think that is a point of order. I will ask Mr Davis to have the floor, but just let us keep it down for everyone in the house.

David DAVIS: Let us return to the details of this motion. Mr Bourman makes a number of key points here. He points out that there is a cost-of-living crisis for many in this state, and he is quite correct. He is quite correct. He points out that in July 2025 the CityLink daily pass increased to \$22, three times what it was when the road opened, and increased to \$49 a day for the average family ute. In 2024 families chose to purchase utes such as a Ford Ranger, Toyota HiLux or the Isuzu ute D-MAX, with these vehicles being in the top five vehicles sold in Australia and accounting for approximately 22 per cent of all newly purchased vehicles in the year. Under Transurban's concession deed with the government, tolls will increase annually by 4.25 per cent until 2029. It is not in line with inflation. I have to quibble about that point in this motion. This is far and above inflation. It was an escalator put in in a cosy sweetheart deal – a corrupt deal, I have to say – that was done by the former Treasurer Tim Pallas. His staff were intimately involved, and a number of them leached across to Transurban in the period around that time and immediately after, corruptly. It stank to high heaven.

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, Acting President, yes, I appreciate that there may well be a component of electricity to Mr Davis's contribution, but he is by no means a vehicle, and I would appreciate it if he could come back to the motion at hand.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): I will take that as a comment. Mr Davis, if you can continue.

Harriet Shing: My colourful point of order aside, Acting President, Mr Davis has made a number of comments which cast a number of aspersions. If he wishes to make those aspersions, he should do so by way of substantive motion.

David DAVIS: On the point of order, I do not wish to make those statements by substantive motion. They do not relate to any existing member. They relate to the government, and they relate to a number of individuals from the past.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): I uphold that point of order, Mr Davis, and I ask you to continue.

David DAVIS: I was being sorely tested there with interjections from people who wanted to stop me making sure that the history is on the record. It is true that CityLink was a Kennett government proposal and project and Transurban was in effect a creation of that project. It has been a wildly successful company worldwide. It has had a base here in Victoria. I in no way cast aspersions on Transurban. I believe it is an important Victorian company, and it does very well. That is not to say that the state government ought to be a soft touch for any firm, including Transurban, and the fact is that the tolls are actually hurting Victorians and they are actually burning in. It is important to put on the record in this chamber now, I believe, something of the history of this project.

The extension of the toll concession and the matters around the West Gate Tunnel were signed by the Labor government after it came to power. It went to the election with a slip road, a \$500 million slip road, as its policy. After the election, a market-led proposal came from Transurban, an entirely legal market-led proposal, and people are allowed to put market-led proposals. Four companies are –

Michael Galea: On a point of order, Acting President, this is not a motion about the West Gate Tunnel, important project though it is. This is a project about tolling for light commercial vehicles, and I would ask Mr Davis to return to the motion, as the previous two speakers have been very relevant to the motion.

Katherine Copsey: On the point of order raised by Mr Galea, I would say that the motion deals squarely with Transurban. Transurban's relationship to the government is pertinent, and I think that Mr Davis is within the bounds of what the motion raises.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): I uphold that point of order. Thank you, Ms Copsey. I ask Mr Davis to continue.

David DAVIS: I will try and be as succinct as I can, and I thank those in the chamber. But what happened is the market-led proposal was accepted by the government, and my goodness, Transurban saw the government coming. They got the deal of the century. Let us talk about the new tolls that went on. First of all there is the 10-year extension on the existing CityLink roads, including the Bolte Bridge and the tunnel itself. Then there is the new city access charge that was put in place, and then the new tolls – some of the ones we are talking about now, including the new arrangements for heavier vehicles – were put in place at that time too. That is one of the new costs that was built into the system by Labor – by the deal between Pallas, his former staff and Transurban, probably corruptly. Indeed the deal was so generous –

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Davis has yet again made allegations that if he wishes to put he should do so by way of substantive motion.

David DAVIS: Further to the point of order, Acting President, the point of order is simply not right.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): I cannot uphold that point of order. I ask Mr Davis to continue.

David DAVIS: Further to the point here, the other charge that was introduced at the time is this escalator – every quarter it goes up and up and up and up – and Victorians are paying through the nose, every Victorian. Those on the CityLink tunnel now, those on the Bolte Bridge now, will be paying more today to fund the West Gate Tunnel, which is not even open. People will remember in this chamber the promise that the West Gate Tunnel would be open in 2022. In fact along the edge of the road there were banners going for literally miles and miles: 'Open in 2022,' 'Open in 2022.' They ripped them down because it is still not open. It probably will not be open this year; it might be open next year. The tunnel is years late, and people have been paying through the nose every week. If you use the current Citylink roads, if you use the Bolte Bridge, you are paying through the nose now, including the higher charge for so-called heavier vehicles. I take up Mr Bourman's points here where he talks about –

Michael Galea: You are going to return to the motion – great.

David DAVIS: I am. I have already done that. As you know, for family utes and so forth this is going to hit very hard. Mr Bourman is quite right that there is different treatment in different parts of Australia. He is quite right that this is up to government to do, and the comments made on that side of the chamber by Ms Terpstra that this is actually controlled by the government, partly through the deal with Transurban, are also right. People need to look squarely at that deal, look at the corrupt nature of it and look at the deal that was done. They got the deal of the century, which has fuelled their coffers at the expense of people driving in ordinary cars and people driving in larger vehicles that are being especially hit.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (16:28): I rise too to speak on Mr Bourman's motion. The Greens will not be supporting the motion today. However, as has been remarked extensively, there are certainly issues with Transurban's grip on this state, as Mr Bourman's motion raises. Transurban is a private company that seems to continue to have an undue amount of influence

over this government's transport planning. The West Gate Tunnel project is the brainchild of Transurban, and they came up with a sweetheart deal with the government to get it built. In exchange for shouldering much of the assumed cost of construction, Transurban would not only get the tolling rights for this massive new road but they would get to keep the existing CityLink road for decades longer than planned and to increase the rates of tolls, as Mr Bourman's motion described. Blowout after blowout has seen the cost of the West Gate Tunnel roughly double, from around \$6.3 billion to around \$12 billion, and the government has had to contribute billions to get it over the line three years late. This is a road project suggested by a tolling company, not a public service transport planner. It has blown out its budget and its timeline. It has been repeatedly rescued by cash injections from the government, and Transurban get to keep their sweetheart deals for tolls for decades to come. This is what happens when you leave the foxes in charge of the henhouse, and it underscores yet again, as I have raised in this place many times, why the government needs to prepare and publish an integrated transport plan – a transparent, forward-looking plan co-designed with the Victorian public which benefits them rather than private company interests.

Transurban's tolling model, funnelled through Fines Victoria's enforcement machinery, has become a regressive debt trap for many Victorians. Missed Linkt payments can quickly snowball into administrative fees, enforcement orders and licence suspensions, and this can push families living pay to pay into deeper hardship rather than resolving the debt. Freedom of information data showed a heavy concentration of toll fines in Melbourne's outer south-east, including places like Frankston, Dandenong and Cranbourne, areas that are already under cost-of-living pressure, with about 40 per cent of toll fines in the past year landing there. Fines Victoria's well-documented failings have amplified harm here. Complaints to the Ombudsman surged when Fines Victoria was launched, and errors included wrongful licence suspensions and massive backlogs. There were 252,118 toll fines worth \$46 million issued in 2022–23 alone, while hundreds of millions in unpaid tolling fines sit on the state's books, locking people into a cycle of penalties and exacerbating poverty. Community legal services say most clients with toll infringements did not intentionally avoid paying – they missed a notice or changed address or were juggling bills, and a small debt has spiralled. So there are issues certainly when it comes to CityLink tolling practices and the relationship between Transurban and this Labor state government.

When it comes to the issue of prices between utes and passenger vehicles, this is going to be controversial in this chamber, but it is actually sensible that heavy vehicles are charged more. These are often commercial vehicles and often very large ones, despite the many forces conspiring to encourage families to use them for regular passenger duties. Now, part of the reason that these vehicles are so popular today is simply because they are more profitable for car companies, who have therefore poured huge amounts of money into advertising them. The *Rammed* report from Comms Declare shows that car companies doubled their advertising spend on SUVs and big utes over the past decade while slashing spending on advertising passenger cars, and in some cases popular passenger models have been discontinued altogether. How many people today driving a Ford Raptor to do school drop-off would have been in a Falcon if those were still available?

The policy environment encourages people to drive these larger and larger cars, and they often do so in circumstances where they are not fit for purpose. At the federal level we have got big utes exempt from the luxury vehicle tax, with the rationale being that they are commercial vehicles. But there is no requirement with that eligibility currently to prove that these vehicles are being used for commercial purposes, and most of them are not. They have never been near a farm or a construction site, and as Mr Bourman's motion acknowledges, they are more likely to be a family ute used for general passenger duties. Here in Victoria it costs \$81.40 less to register a dual-cab ute in the outer metro area than it does to register a small hatchback, which is really perverse; that is about a 9 per cent discount for the bigger vehicle. In rural areas it is \$148.50 cheaper for the big ute, and even right in the centre of Melbourne you can register a large, heavy and more dangerous ute for a measly \$1.10 more than a hatchback.

This kind of encouragement to drive big commercial vehicles for what are regular passenger duties, day to day, matters because of the considerable harm that these vehicles cause. It has been missing from the levity of the debate today, and I appreciate colleagues having a convivial discussion for once. But what I would like us to consider is that there is actual harm occurring from these policy settings. Heavier vehicles do cause exponentially more damage to our roads, so there is a commercial outcome – and we hear complaints often in this place about the condition of Victorian roads. If you double the weight of a vehicle, that increases the harm to our road surfaces by 16 times – that vehicle will cause 16 times more damage. Where do all these big utes go once they leave the toll road in question in today's motion? Many of them are too big for standard parking spaces. We have had jokes about that today, but apparently that is an issue here on the parliamentary grounds as well. It is common to see these vehicles bulging over the sides or spread across two parking spaces – not that you would ever do that, Mr Bourman – and this does make it harder for everyone else to find a park. It is forcing councils, supermarkets and others managing parking areas to look at the possibility that there will be less parking spaces available because the size of vehicles is exponentially growing, as Ms Terpstra has observed. Is this actually what we want?

On local streets these vehicles occupy more lane width. At intersections their long hoods and high beltlines obscure sightlines, so turning drivers then creep further into crosswalks. This slows phases of traffic lights, and it increases near misses. Multistorey car parks that have been built to regular standards are reporting conflicts over clearance, ramps and pillars as well as increases in damaged kerbs, bent bollards and uprooted verge plantings. Schools and shop owners are seeing it daily – slower and more congested school drop-off, blocked sightlines at zebra crossings, delivery trucks unable to nose in because bays are filled up with privately operated truckzillas, and buses delayed when a parked ute's tray encroaches into the lane. The bigger each vehicle gets, the less public space we all have on our roads, so the system clogs, safety margins shrink and everyone's trip takes longer.

These vehicles also, sadly, contribute massively to the death toll on our roads. Their boxy fronts and huge mass mean a child is eight times more likely to die when hit by an SUV compared to a child who was struck by a passenger car. Bigger, heavier vehicles have to burn more fuel than small vehicles, which also means more climate-wrecking carbon emissions. If SUVs were a country, they would be the sixth largest emitters on the planet. The trend towards larger vehicles in this state and in this country is essentially cancelling out the emissions reductions that Australia is making by moving to electric vehicles, so we need to arrest this trend. More fuel burnt means more localised pollution. Carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and particulate pollution are all causing damage to people's lungs. It is estimated that they cause over 11,000 deaths per year – 10 times more than the already unacceptably high road toll from vehicle crashes.

I will end all this by saying no-one is saying that farmers and tradespeople cannot drive utes if they are needed for legitimate purposes. The good news is that, as has been remarked, less emissions-intensive and in fact smaller utes and trucks are still available and are growing in popularity. I want to give a shout-out to Japan's Kei cars, which I am a fan of, from cute little cube-like hatchbacks to tipper trucks. These vehicles are growing in popularity, and they are refreshingly practical. Despite their overall tiny size, some have a tray bed that is comparable in size with the current F-150.

Bev McArthur interjected.

Katherine COPSEY: Just listen to that, Mrs McArthur, because fuel costs are an important thing on the farm, I am sure. Despite their overall tiny size, they have got a tray bed that is comparable to a current F-150. If people really do want to choose bigger, more harmful, more polluting vehicles that cost more to run and that increase damage to our road surfaces, that is their choice, but we must consider whether it is something we want to keep subsidising through our public policy.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:39): I am revved up to be speaking on this motion today. I appreciate Mr Bourman raising this topic, one that I know is of very high importance to him and indeed to many people across the state whether you are driving a Ford Ranger or a new

Kia Tasman or whether you are driving any sort of ute that is classed as a light commercial vehicle. Like other colleagues in this place, I have learned a lot about different types of utes, and I will come back to that shortly.

David Davis interjected.

Michael GALEA: I have learned some history in fact, Mr Davis. Some of the history that I have learned is that the current classification for Victorian toll roads was understandably brought into place when the first toll road was brought into place, which was in the 1990s. It was under the Kennett government, when you were cutting your teeth, Mr Davis, that the current classification system was applied. I am not sure if you did speak up in your early years in this place about this great unfairness that you are now here to talk about, if you even did talk about the motion today, but perhaps you did raise your voice in your party room; I do not know. You did not quite answer me earlier when I interjected. But we do know that the same classification that applies for the Transurban CityLink toll roads also applies for the ConnectEast EastLink toll roads, where there is the distinction –

David Davis: Which was Brumby.

Michael GALEA: Yes, it was. It is good to be consistent. It would be an even worse situation, Mr Davis, if we had different toll roads applying different classification standards. I am sure we could agree on that.

David Davis: You levelled upwards, is that what you are saying?

Michael GALEA: No, we are not saying that, Mr Davis. We have this consistent measure, and that aspect of it is a good thing. But you basically have cars, you have light commercial vehicles, otherwise known as LCVs, and then you have basically trucks, those classifications. I think it is an interesting point. I think she has left the chamber, but I was going to come back to a few things that Ms Copsey raised in terms of different vehicle sizes. For example, there are some interesting classifications as to what actually counts as an LCV and what does not. Ms Copsey talked about the heaviness of vehicles. If you are driving, for example, a Nissan Patrol, that has a kerb weight of over 2700 kilograms. But there are some of these ridiculous American cars which have over 3.5 tonnes. In fact I think there is one that even has almost 4.5 tonnes. But some of these, if they are what we would call an SUV – what we used to call four-wheel-drives – and not actually a ute – are actually counted as a car. Whereas a lighter ute that might be half the weight –

Harriet Shing: Mr Davis is leaving us.

Michael GALEA: I hope I am not boring you, Mr Davis. But a lighter ute that might even be half the weight would actually still be classified as an LCV. I think Ms Copsey makes an interesting point about the heaviness of vehicles, and perhaps that is something that this inquiry, should it get up today, could actually look at – whether that is a more equitable way of measuring this, as opposed to just those three distinctions. There might be arguments for that, there might be arguments against, and I am sure the committee would have a grand old time looking into that. I am sure, Mrs McArthur, you would have a lot to say, and I am looking forward to your contribution later. The rationale for applying these measures was put in at 1995, and it certainly made sense at the time, when our cars were smaller, when even everyday tradie utes were a lot smaller. I have also been learning a lot about the different types of vehicles that we have had and the different types of make-ups. One of the distinctions that makes an LCV an LCV, I understand, is they are specifically defined as two-axle rigid trucks with a gross vehicle mass of between 1.5 tonnes and 4.5 tonnes.

Harriet Shing interjected.

Michael GALEA: Very exciting, I know, Minister Shing. It is actually interesting to note that the most iconic of Australian cars, the good old Holden Commodore ute, actually would be counted not as an LCV but as a car. That is because it does not have that two-cab chassis design. It is actually something called a monocoque, which is a single-cab chassis – a monocoque, which is another word

that I learned as part of this debate. The larger version is not called a ‘duocoque’ or a ‘dual-coque’, it is called a two-cab chassis, but the smaller version is called a monocoque – with the French spelling on the end, I add, for clarification. These monocoque cars, which were driving around Victorian roads – and some still are – like Holden utes and Ford utes, are icons of Australia. I have got to say, if you look at some of these utes – and I have nothing against any of these car makers, whether it is against Kia or whether it is against Toyota or anyone else – these cars are just not nearly as attractive as those gorgeous Holden utes. That VE ute is probably the icon, the peak of Australian vehicle manufacturing.

I did have the privilege of driving for a few years different VE and VF Commodores – sedans, though, not the utes. But there would be nothing like seeing, as a young man then myself, a VE ute. I do not know if you can use these words in the chamber, but can I say a sexy monocoque ute coming past – a Holden VE, absolutely, especially that electric blue colour coming past. What a beautiful car – an Australian-made car made right here, with Holden based in Victoria, made in South Australia, an absolute icon. I would much rather that we go back to having those as our tradie vehicles rather than these huge, enormous cars that are just getting bigger and bigger and bigger. There is certainly a place for the bigger cars, certainly a place for them, but I think for many instances –

Harriet Shing interjected.

Michael GALEA: There is nothing like a monocoque, Minister Shing, I am glad you agree. There is absolutely nothing like it. And I say let us go back to that. But we do know that there are some other market forces, and Ms Copsey went there as well. But it is also a great shame that we do not make monocoques in Australia anymore, because we do not make cars in Australia anymore, because Mr Davis’s mates over in Canberra, what, 12 years ago, maybe about 10 years ago, drove them out. The Treasurer got up in the chamber in federal Parliament and said, ‘Leave.’ He encouraged Holden to leave. There was no support for monocoques from the former Liberal government, which is a great shame. As a result, we saw Holden and Toyota leave. There are now maybe just 20-odd countries in the world that make their own cars. The majority, if not every one of those 20, are making them with subsidies from government. They continue to have thriving industries. We know that every job directly employed at one of these plants, at Holden or at Ford or at Toyota, was supported by a much larger supply chain. That supply chain was completely ripped apart by the Liberal Party, by the former Abbott then Turnbull and Morrison – whatever they were – government. It was a crying shame that that industry left Australia. In this state we are still especially proud to make our own trams, our own trains, our own buses. In fact I was out with Ventura Bus just the other week, and it was a terrific opportunity to see a new bus route. I was driven in a new bus that was built right here in Victoria as well. Thank you to Andrew and Aron and the team from Ventura for having me along for that. A grand bus, and I am sure one that will pass as the higher end of the scale when we come back to talking about tollway classifications.

It is a crying shame that we do not have that industry in this country anymore. It is something that we probably will never be able to get back, and that is a great, great pity. And as a result, it also means that we do have less say in the sorts of cars that we buy. We are subject to global market forces, and it may well be that we see very few monocoque utes in this country again.

A member interjected.

Michael GALEA: I hope that that be the case. And you know what, they were just as practical. The Holden ute – as Mr Bourman would agree, you could lay out anything in that, you could put anything into the back of that. It was a really versatile car, a great Australian car, and it is a great shame that we do not have it anymore.

As it comes to the utes that we do have today, typically the larger utes and whichever brand that it might be, we do have a changing user demographic of these vehicles, and indeed for many Victorians they are essential. Largely they are essential because, as I have highlighted, there is not really any other

option – you either have a passenger car or you have a large ute. There really is not that market for a small ute in Australia anymore, and I hope that will change. I really hope that will change, and I hope that our car makers will listen to that segment of the market and start to cater for that segment of the market too and not just drive us to those pricier, more expensive vehicles that, as Ms Copsey says, perhaps have higher profit margins as well. I hope that in terms of all the other outcomes that she has talked about, whether it be for the road toll, road damage and all those other aspects that those vehicles can lead to, that we do see a bit more of a balance when it comes to those things. Indeed we might even have a situation on some future date when Mr Bourman can drive a car that will fit into a car space on the parliamentary precinct, unless you decide to upgrade to a Raptor or whatever one of these American things are, Mr Bourman, and then you can take up three.

Jeff Bourman interjected.

Michael GALEA: Well, we should not be increasing it just for you, Mr Bourman. There is limited space in this complex, and I would rather keep our gardens and our nice lawns and features. But on that note, I will leave my remarks there.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (16:49): I had been excited about bipartisan support for this motion. Even though we do not have total support in this chamber, we have clearly got bipartisan support for innuendo today. I have been hearing all about monocoques and how size matters and wear and tear and things like that. But I must say, the idea of having extra unused seats in a car causing needless harm, I think the answer to that is to just have more children. I can say that as a mother now. Thank you so much for raising this motion.

Harriet Shing: That is why they invented people movers.

Moira DEEMING: I have a people mover – that is right. And can I just say, the other good thing about extra seats is I can always be generous – see, innuendo over, first of all – and give other people a ride. Okay, I walked into that one. It is true, we are in a cost-of-living crisis. We all hear everywhere that families are being – gee, this is terrible now with this innuendo – squeezed from every direction, with mortgages, groceries and fuel, and then on top of it all we have just heard about our citizens being hit with some of the highest tolls in the country. CityLink tolls are going to hit up to \$22 a day for cars and nearly \$50 for the family ute, and that is not including parking. They are not luxury vehicles, they are the workhorses of our suburbs, the Ford Ranger and the Toyota HiLux, which just happen to be the top-selling cars in the nation – families use them to get kids to sport, to get to work, to carry the tools that put food on the table. But here in Victoria, as we have heard, they are classified in such a way that they are getting charged double, even though in New South Wales, exactly the same vehicles are tolled as cars. If there is a tradie in Werribee, for example, that uses CityLink five days a week, he could be paying more than \$10,000 a year. Ten thousand dollars a year is the kind of figure that can sink a family.

Now let us talk about how the tolls rise. They are not linked to inflation, they are locked in to rise at 4.25 per cent every single year until 2029. That is more than double the Reserve Bank's inflation target and far above wage growth. The formula was legislated by this government when it handed Transurban a 10-year extension on its CityLink concession, all to finance part of the West Gate Tunnel, which of course is over budget and delayed. But Transurban is forecast to make \$2.842 billion profit in 2025. Almost a quarter of its global revenue comes straight out of Victorian motorists' pockets. Since 2000 CityLink has delivered the company nearly \$13 billion. Some people might shrug and say, 'Well, things cost what they cost,' and maybe they are unable to recall things like price gouging, corruption and crony capitalism. My philosophy is simple: fair trade within fair laws. When governments sign contracts in our name, they need to be on our side. Public money and public contracts need to be executed in the public interest. Victorians are the customers, we are the ones paying the tolls, and yet obviously we now feel that we are just cash cows for all these big, big corporate contracts that do not seem to benefit us as taxpayers. This is not about tearing up contracts.

It is not about demonising profit. It is about scrutiny, transparency, value for money and good governance. I commend this motion to the house.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (16:52): It is not too often I stand up and say this, but Mr Bourman has brought something very valuable to the house. Looking at some of the notes on this, I thank him for bringing this motion. We will not oppose it. But what a what a fantastic conversation it has been, about something so deeply iconic as the Aussie ute. It is absolutely sensational. When I was a young lad I was knocking around in the HQ. There is a fantastic Simpsons line about Willie and Scotland and a pool table, which I will not draw conclusions to, but for those of you that are Simpsons fans you can look that one up. But the HQ ute, we just spent all our time in it, feeding out. We had an XF Falcon, which is a little bit controversial to those who are Holden people in the house. And then I had a WB later on, metallic blue, when I was in my in my trade days.

Bev McArthur: Such a trendsetter, you are.

Tom McINTOSH: Thank you, Mrs McArthur, indeed a trendsetter. I mean, it was probably older than me at the time I owned it, but anyway, it was very beautiful. But in all seriousness, Mr Bourman has raised this about the 1.5-tonne utes paying excessively more in tolls than a small vehicle, and it is a massive slug. We know that more and more utes today actually have laptops in the back rather than tools or hay bales, Mrs McArthur, as perhaps in a bygone era. But either way it is a massive cost for people to be using our roads, and we know that cost of living is incredibly high on all of our radars. And I am proud to be part of a government that is tackling cost of living, whether it is education, whether it is health, whether it is public transport, whether it is road transport or whether it is housing – all of these things that make people's day-to-day life cheaper. We have got a new Acting President since I last looked over –

Bev McArthur interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: Deputy President, sorry. But, Deputy President, be very, very careful when the Liberals sit on that side and shout about how they are sticking up for working Victorians. We know it was the Liberals who put an end to the automotive industry, a proud tradition of Victorians, skilled up, building vehicles for Victorians, indeed for Australians, here in Victoria. We know that the Liberals calculatingly, cold-bloodedly put an end to the automotive industry and all of those Victorians that were trained and skilled and the ability that gave us to build things in this state. I am very proud to be part of a state Labor government that has brought contracts for trams, for trains, for so many –

Michael Galea interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: for buses – thank you, Mr Galea, my esteemed colleague – to build things here in this state. We know those opposite hate free TAFE. They hate us skilling up workers. We know those opposite have an economic policy of lowering working people's wages. I am proud to be part of a party, the Victorian Labor Party – the Victorian Labor government – that not only invests in getting our young people or our people that are transitioning between industries skilled up and ready for the workforce that is so needed in this state, with our economy so, so strong and well-paying jobs present in this state. I just say very calmly to working Victorians: never trust the Liberals, because they will say one thing, but they will do another. They will cut the conditions of your jobs. They will cut manufacturing. They will offshore things with the stroke of a pen. They do not care.

Mr Bourman has referred this matter this to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee (EIC). We have got another inquiry coming up later in the year, the electric vehicle inquiry. The opposition will be laughing; they are saying that EVs are going to get rid of the weekend. You know, the same stuff they have been espousing for some time. But I tell you what, when I talk to tradies, Mrs McArthur, do you know what they are looking forward to? Pulling up onsite and having all their tools in the back on charge, plugged into the back. You are not having to lug the generator out onsite, you are not having to run temp power, you are not having to do all this. Everything is charged. You are not having to get

your drill, your circular saw, your whatever and leave it onsite with the possibility of it being knocked off. It is all locked up in the back of the ute. That is excellent for tradies.

But what about the long weekend getting stolen? What about the long weekend? Those opposite have probably never been camping in their lives. But anyway, they are for Aussies, they are for Victorians. They would not know the first thing about it if it bit them on the backside. But I will tell you this: if you can pull up with 60 to 70 kilowatts under the hood in the middle of the bush, you can plug the fridge in, you can plug the radio in, you can go all week in the middle of the bush and do whatever you want, because the EV enables you to do that. You can do exactly what you want. But those opposite espouse the ‘Oh, you know, everything’s bad, everything’s terrible’ line. That is why the BYD Shark is rocketing up the sales list, Mrs McArthur and those over there.

Anyway, we are going to get to that when we go through the EIC inquiry on electric vehicles. But these are exciting times. We have seen the ute that many of us grew up with evolve. We see now the twin cab for young families. The twin cab is great to put the bikes in the back, the wetsuits in the back, as I said, perhaps the laptop in the back for the modern-day ute driver. But that is okay; it is for everyone, and it will evolve. What is important is that all of us are here with an eye to the cost of living, to keep the cost of living down. I thank Mr Bourman for bringing this motion forward. I think it is a good one because we know that people need to get from A to B, whether that is for work, whether that is training, whether that is moving their kids to sport, whether that is Mr Bourman in our electorate of Eastern Victoria or Minister Shing mountain biking, putting the bikes in the back, dirt bike riding. Whatever it might be, people being active in Victoria is a really good thing, so we want to make sure they can do that at the minimal cost possible and of course in a responsible way. That is what we want.

I think the other point of my contribution would just be to talk about the importance of tradespeople being able to keep the costs of their operations down.

Sheena Watt interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: Thank you, Ms Watt; that is exactly where I was going to go next. I touched on TAFE briefly before, but I am incredibly proud to be part of a party that has invested so heavily in our TAFE system. When young Victorians or older Victorians that are retraining go into the TAFE system, get the pre-apprenticeship, get the traineeship or get the apprenticeship and get out into the workforce and then get free registration, that is so critically important, particularly for regional and rural Victorians, Mrs McArthur. We need to get them from A to B, and the free registration – I do not know how long that has been in for now, but gosh darn that has been a fantastic policy.

Our trades are so important. We know the importance, in the building of infrastructure and building of houses, of enabling our apprentices to get that free rego and get from A to B. It really sits with our policy of supporting trainees and apprenticeships in the workplace, on sites. When those opposite scrapped the SEC, when they privatised everything, what happened? A whole generation of apprentices got wiped out. When I did my apprenticeship I still worked alongside some of the guys in overalls that did the trade and got the watch. Of course that has changed, but I am proud to be part of a government that ensured there are components in big infrastructure so the trainees and the apprentices are in there getting trained and that ensured that they have had the free rego to get from A to B. So thank you, Mr Bourman, for bringing this on, and to everyone I just say: be very mindful of the Liberals because they will cut your job and they will lower your pay.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:03): I rise to support Mr Bourman’s motion, even though, as a member of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, I am going to incur yet another committee inquiry. But Mr Bourman has assured me it might last for a day. That will be fantastic.

Jeff Bourman: Only a week or so.

Bev McARTHUR: What, are you expanding it, Mr Bourman? I thought I had an agreement – a day – because there is a very important inquiry that the Economy and Infrastructure Committee must

conduct, and that is on transmission lines, Mr McIntosh; we need to get to that. I am going to go through this systematically, and I am going to start with the Greens over there, who want everybody in a small hatchback. That is where you want us. You want us cruising around in some little car.

Tom McIntosh: Can't have everyone in an EV, Bev.

Bev McARTHUR: He has got an EV.

Tom McIntosh interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: They do not have any. Actually, rather than a small hatchback, they would have us on bicycles if they could. They got rid of the horse-drawn carriages in this city. We should go back to that, probably, and then you would be happy, and I can tell you the manure left on the roads would be great for your tofu or something.

Harriet Shing interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: Donkey poo is better. Thank you, Ms Shing. Donkey poo is better, but we cannot get a donkey driving a horse-drawn carriage. The Greens clearly do not get that Victorians – especially tradies and union members, Greens – all love a twin cab. They are mad about twin cabs. If you had run the duck-shooting inquiry you would have learned that the reason why the union members supported the duck shooting continuing against those over there and against even those over there was because they like to get out of the city, out of the tunnel and into their twin cab. Look, I am verballing Mr Gray from the ETU, but I can remember him distinctly saying, 'You've gotta know, we love to get out of the city, out of that tunnel where we have been working for six days, and get in our twin cab with our camping gear, our shooting gear' – Greens – 'and with our swimming gear and everything we need to go out in the bush and have a great time in our budgie smugglers and twin cabs and the whole kit and caboodle.' But the Greens have never ventured outside the tram tracks. Have you, Aiv? You do not know. As Ms Shing said, you get stuck in the tram tracks – that is where you end up. If you knew what it was like outside the tram tracks, you would need a twin cab. You need a big car, because I tell you what, the roads are so bad and the potholes are like craters. If you had your little hatchback, you would be stranded on the side of the road with your tyres blown and your rims wrecked. You would be going nowhere, Aiv, I can tell you – going nowhere fast. That is where the Greens would be – going nowhere fast.

But then I go to Mr Galea. Where is Mr Galea? He has deserted us.

A member interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: Have you got a point of order?

A member interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: I thought you were trying to interrupt me. Mr Galea has invited Mr McGowan and me out on a bus trip. He has got some favourite bus route in Melbourne that he would like us to get on. We have sort of accepted. I have said as long as there is a good cafe at the end with a decent coffee and avocado on toast. But I am going to take him out on our roads. Mr Berger knows about our roads, because he is in my electorate. He is not actually in Southern Metro; he is in my electorate. He gets a passport every time he comes in and out of this place.

John Berger: Oh, here we go.

Bev McARTHUR: Yes, here we go, Mr Berger. Mr Galea needs to get out on our roads to know that a twin cab or a ute or a heavy vehicle is exactly the only thing you can survive in.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: Mr Batchelor, you would not know what is needed out in the bush. You really would not have a clue. But what we have learned from Mr Galea is this extraordinary new bit of

information – education, in fact – about monocoques and duocoques. I wondered if there were triplecoques – I do not know whether he got that far. But anyway, we have learned a lot from Mr Galea’s education. But we need to do something here, and Mr Bourman is quite right: we need to reduce the cost of living. We really do need to. Why should Transurban absolutely fleece the families and tradies and unionists of this country? Why should they fleece them? These are the hardworking people that are productive. They pay their taxes – they cannot avoid them like Transurban – and they make a difference to our society. They need their twin cabs and their utes. They have got to put their tools in them, Mr Galea.

Michael Galea: I was just planning our bus trip.

Bev McARTHUR: Yes, we are going on a bus trip. Can you get busy with that triplecoque or whatever you were talking about so we can go out on that? As I was saying, they do need these vehicles to put their gear in. They have got to get outside the tram tracks of Melbourne, and they have got a lot to store. Now, I do not know about Mr McIntosh’s computers. I am a bit worried about the laptops left in the back of a ute, Ms Shing. I am terribly concerned it could be some Labor factional laptop, Tom, that you would not want anybody to find – that is what you will have in the back of a ute. Anyway, it is fabulous that the Labor Party is supporting Mr Bourman. The Greens – you are not supporting? You do not know where to go, you people. You are all over the place. I know Ms Copsey said it was safer to be in some little weeny car. Well, let me tell you, it is absolutely not safe to be in some poxy little vehicle out on our roads. You will get absolutely smashed. We need the heaviest vehicle possible. We need the strongest vehicle possible. As I said –

Members interjecting.

Bev McARTHUR: Look, I know you people love EVs, but you must love brown coal as well, because that is the only way you are getting EVs – they are brown. They are brown all the way to your tank. You have got them charging out here in the car park. They are charging through the brown coal electricity generated down in Gippsland. Where do you think the electricity comes from?

Tom McIntosh: Where does your oil come from?

Bev McARTHUR: Oil? Well, we are in favour of petrol vehicles. I am totally in favour. I tried to get a fully petrol vehicle – I have got some hybrid thing; I do not know how it works.

Tom McIntosh: You want to get oil – from where? You want to sail it around the world to bring it here. What about our geopolitical strategic safety?

Bev McARTHUR: That was a big word for you, Mr McIntosh. I dare you to repeat it. I do not know that you know what you are talking about. What was that again, Mr McIntosh?

Mr McIntosh is obviously keen to bring back the automotive industry. Is that a pledge, Mr McIntosh, that the Labor Party are going to bring back the automotive industry? Well now, how much is that going to cost, Mr McIntosh? And he is also keen on ‘free’. I have news for you, Mr McIntosh – there is nothing free in this world. Somebody pays for it. The poor hardworking tradies in their twin cabs, they are the ones paying for your free everything. Everything is free in your world, Mr McIntosh, but nothing is free. Let me tell you, the hardworking unionists and tradies and families and farmers – they are paying for free TAFE and free whatever else you give. What are you giving out now at the moment – \$100 off electricity bills? There is nothing free; somebody is paying it. I think Mr McIntosh needs to get back on his bike, actually. Get on your bike, Mr McIntosh, and we will all be better off.

I am so grateful for Mr Bourman – despite the fact we are going to have to endure yet another inquiry – for bringing this motion on, because clearly we have got to be very concerned about the cost of living in this country and in this state, with, what are we on, about the 65th new or increased tax. You will be taxing us for breathing soon, you lot. But Mr Bourman has got it right – we are going to see if we can reduce the cost, because Transurban are ripping off every ute driver in this state.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:13): I was hoping I would not have to follow that – that there could have been just a little emotional break and I could have resumed with a different tone. I look forward to your summing up, Mr Bourman, because that will be –

Jeff Bourman interjected.

Richard WELCH: No, but it has been a fine, far-ranging debate indeed, and we have a certain degree of unanimity in terms of supporting this motion, because there clearly are problems with the categorisation, because it has been 25 years, and categorisations change – things change – over time. One of the earlier comments was that the vehicles are heavier. I mean, in the same concept, electric vehicles are heavier than these utes, so if we are doing things by weight, then that is even more of an argument for having a review of the categorisations.

I still struggle, only in the sense that it is such common sense, so why do we need an inquiry to do it? It is a bit like the EV charging stations – every country in the world has already got EV charging stations everywhere. They have already got processes and good practices around them. It is not rocket science, it is a commodity-level activity. Why do we need to have an inquiry? Because this is really something that a department should be just doing as part of its day job, frankly. So I can understand why you are asking for an inquiry; the ideas are not coming from the government on this, so you need to bring your ideas forward. So congratulations on that; I think that is right. It does seem like all the best ideas at the moment come from places other than the government. You need other ideas, because this is a very tired, unimaginative government. It is a government that does not really understand the value of money – on that there can be no dispute – so of course it would not think to address tolling issues as an everyday matter of transport, fairness and equity in our society. This is a government that asks business what its favourite tax is, so again, it has no common sense on this.

I think what we want is efficiency in the tolling system. There has been a lot of levity, but it is a productivity issue as well as an equity issue in our society that our tolling system is efficient. It is not just there to create profits for large tolling companies, it is actually meant to underwrite our ability to continue to afford large infrastructure, and it needs to be fit for the future in the long term. It cannot just be more funds coming from a magical money tree. I say all this because I endorse Mr Bourman's proposition. His points are well made, and we will support the motion.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (17:16): There is no way on God's green earth I can follow some of these contributions. I thank everyone for their contribution. Some of them were so innuendo laden I just do not even know where to go, but this is a serious business in the end because it is about people struggling to pay the bills. What I want out of this committee is something that is short, sharp and focused. As Mrs Mac said, I do not envisage this requiring a large number of hearing days, but we need to make sure we have enough, and that is the point. Whether it is one or two, it is not going to take a week – I know that. What I want out of Transurban is for them to be good corporate citizens. The government, as mentioned, cannot unilaterally do this. They need Transurban's buy-in, and this is their chance. We will leave it to them as to how they want to do this. I am glad Ms Copsey is back. The Greens had a lot of problems with Transurban's grip on this state, so why are they opposing this? Maybe it was about the weight of vehicles; this came up. I said a Tesla Model Y weighs more than my Ranger, so I presume that the Greens will be all for extra tolls for electric vehicles. There was a safety concern. My ute has a 5-star ANCAP rating, which I believe most of the twin-cab utes do now, except for maybe some of the cheaper overseas ones. And I do like the little kei trucks, I must say. I reckon I could put one in the back of my ute and drive around with it. But on a serious note, you cannot put two adults, two kids and a load in them, as much fun as they could be.

Mr Galea, I thank you for your contribution. That was the most innuendo-laden contribution I have ever experienced in this place, but it got the job done. I thank Mrs Deeming for her solutions to unused seats, both short term and long term. To Mr McIntosh – he has gone somewhere – I applaud his excitement over electric vehicle utes, but I remind him that no-one ever invites someone over to

microwave a steak. Mrs Mac was poetry in motion. Mr Welch, I am doing this to get this moving. You are right, we should not need it, but apparently this is what we need to do to get it going.

I do thank everyone genuinely for their contribution. It was good that there was some humour in this. We are getting towards the end of the year, the end of the term, but it is a serious thing, and I would just urge everyone to vote for it.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (32): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Noes (5): Katherine Copsey, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Sarah Mansfield, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:25): I move:

That the consideration of the remaining notices of motion and orders of the day, general business, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Statements on tabled papers and petitions

Department of Premier and Cabinet

Victorian Government Report on Multicultural Affairs 2023–24

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (17:26): I rise to make a statement on the *Victorian Government Report on Multicultural Affairs 2023–24*. One community that is mentioned in that report a few times is our growing and vibrant Nepalese community, particularly the large Nepalese community in the northern suburbs. I want to take an opportunity to extend both sympathy and support during this very difficult period that Nepal is currently experiencing. I want to bring to the attention of this Parliament the tragic and historic events unfolding in Nepal in recent days and as we speak. I am a proud supporter of our Nepalese community and have been to countless Nepalese community events in my time as an MP.

What began as a youth-led mobilisation, widely known as the Gen Z protest, was sparked by a government ban on major social media platforms. This ban was merely a tipping point. Beneath it lies years of frustration with corruption, the abuse of power by politicians and the lack of accountability and meaningful reform. The young people of Nepal are demanding transparency, political renewal and the protection of their digital, civic and cultural freedoms that are ingrained in this anti-communist movement. The human cost of these events has been heartbreaking. Reports confirm at least 19 protesters killed, along with three police officers and even the tragic death of the wife of the former prime minister Jhulanath Khanal, bringing the total fatalities to 23 lives lost that we know of, while hundreds more have been injured. We extend our deepest condolences to the families of the victims and all those mourning across Nepal and to the Nepalese diaspora here at home. The situation escalated rapidly. Protesters stormed parliament, torched parts of government offices and attacked residences of leaders, including the president, the prime minister and other senior ministers. Among those assaulted was the president of the Nepali Congress, the largest political party, along with the finance minister and foreign minister. The pressure eventually led to the resignation of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli.

To the people of Nepal, especially those of Nepalese origin here in Victoria and across Australia, I say that we stand with you during this difficult time. Your pain, your resilience and your aspirations are felt here, far from Kathmandu but close in spirit. This movement is not only about political change in Nepal; it represents a generational call for justice, integrity and democratic freedom. The voices of young Nepalis echo far beyond the borders, reminding us all of the enduring importance of accountability in government. Let us, as a Parliament, extend our solidarity to the people of Nepal, honour the memory of those who have lost their lives and hope that through this turmoil a more transparent and just political future will emerge. As your Liberal member for the Northern Metropolitan Region and as Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs, I will continue to stand with you, celebrate with you and work with you. The Nepalese community have our support and our compassion, and we stand with you.

I have had the pleasure of attending, as I said, countless Nepalese community events. Recently it was great to join the Far Western Nepalese Society of Victoria at Gaura Parva 2025 celebrations in Brunswick, and I also joined thousands over the weekend at the first ever Indra Jātrā celebration held in Australia, at Diggers Rest at the Australian Nepalese Multicultural Centre. It is always a joy to support and attend Nepalese community events. I would like to acknowledge my friends at the Australian Nepalese Multicultural Centre, the Craigieburn Nepalese association, the Doreen–Mernda Nepalese association, the Nepalese Association of Victoria and the Non-Resident Nepali Association. धन्यवाद.

Electoral Matters Committee

Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:31): I was going to talk about something else tonight, but I decided that it would probably be pertinent to make another contribution on the Electoral Matters Committee's report on the inquiry into the conduct of the Victorian election in 2022, which was tabled in July last year. I have made a couple of contributions using this report as a springboard, because I think it has some really interesting things to say about what is happening to our democracy and the importance that trust in Victoria public institutions has. It makes some reflections on these matters in the context of the conduct of the 2022 state election, but I think it is relevant to repeat those words outside the election context. The committee's report on page 147 says:

The Committee was disappointed to see members of Parliament amplifying inaccurate information that undermined trust in the electoral system.

The report goes on to say:

Members can give authority to information and therefore have a duty to be cautious in what they say.

I think these are really wise words from the Electoral Matters Committee. It has been something that has been on my mind a little bit recently. Obviously we had a discussion earlier today about the way that members of the Liberal Party have been amplifying mistruths on their social media platforms about matters of community safety in an attempt to generate mistrust in community safety initiatives that they in fact voted for. I think we do have a duty to call people out on that, not only because of the wise words of the Electoral Matters Committee in articulating why spreading lies undermines confidence in our democracy but also because as members of Parliament we have responsibilities and obligations to support our institutions and support a discourse that does not perpetuate mistruths. What we have been hearing in the course of the debate about machetes are words that are trivialising and untrue from members of the Liberal Party, and I think that warrants reflection because of the seriousness.

The other thing I will say, on a very similar theme, is we had some evidence at a public hearing of the Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into community consultation practices last week from the Municipal Association of Victoria, whose head of democracy and diplomacy gave some excellent evidence in a public session about the way that disinformation is eroding trust in democracy. That

evidence then made me go and have a read of some of the other work that Ms Ika Trijsburg has written about the corrosive impact that this information is having, particularly at local government level, and the efforts that the Municipal Association of Victoria in particular, but more broadly, is taking to try and strengthen support for our democratic institutions and some work and strategies that the Municipal Association of Victoria has undertaken to try and combat the corrosive effects of misinformation on our democracy. Misinformation and disinformation, incidentally, the World Economic Forum identified as one of the top global risks that we face across the community. The World Economic Forum found that disinformation is a growing and global challenge with profound impacts on cities and local democracy.

I would encourage members to reflect on the report from the Electoral Matters Committee and take heed of their advice on the responsibilities that we have as members in the way that we choose to give authority to information, and that when we go out as members and spread things that are not true, it has a corrosive effect on our democracy. We need to be accountable to ourselves and to each other collectively and make sure that we do not tell lies.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Climate Resilience

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:36): I am going to speak this evening in statements on reports on another inquiry that the Legislative Council's Environment and Planning Committee (EPC) has put through its paces – and it is quite a compendium – which is the climate resilience inquiry. It was a Greens-delivered inquiry and one that the Nationals certainly were not super keen to embrace at the start. However, overwhelmingly there are some very interesting and compelling arguments from people who live outside the tram tracks and who have been able to provide some interesting dynamics and conversations and hence content and findings and recommendations.

It is actually to the minority report written by the Liberals and Nationals that I would like to address my comments today, stating that indeed we do not oppose the majority report but that in terms of a range of the government's policy directives and indeed strategies in this space, many of the people who provided commentary to us spoke about how the Allan government talks a big game on climate resilience but its delivery is riddled with bureaucracy, political spin and buck-passing and that communities, particularly regional communities, often feel very much left behind. Indeed this goes to the point that in the very last chapter of this particular report there was an insertion – and you can see it in the transcript of proceedings there – that the Liberals and Nationals very much voted against having included in this commentary, the emergency services tax. That particular tax, that policy that has passed through this house, was not part of the terms of reference. It was not included, with no ability for people to make a statement on it or appear as testimony, and we opposed that and oppose the tax. And we will scrap the tax when coming to government.

Some of the other comments that I want to put on record here are in relation to coastal erosion and the ongoing issue that faces our regional people. In particular, many in my Gippsland coastal communities, down at Silverleaves and at Inverloch, are facing really grave concern not only for their beloved beaches and stretches of coastline but indeed for community assets and private assets as well. And just the frustration – and I heard the former member talking about the community consultation practices, which is another inquiry that the EPC is doing. Many of those people consistently feel that they are knocking on the door and seeking information, asking for consultation – and consultation, we know, is a two-way street. It is not being consultold. It is not, 'This is what we've decided, and I'm sorry, community, but you can just lump it.' It is about working through the best outcomes for community, and they feel that they have been left out of this loop, and all of the placating and late-to-the-table discussion still does not provide those communities with any measure of confidence that the government is going to get these issues right.

There is the cape-to-cape resilience project down there that the government has been working on for five years, and already my community – and we have heard it in this report – feel that it is out of date.

It does not consider the dangers, and it is not considering the adaptation. ‘Chuck a bit of sand around and then retreat’ – that is the feeling that this community get. Well, I am standing up for these good people down there and our beautiful coastline, and I say the government needs to take this seriously. Indeed our recommendation speaks to ‘a coordinated response to coastal erosion that integrates site-specific engineered solutions combined with ecosystem-based adaptation as appropriate’. That is a bit of a garble, but it says it must be site specific, it must be bespoke, it must be in consultation with the community and it must achieve a desirable outcome. Moving sand around – that is what they are having to do on a weekly basis. Who wears the brunt of this? It is often councils, and councils are left with cost-shifting to pick up the pieces. So I call on the government to have a read of the minority report and to understand what communities are dealing with and work collaboratively with them, listening to the members who are most impacted, to get the best outcome for their communities and also the environment.

Zoos Victoria

Report 2023–24

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:41): I rise to speak on the annual report of Zoos Victoria for the 2023–24 financial year and to commend the remarkable work being done in conservation, wildlife rescue and breeding programs across Victoria, supported by the Allan Labor government’s investment in conservation. At the heart, Zoos Victoria is not just a destination, it also does important conservation work that helps to fight extinction and to create a future rich in wildlife. This is not abstract work, it is about ensuring species that have lived on our continent for tens of thousands of years will continue to survive and not vanish forever.

Over the period of this report we saw landmark achievements in conservation and breeding. At Healesville Sanctuary, the lowland Leadbeater’s possum was bred in captivity for the very first time. This is proof that science and persistence can actually defy the odds. The Guthega skink program recorded its most successful breeding season on record, including a record-breaking litter size, and for the first time, males from Victoria bred successfully with females from New South Wales, which is an important step in genetic rescue. After nearly 50 years of absence, 28 endangered Pookilas were reintroduced to the Cranbourne botanic gardens. These are victories not only for endangered species but for conservationists and the whole Victorian community, because this reminds us that extinction is not inevitable when government, science and communities take action and stand together. The rediscovery of the Victorian grassland earless dragon, thought lost for more than 50 years, was another triumph of persistence. Thirty-two individuals are now part of a conservation breeding program at Melbourne Zoo, with 49 offspring already reaching subadulthood. This is a further demonstration of how endangered species can recover with science, patience and public support.

Wildlife rescue has also taken a leap forward, with more than 2000 native animals treated this year across Zoos Victoria’s hospitals. The marine response unit, the only dedicated service of its kind in our state, responded to over 1000 cases of distressed or entangled marine life, from fur seals to turtles, seabirds and dolphins. The RSPCA koala ward at Werribee Open Range Zoo treated more than 1200 koalas and other native animals in its first year of operation – the biggest year on record. These outcomes were made possible because our government chose to invest, in the wake of the Black Summer bushfires, in modern animal hospitals and wildlife rehabilitation centres and in creating a world-class raptor rehabilitation centre at Healesville Sanctuary, which is now the largest of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere. When governments act decisively, animals get a second chance.

One of the most significant undertakings this year is the relocation of the Asian elephant herd from Melbourne Zoo to Werribee. Thanks to the Victorian government’s \$88 million investment in the largest capital project in Zoos Victoria’s history, we have created a 21-hectare elephant trail, a space designed with animal welfare at its very core. All nine elephants, including three calves, are preparing for the journey, trained through positive methods that respect their welfare and dignity. It is not just a

move, it is a statement about what kind of society we want: one that values and respects nature and carries that responsibility for future generations.

Our investment is not just in animals but, obviously, in people and community. Zoos Victoria welcomed a record 2.8 million visitors this year and has 359,000 members – one of the largest zoo memberships in the world. These are families, students and visitors who are learning that conservation is not distant, it is part of their daily lives and something they engage in actively. Through programs like Totes for Wildlife, Coffee for Wildlife and the Fighting Extinction schools initiative, the public and children are being empowered to learn and to lead, and this is how we grow the next generation of conservationists. Zoos Victoria's work is proof that when government, science and the community come together, extinction can indeed be fought and species can be saved. The Allan Labor government is proud to back that mission and proud to ensure that Victoria continues to lead the nation in wildlife conservation. I commend this report to the house.

Petitions

Victorian Fisheries Authority

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:46): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

I rise today to support Legislative Council petition 9339, which I had the honour of sponsoring. It was a great honour to sponsor this petition. I would just like to thank the many people who are in the gallery, the visitors who have come here at very short notice to listen to this debate. With over 20,000 signatures, this petition calls on the Victorian government to halt the destructive changes within the Victorian Fisheries Authority. At stake are the livelihoods of fishing communities, the safety of Victorians and the sustainability of our marine environment. The Allan Labor government is pursuing a reckless gutting of the VFA. These plans slash about half of our enforcement officers, reducing 73 to just 36, while shutting down key stations at Cowes, Mornington, Braeside, Altona and Queenscliff – the busiest in the state, I might add. That is not a restructure, it is an invitation to chaos.

The government assured Victorians that savings under its COVID debt repayment plan would not impact frontline services. Budget papers promised greater efficiency 'without affecting frontline services', yet here we stand seeing the wholesale sacking of half the state's fisheries officers. Even the Auditor-General has flagged concerns that government cannot even define 'frontline worker' properly, let alone assess how cuts affect service delivery. This is a breach of trust and a broken promise to every Victorian. Let us be clear: this is happening because the government has run out of money – our money, your money, every Victorian's money. Instead of prudent management, it is pouring billions into wasteful vanity projects like the \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop while gutting the fisheries program that protects a resource worth billions to our economy and which is priceless to our environment.

The consequences of these cuts are dire. Experts and veterans of the sector are united in their warnings. Former chief investigator Murray Donaldson predicts an explosion of fisheries crime, recalling the out-of-control fish theft of the 1990s. Forty-seven-year veteran David Burgess calls the cuts 'insane', warning that without enforcement it will become a free-for-all, with illegal fishing and black market sales leading to health risks and crime infiltration. The abalone trade alone illustrates the danger. A single diver can illegally take 100 kilos – worth \$3000 – in a few hours. Without officers on the water, organised crime will not hesitate to move in. Businesses such as Tasmanian Seafoods, who operate in my electorate, have voiced serious concerns about the impact on sustainable operations. And what is the government's brilliant alternative to enforcement? An educational approach – handing out flyers and hoping people will do the right thing. A pamphlet patrol no less – that is not fisheries management, it is fantasy. Compliance collapses without enforcement, and offences remain high: 58 per cent in intertidal abalone, 56 per cent in marine national parks. Crime is not deterred by brochures. Fisheries officers also play a critical role in marine safety. They conduct almost 12 times as many inspections

as Safe Transport Victoria, contributing to a 52 per cent drop in boating- and fishing-related fatal drownings over the last decade. Gutting their capacity will cost lives.

To suggest Victoria Police, already down 800 officers and closing 43 stations, can pick up the slack is fanciful. This government pretends cuts are confined to corporate or back office roles, but every round of so-called savings ricochets onto the frontline. Here it means weaker enforcement, compromised safety, lost revenue and a massive hit to Victoria's international reputation. It risks the sustainability of our commercial and recreational fisheries and even threatens export accreditation. Enforcement exists for a reason. Without it, laws are meaningless, crime flourishes and lives are put at risk.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:51): I rise to speak on the petition which has been put before the house today by Mrs McArthur, and I note that we will be supporting the adoption and acceptance in this chamber of the petition which she has brought forward today. It does concern a serious topic in relation to the to the VFA, to the Victorian Fisheries Authority. As has been widely discussed and widely canvassed across media, and indeed by Mrs McArthur's remarks, there have been some structural changes made to the VFA, which will focus on efficiencies but also allow it to focus on core areas of need.

I do want to get to a few different points, but I will at the outset note that in her remarks, I believe Mrs McArthur made reference to the fact that the Cowes and Mornington stations would be closing. That is not the case, as I understand it. The Cowes and Mornington stations and indeed Queenscliff station will also very much continue to be operating, as indeed will 16 other sites across Victoria. The two affected sites which will be closed are Altona and Braeside. I do want to make sure that when we are discussing what is a serious issue, we are noting things accurately and that Cowes, Mornington and Queenscliff will still be operational under these changes.

These changes will also enable funding within the VFA to continue and add towards the resourcing of the major fishing crime unit, which is an important part of it, an important part of addressing crime where it happens at that larger end. We know that with these sorts of investigations much of the biggest impact that we see from fishing violations, the biggest impact on the state's ecology is not from a fisher having his licence being out by a couple of days. Of course he should not do that, but that does not have nearly as deleterious an effect on the ecosystem as a major breach by, for example, a corporate fishing operation. That is where the MFCU, with increased resourcing, will be able to focus more on those areas of harm that cause greater damage to the state's fisheries and to our ecosystem as well.

Indeed, we do know that there are 35 less roles in the VFA as a result of this restructure, and I know that every support is being provided to those affected employees. It is never a good situation to be in, and I certainly acknowledge that. Nevertheless, we need to ensure that the VFA is focusing on its core work and what it needs to be doing the most. And there are other aspects which Mrs McArthur did touch on a little bit in terms of whether it is the marine unit or whether it is Safe Transport Victoria and its role in ensuring safety and compliance and other aspects that are not to do with fishing on our waterways, our rivers and our lakes, and in our harbours and bays. But it is an important and a serious thing to be discussing.

We do know that the commercial fisheries in Victoria have changed, with a transition of 700 tonnes less net commercial fishing operating in Port Phillip Bay alone, and that is a significant change. It has had a significant impact on the ecology and environment of that area. And with it, that means that our regulatory resourcing and oversight powers need to be concentrated into the areas where they are focused. With that 700-tonne reduction in Port Phillip Bay itself, that also provides some of the basis for some of these changes to ensure that the operations of the VFA are being conducted in the areas where they are needed most, reflecting the changed reality of what is actually happening out there in the waters.

There are many other things that we could talk about when it comes to supporting recreational fishing in this state, whether it is the restocking of fish in various lakes across Victoria every school holiday.

Just in the last school holidays alone in my region, we saw fish restocked at Berwick Springs, at Casey Fields Lake, at Karkarook Lake and at Rowville Lakes. There are many other things that we could talk about in this space, but this is a serious motion as it does affect people's livelihoods. It is important that when we make these changes, we are doing so in a way that is ensuring not just best support for them, but best value for money for taxpayers.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (17:56): The Greens support the petition being tabled today, and I thank the many community members who have added their voices to this important issue. Unfortunately, people's livelihoods, the government's institutional environmental expertise and Victoria's marine life are all being sacrificed by Labor's current cost-cutting agenda. Over years of employment cuts to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action we have witnessed the blatant disregard this government has for roles in the environmental sector. In fact just last month the government announced plans to cut another 350 jobs in the department. Every job impacted by these cuts translates to a disruption to a person's livelihood and slowly drains institutional expertise away from where it is needed most. With this in mind, I want to take a moment to acknowledge that this is a difficult time for many people. On behalf of my Greens colleagues, please know that the wellbeing of staff affected is at the forefront of our minds. We must remember that the job cuts within the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) constitute the loss of important employment opportunities across Victoria, especially in regional communities like mine.

In addition to the impact on individuals, these changes pose a significant risk to Victoria's marine life, because the reality is that by cutting these positions there is a high chance that noncompliant fishing practices will increase. This is deeply concerning. Marine parks already show a 56 per cent. noncompliance rate to rules and limits. Public adherence to regulations on the harvesting of vulnerable marine species such as abalone and giant spider crabs is crucial to safeguarding these species from the impact of overfishing.

But it is not just an environmental issue. It is also important to acknowledge the role of VFA officers in monitoring the use of safety measures by recreational fishers, thus significantly reducing the likelihood of accidents on water. The proposal to establish fisheries engagement hubs, some to be staffed by only one or two employees, is an inadequate replacement for proper enforcement and monitoring of fishing practices, including safety. Fisheries officers are highly effective at deterring illegal practices and are a welcome presence in the communities in which they operate. The Greens ask that the government and the VFA seriously consider the implications of such cuts and that immediate and adequate funding is provided where it is needed to ensure the sustainability of fisheries officers positions into the future. I commend the petition to the house.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:59): I appreciate the opportunity to support the Victorian Fisheries Authority workforce changes petition involving the retrenchment of fisheries officers and scientists by the Victorian government's VFA. This petition was signed by over 20,000 concerned citizens of Victoria and highlights that on Tuesday 20 May 2025 the VFA announced the permanent closure of fishery stations at Braeside and Altona North, effectively leaving no fishery stations at the northern end of Port Phillip Bay. This announcement also revealed a loss of talented and committed scientists and a 44 per cent reduction in full-time employed fisheries officers from 69 to 39 positions, all in pursuit of \$9.4 million in government savings. Seriously?

Crucially, this decision was made without seeking or receiving a risk assessment. These cuts to both resources and frontline fishery officers will inevitably compromise the state's ability to enforce fishing regulations. Regular safety inspections protect our iconic marine life from the risk of criminal activity and ensure the sustainability of Victoria's immensely valuable commercial and recreational fisheries. The changes by the government are causing significant concerns within the recreational fishing community. Fisheries officers are the frontline defence against illegal and unsustainable activities that threaten the long-term viability of fish stocks. Effective enforcement must be informed by rigorous, independent science to ensure long-term sustainability of Victoria's marine resources. Up until 2025 fisheries officers played a crucial role in keeping a lid on offences, with the 2023–24 reporting showing

VFA officers made contact with 49,818 fishers, of which 10 per cent were found to have committed offences, from possessing undersized fish and exceeding catch limits to selling fish caught recreationally.

The Victorian Recreational Fishing is the government's peak community advocate body. It has provided the government with evidence that the fishing community's main concerns and recreational fishing issues are about inadequate legislation and a lack of regulation and how this can lead to higher levels of illegal take. VRFish surveyed about 2054 recreational fishers and prioritised their findings into what the community valued the most. One: the issue of the greatest importance was enforcement and compliance. With the government closing the two stations, one in Braeside and the other in Altona, each having for example four or five fisheries, our recreational fishing in Port Phillip Bay is now not being properly regulated, but recreational fishing needs well-resourced fisheries to be sustainable. Two: the need for well-resourced fisheries also relates to the second-greatest concern to the recreational fishers, and this is the significance and importance of good fisheries management. Scientists, as I said, until now used an evidence-based approach to ensure fish stocks were sustainably managed. Now with the government axing the scientists who monitored recreational fisheries, there is no-one properly monitoring the fish stock sustainability or providing good management for recreational fisheries. The community's willingness to invest in the sustainability of their fisheries is revealed, with 60 per cent of recreational fishers willing to pay an additional \$11 to \$20 a year on their fishing licences to support enforcement and science initiatives.

In my opinion, filling a fishery department with subjective Labor operatives who are not trained or who, because of their own ambitions or allegiance, are unable to provide genuine, objective, evidence-based clarity on what recreational fisheries require to be sustainable is nonetheless problematic. Many comments expressed concern about the consequences of reduced enforcement, emphasising that without fisheries officers and scientists, illegal fishing and environmental damage are likely to increase. Statistics, community voices and the concerns raised by the petition make one thing very, very clear: this government's change in direction undermines recreational fishing enforcement and scientific management, placing Victoria's fisheries and fishing communities at serious risk. I urge the government, along with my colleagues, to review these changes and align their policies with the priorities expressed by over 2000 Victorian anglers by reinstating our fisheries officers and scientists so we can fully support carefully monitored recreational fishing for current and future generations.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (18:04): I too rise to speak on the petition before us today, and in doing so join in the chorus of more than 20,000 Victorians who have signed the petition calling on the government to reverse its cuts to staffing at the Victorian Fisheries Authority. It is not often that I stand here in unity with my colleagues Mrs McArthur and Mr Bourman, but on this issue we are actually shoulder to shoulder. These signatures represent an unprecedented coalition of conservation and recreational fishing groups, including the Victorian National Parks Association, the Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak Body and Seafood Industry Victoria. The cut of 44 per cent of all full-time enforcement staff at the fisheries authority is a reduction which the authority describes as an emphasis towards education and engagement. This is no substitute for a credible enforcement regime. Already there is noncompliance at a rate of more than half in marine protected areas. As mentioned in the petition, the permanent station closures at Braeside and Altona North will leave vital areas of Port Phillip Bay without an adequate enforcement presence. When enforcement presence is reduced, illegal fishers and operators can exploit that gap, with immediate and long-term consequences for biodiversity and for sustainability. This will increase the risk of overfishing and the illegal harvest of vulnerable species.

These cuts have happened at the same time as significant reductions across other nature protection agencies – agencies which were already understaffed and under-resourced. Parks Victoria, the Office of the Conservation Regulator and now the fisheries authority face an uphill battle in protecting Victoria's natural environment and our state's wildlife. Effective, well-resourced fisheries enforcement prevents unnecessary animal suffering by limiting illegal and destructive methods

impacting fish and other marine animals. I have spoken in this place many times about the government's Little Angler program, which has provided free fishing rods to school-aged children across the state but has had an unintended consequence that has caused significant harm to Victoria's wildlife, particularly birds and flying foxes, due to discarded and cut fishing line in the environment, causing entanglement. Wildlife carers have reported a significant increase in animals coming into care, including in my electorate, with agonising entanglement injuries – more proof of the need for increased monitoring and enforcement rather than the new so-called focus on engagement by the VFA. In the face of this restructuring the government have a responsibility to demonstrate how they intend to continue to protect Victoria's rich marine biodiversity, and I call on them to do that, while thanking all petition signatories for their dedication and compassion towards Victoria's marine life.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (18:07): I rise today to support this petition against the government's reckless decision to gut our state's fisheries officers and close critical stations. Victorians are sounding the alarm. Just over 20,000 signatures have been collected, which is over 40 times the average petition size. On 20 May the Victorian Fisheries Authority confirmed that it would slash 44 per cent of our fisheries officers, from 69 down to just 39. That is not a saving; it is short-sighted. It risks lives, livelihoods and the sustainability of our marine environment. Fewer officers means weaker enforcement and more poaching. Abalone poachers tied to organised crime and foreign syndicates make millions every year exploiting our coastline. As reporter Andrew Rule put it, poachers are stripping our reefs bare while a bankrupt state simply surrenders. The irony cannot be lost. As fish stocks are depleted by poaching, legitimate operators are priced out and everyday Victorians are forced to pay more for local seafood. This undermines your treasured sustainability targets as well as punishing law-abiding fishers and consumers alike.

Leading conservation and fishing groups Victorian National Parks Association, VRFish, Seafood Industry Victoria and Abalone Council Victoria have united in opposition. Shannon Hurley from the VNPA said:

When conservation groups and fishing interests stand together on an issue, the government should take notice.

Instead the government has just claimed that these cuts will save \$9.4 million, but we all know that the fallout is going to cost far more. We remember the broken promises, and we think about the bigger picture. This is not just about fisheries officers, it is about a state sliding into lawlessness. Crime is rising, small businesses are closing, streets are scarred by vandalism and decay, commercial fishing is being wiped out and regional economies are being hollowed, all while the government rewards itself with a pay rise. The real cost will be far more, and measured in depleted fisheries, higher food prices, lives lost and criminal networks further emboldened. Fish stinks from the head, and Victorians can smell the rot from this government's reckless and ill thought out decisions.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:10): I would like to quote the Shadow Minister for Outdoor Recreation. I know Sam Groth is sitting in the audience at the moment listening very intently, because he is most concerned about this. He said:

The Liberals and Nationals will always stand with our recreational fishing community to protect fish stocks, uphold fair rules, and ensure the long-term health of Victoria's marine environments.

Hear, hear to that. He went on to say what has been said multiple times by the Liberals and Nationals on this side of the chamber in relation to why these cuts are happening – that is, these cuts are happening because the Allan government cannot manage money, and Victorians, and in this case the marine environments, are paying the price.

We know these cuts to the fishing officers are just one of many, many cuts. I have been speaking with fantastic people down at Cowes, down at the Newhaven Jetty, at Corinella Jetty and San Remo and particularly the San Remo co-op, which is one of the few co-ops that are still going around, doing an amazing job to produce our own seafood, our own fresh local Victorian seafood. What a wonderful activity and outcome and produce – to have something that is caught out in Bass Strait delivered to

the jetty at San Remo and then processed, and you can buy it in the shops straightaway or it is sold into markets et cetera. This is really important, and it is really special. We need to protect those species which are called our recreational and our commercial fishing operators.

We are concerned about the explosion of poaching. We are concerned about the illegal fishing. We certainly are concerned that this government is reaching into various entities right across the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) to try and find some money, scavenge some money, by cutting services that do not warrant cutting. We know that last year they cut \$95 million worth of funding out of Parks Victoria. Parks Victoria rangers are being cut back. The environment is deteriorating. We have got pests and weeds and tracks that are not maintained. The government is not cutting suits in Melbourne; it is cutting boots on the ground. These frontline fisheries officers are just another example of that.

I want to take a moment to talk about the 350 additional jobs that are going to go from DEECA this year, and this includes jobs from FFMV – Forest Fire Management Victoria is on the chopping block – and Ag Victoria, which is part of a larger department. Once upon a time Agriculture Victoria held its own under Peter Walsh in government as the ag minister. It held its own. Now it is in a back room, and this is the disrespect this government is affording the people that provide our clothes and feed us.

When we look at more cuts to the area, we see that Parks Victoria is not maintaining the jetties that recreational people fish off, the jetties that enable people to take their rods, to go fishing, to freely, in a world where we have got a cost-of-living crisis, be able to work with their family, enjoy their family and fish off a pier. If you do not have a boat, that is fine. What is this government doing? It is not maintaining those fishing platforms. It is locking them up, and it is just leaving them to decay. That is not good enough. It is indicative of this particular scenario where we are seeing more and more fisheries officers cut as well.

In conclusion, the Nationals are pleased to align ourselves with Mrs McArthur's petition. We thank the 21,000 anglers, pro fishing people and concerned conservationists who want to get the balance right in making sure that we have a marine ecosystem that is self-sustaining and that is not overpoached or being attacked by illegal fishing. We believe this is just indicative of a government that cannot manage the budget and is going into various forms and various services that should not be cut.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:14): I thank my colleagues Mrs Hermans, Mrs Deeming and Ms Bath, my Western Victoria Region colleague Dr Mansfield and my friend, often my foe, Ms Purcell for their endorsement of the petition. I also stand not only with the recreational fishers but with the professional fishers, who need protection from illegal fishing and organised crime. Despite Mr Galea's attempt to spin the line that there is nothing to see here, these are experts you are doing away with. Your priorities in Labor are totally wrong and totally misguided. Along with the 20,115 Victorians who signed this important petition, I implore the government to abandon this reckless course, reverse these devastating cuts and honour its own commitments to protecting frontline services. The health of our marine environment, the safety of Victorians and the livelihoods of our fishing communities depend on it.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:16): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

TAFE sector

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:16): (1936) My adjournment is for Minister Tierney, the Minister for Skills and TAFE, and the action I seek is an update on how the government is supporting Victorians to enter adult education, retrain, upskill and develop employment pathways.

Suburban Rail Loop

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:16): (1937) The action I seek is from the Minister for Planning. The uncosted and unfunded Suburban Rail Loop is costing Victorians at least \$34 billion, will reshape our suburbs and is disrupting the lives of tens of thousands of people. Communities from Box Hill to Cheltenham have faced road closures, the closure of businesses and compulsory acquisitions of an RSL and a church and homes. This project plans to change the very nature and character of these suburbs, and my communities are constantly disappointed at a planning process that lacks transparency. In effect the way the government conducts consultation is an abuse of trust at best and corruption at worst. Public hearings have been scheduled for the Suburban Rail Loop East precinct standing advisory committee and are supposed to be a forum for the public to provide vital input into the future of their communities. In requesting to appear before this forum, the Surrey Hills and Mont Albert Progress Association has asked the Suburban Rail Loop Authority to place all tabled documents from the hearings onto the Engage Victoria or similar website, which is what happened with the 2022 SRL East environmental effects inquiry. Tabling these documents would clearly allow for a more genuine consultative process and a more worthwhile exchange of views. However, the government, via Planning Panels Victoria, has indicated it will not happen on this occasion. Why? Because they do not have to, which is different from saying ‘You shouldn’t’ and totally different from saying ‘We are willing to be transparent.’

Make no mistake, consultation conducted while purposely withholding key information from interested stakeholders is a sham. Communities cannot be asked to provide feedback if they are denied details they consider relevant. This is yet another case where the government weaponises the availability of information. It is in effect a lie by omission. It is the government acting in bad faith. There is no integrity to it and therefore there is no integrity to the process. It is essential that all documents presented at these public hearings, including expert evidence and submissions, are made publicly available to ensure scrutiny and informed community engagement. The action I seek from the minister is to intervene to ensure that all tabled documents and submissions for the SRL East precincts standing advisory committee are made public and published on an ongoing basis.

Supermarket sourcing standards

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (18:19): (1938) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action I seek is for self-regulated corporations to be held accountable for their broken promises. Last week Woolworths seemed to have backflipped on its pledge to stop selling beef linked to deforestation by the end of 2025. The commitment to sell deforestation-free beef was made in August 2024, and the policy was intended to apply to fresh beef; paper, pulp and timber; palm oil; cocoa; and soy for farmed animal feed sold across its stores. Woolworths said they take any instances of deforestation identified in their supply chain seriously, but in their latest sustainability report for 2025 they downgraded fresh beef as a low-risk commodity for deforestation after having considered it high-risk just one year earlier. This is despite beef production being the leading cause of deforestation in our country and Woolworths being the single largest retailer of beef in our country.

With Coles pressing ahead with this commitment, Woolworths’ failure to act leaves more forest and bushlands and their irreplaceable wildlife vulnerable to being bulldozed and cleared to make way for beef pasture. But Coles, you are not off the hook either. Completing the duopoly of disappointments, over the weekend Coles announced a delay to banning caged eggs due to supply disruptions from bird flu outbreaks. Australia has committed to banning battery cages in all states and territories by 2036, and after mounting public pressure over the suffering inflicted on hens Coles had initially pledged to go cage-free this year. Now the current pledge has been pushed back all the way to 2030. But for hens forced to endure life in these cages this is far too long; they cannot wait a single day longer. In battery cages hens are crammed into spaces smaller than an A4 sheet of paper, unable to stretch, flap their wings or forage. Forced to stand on wire floors their entire lives, they endure chronic pain, crippling bone weakness and more fractures than in any other egg-laying system. Advocates have been pushing

to ban cage eggs for decades, yet millions of hens still spend their entire lives in cramped cages while meaningful reform continues to delay and drag on.

So Woolworths, I have got a beef with you, but Coles, you are just as rotten, and this is exactly why self-regulation on animal welfare absolutely fails. Corporations are able to make commitments they have no obligation to honour. I urge the minister to urgently step in and hold them to account.

Summer of cyber program

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (18:22): (1939) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs Danny Pearson. The Allan Labor government's summer of cyber program supports women and gender-diverse people to get into cybersecurity careers while helping small businesses address skills gaps. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on outcomes expected from this program.

Government performance

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:22): (1940) My adjournment matter is to the Premier, and the action I seek is for her to stop achieving the worst records in the state of Victoria. I rise today in profound disappointment. Victoria is leading the country in many ways, and every single one of them is shameful. Record debt: net state debt sits at \$155.5 billion, projected to climb to \$194 billion in 2029; that is more than \$25,000 for every Victorian man, woman and child. Interest alone costs taxpayers nearly \$29 million every single day. Record unemployment: Victoria now has the highest unemployment rate in the nation after years of bloated bureaucracy and reckless spending. Record business closures: in the 2024–25 financial year insolvencies rose by 48 per cent, with 4242 companies collapsing, the largest recorded percentage increase of any mainland state. Record waste: the Auditor-General has found the \$11.66 billion jump in costs to the mismanaged Big Build projects last financial year will push Victoria's bill for 113 major projects to a combined \$145.55 billion.

But these financial failures are matched by social collapse. Victoria Police made the highest number of arrests in the force's 172-year history. Record car thefts: in the 12 months to the end of March, 31,551 cars were stolen in Victoria, a sharp increase of 47.1 per cent, the worst since 2002. Record youth crime: offences by children aged 10 to 17 surged to 25,275 incidents, the most since electronic records began in 1993. They now commit 63 per cent of robberies, 46 per cent of aggravated burglaries and 26 per cent of car thefts. Record total crime: 627,268 offences in the year ending March 2025, a 17.1 per cent increase and the highest rate in a decade. Criminal incidents reached their highest ever recorded figures, up 20.1 per cent to 474,937. Here are some headlines in the past few weeks, and they are from the *Age*, the ABC and so on. So Premier Allan, instead of defending Victorians, your government continues the legacy of failure left by your predecessor.

Northern Victoria Region roads

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (18:26): (1941) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to conduct an inquiry into unsatisfactory road repairs in my electorate of Northern Victoria Region and to hold the contractors responsible to account. Almost as often as I hear from my constituents about deteriorated, neglected roads I hear from them about unsatisfactory road repairs. Within weeks, sometimes days, of so-called repairs being completed, I am hearing stories of these works crumbling, potholes reforming and rough surfaces reappearing. This is simply not good enough. The government spruiks about how they have spent over \$900 million on roads in the past year, yet my constituents are asking: where? The shoddy workmanship we are seeing on rural roads is appalling. If we take the Katamatite-Shepparton Road as an example, within three weeks of the repairs being completed, cracks began to form; several large potholes reformed or new ones opened up; and the dangerous rutting came back, in some places worse than before. It begs the question: does anyone from the government go back and check on the work completed by the contractors hired to complete these works? To my constituents it seems like an awful lot of money is thrown around for not much in return. Repairs lasting only a few

weeks is not value for money, and that is what my constituents want to see. These roads should be fixed correctly the first time, with no corners cut and no need for almost immediate repairs, so the action I seek is for the minister to conduct an inquiry into unsatisfactory road repairs in my electorate of Northern Victoria, and to hold the contractors responsible to account.

Housing

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (18:27): (1942) The Big Housing Build is bringing more social housing to southern metropolitan Melbourne, including at Essex Street in Prahran, where we are replacing 63 older walk-up-style flats with more than 150 new social, affordable and market rentals, including a 37 per cent increase in the amount of social housing on the site. So my adjournment matter tonight is to the Minister for Housing and Building, and the action that I seek is for the minister to join me on a visit to this great new development.

Crime

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (18:28): (1943) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police regarding the alarming surge in motor vehicle theft occurring in our state. The action I seek is for the minister to release a detailed plan outlining how the Allan Labor government intend to combat the significant increase in theft of motor vehicles. Data from the Insurance Council of Australia indicates that while most states in Australia experienced a decline in motor vehicle theft claims over the past financial year, Victoria unfortunately tops the charts for all the wrong reasons. Our state of Victoria saw a staggering 59 per cent increase in the number of motor vehicle theft claims, accompanied by a 70 per cent rise in related costs. This accounts for more than 12,000 claims. According to the Crime Statistics Agency's 2024 data, nearly 20,000 vehicles were reported stolen in Victoria, averaging out at 109 cars stolen every single day. This marked the highest rate recorded in the past two decades, and it represents a dramatic 41 per cent increase compared to the previous year. We are facing a crisis. In my electorate, Wyndham City Council was one of the hardest hit for car theft, along with other LGAs such as Casey, Hume and Whittlesea, which are also seeing a year-on-year increase. This crisis is not occurring elsewhere in Australia, highlighting just how severe the situation has become under this Labor government in Victoria. While we can all take measures to help protect our vehicles, I encourage all motorists to visit the RACV website to familiarise themselves with their helpful tips, because obviously the government is not doing anything. The Allan Labor government must step up and examine the policies and initiatives that are effective in other states. Notably, Queensland have achieved an 11 per cent reduction in motor theft claims. Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales have also reported a significant decrease – a decrease in all these other states. I urge the minister: prioritise addressing this issue. We all deserve to feel safe in our homes and have the confidence that our cars and belongings will remain secure.

Planning policy

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (18:31): (1944) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to strengthen section 60 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to introduce a requirement for local councils to consider health and food security when looking at applications for planning permits. If you have driven between Geelong and Torquay, you will have noticed the growing population along this corridor. While the population has boomed, so too has the development of fast-food outlets. It is hard not to notice them lined up, one after another, along the side of the road. While these restaurants certainly bring convenience for a busy community, they can quickly turn these suburbs into food swamps – neighbourhoods where the density of restaurants selling unhealthy, quick-serve options is high, and affordable, nutritious options is low. In fact over recent decades Victoria's growth areas have developed in such a way that they have the highest ratio of unhealthy food outlets to healthy food outlets. In greater Melbourne, for every healthy food outlet being built, as many as nine unhealthy outlets are being developed alongside it.

Under the current planning scheme, communities have very little power to stop these developments from going ahead. In 1999 the Torquay community took a planning application by McDonald's to

VCAT. They lost the appeal, with VCAT citing no planning ground for rejection of the application. More than 25 years later, our planning scheme has not addressed this gap. Councils, the relevant authority when it comes to approving local restaurant developments, cannot differentiate between types of outlets when considering development proposals, leaving them powerless to support the community's call to keep these chains out. Many communities do not want fast food in the first place; they want to support local shop owners, build variety and celebrate the uniqueness of where they live. They also understand the health impacts of increased access to fast food, such as higher rates of obesity and associated conditions such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Minister, I ask that you give communities and councils the power to make local, healthy environments a reality.

Community pharmacists

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:33): (1945) My adjournment matter this evening is directed to the Minister for Health in the other place, and the action I seek is that the minister outline how the Allan Labor government will ensure the expanded community pharmacy program improves health, equity and access across Victoria, particularly for outer suburban communities like Croydon. The Victorian budget 2025–26 provides \$18 million to support pharmacists to deliver expanded care through community pharmacy consultations, like District Chemist Outlet in Croydon. Pharmacists who complete the required postgraduate training will now be able to assess and treat 22 acute chronic conditions, including allergies, nausea and high blood pressure, without patients paying a consultation fee.

This expansion builds on the success of the community pharmacy statewide pilot, which trialled the treatment of urinary tract infections, prescribing of hormonal contraception, management of skin conditions and travel and health vaccinations. These services will now become permanent. Importantly, unlike in other jurisdictions, Victorians will not face out-of-pocket costs for these services. This measure strengthens equity, ensuring people on low incomes, those in vulnerable circumstances, and communities with limited access to GPs can receive the care they need. I commend the Premier and the Minister for Health for their leadership in expanding access to safe, effective and affordable health care.

Bee sites

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:34): (1946) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Environment, and it regards the planned cancellation of longstanding bee sites on public land by Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action staff. Professional beekeepers have been given notice, such as from Parks Victoria at Wilsons Promontory, who stated that no further and future applications will be supported and existing licences will not be renewed. This is in direct contradiction to the state government's own apiculture on public land policy – and you can look it up online; it exists now – which clearly states its commitment to encourage and support apiculture on public land, recognising the honey bees' vital role in food security, regional jobs and in agricultural exports. Seventy-five per cent of our agricultural products in this state require pollination through bees. This policy also aims to maximise the coexistence of other land uses, streamlining administration and ensuring fair financial return to the state from the professional beekeepers who access the public land for their bees. Yet beekeepers and some sites that have been in place for over 50 years are being pushed out without consultation – we have heard that before – justification or consistency. At Wilsons Prom alone, 16 sites are set to be removed, citing vague conservation goals, and in other areas beekeepers have been blamed for the lack of track maintenance, even when they have actually taken the initiative to do the work and keep the tracks open. This treatment is not only unfair, it is dangerous. We have varroa mite – there is a varroa mite incursion in this state. It has come down from New South Wales. There are business failures likely to occur, and the mental health of beekeepers is certainly under serious strain. As I have said, pollination underpins much of our agricultural food supply.

I also raise concern about the disbanding of the Apiculture on Public Lands Engagement Group, aptly named APLEG, which is a communication between government and the bee industry. Bees cannot

thrive without access to ongoing floral resources, and often what happens is they can be up on the Murray pollinating the almonds and then, when the summer comes, they are actually taken off and put into – we will say – bee holiday mode, and they go down onto the prom and utilise the floral resources down there. So the action I seek from the minister is to uphold and implement the apiculture on public land policy, reinstate APLEG to restore collaboration and work well with the community of beekeepers and treat beekeepers fairly and consistently across all public land. Indeed the beekeeper industry, food security and the environment depend on our bees.

Australian Football League

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:37): (1947) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, and the action I seek is for the minister to take meaningful steps to stamp out the AFL's homophobic culture. The AFL recently made history, finally losing its title as the only major professional men's sport anywhere in the world to have never had an openly gay or bisexual player, even after retirement. It only took 128 years. I want to acknowledge and commend the immense bravery of former West Coast Eagles defender Mitch Brown, who has come out as the first current or former openly bisexual male player in AFL history. Mitch stayed silent out of fear, citing a culture of homophobia and hypermasculinity that played a big part in his decision to retire. In one story he shared, he talked about how a fellow player was disgusted at the idea of showering around a gay player and said he would prefer to be in a cage full of lions.

While this is a moment to celebrate Mitch, it is not a moment to celebrate the AFL. In the last year and a half alone, there have been six publicised incidents of homophobia within the AFL. Behind closed doors there would be many more. There is a deeply ingrained culture of homophobia in the AFL, and the reality is Mitch is not alone. Around 3.6 per cent of the population and one in 10 20- to 24-year-olds report a sexuality other than heterosexuality. The actual percentage is likely to be even higher. This means there are hundreds if not thousands of current and former AFL players who are not straight but who remain closeted out of fear. The AFL is Victoria's sport. It is absolutely unacceptable that this is not a safe space for LGBTIQ+ people. Until the AFL's homophobic culture is ripped out by the root and players stop getting a slap on the wrist for using slurs, nothing will change. In the AFLW, there is a proudly large number of players who are part of the LGBTIQ+ community, but spectator culture remains an issue. When Tyabb women's football team's Kate McCallum proposed to her partner Bec Strickland on the field, the announcement was met with a tidal wave of homophobic hate on social media. Hate is not funny. It keeps people in the closet and it puts lives at risk, so I ask: will the minister take meaningful steps to stamp out the AFL's homophobic culture?

Southern Metropolitan Region housing

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:40): (1948) My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning in the other place Minister Kilkenny. The minister and I recently had the opportunity to attend the topping-out ceremony at a very exciting build-to-rent project at Queens Road in Albert Park, alongside the member for Albert Park in the other place. This project will deliver 433 new apartments in a beautiful location near public transport and near Albert Park reserve. That is why the action I seek is for the minister to provide me with an update on the progress of other build-to-rent projects currently underway in Southern Metropolitan Region.

Royal Children's Hospital Foundation

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:41): (1949) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to supporting some very significant untreatable childhood diseases and treatments. I recently spoke to Associate Professor Andrew Kornberg about the impact of advanced therapies such as gene, cell and tissue therapies on how we treat some of the most devastating and previously untreatable childhood diseases, some of these rare diseases. These rare diseases affect up to 2 million Australians, and 70 per cent of those are children. One in five paediatric hospital admissions is linked to a genetic condition, and without access to advanced therapies, one-third of children with a rare disease will not live past the age of five. It has

very devastating impacts, and we have come a long way with medical innovation and treatments. Nevertheless, there is more that can be done.

The Royal Children's Hospital is already delivering world-leading care through advanced therapies for conditions such as spinal muscular atrophy, CAR T-cell therapy for acute lymphoblastic leukemia and recessive dystrophic epidermolysis bullosa. But many other children with rare and life-threatening conditions still have no access to life-saving treatments. These life-saving treatments and care are life saving – they literally need them to survive. Associate Professor Kornberg and his colleagues are leading the charge in this field, but they need support. The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation is seeking \$4.5 million to establish a dedicated centre for advanced therapies, the first of its kind in Victoria. This centre would provide the infrastructure, expert workforce and clinical trial capacity needed to deliver cutting-edge treatments for children who need them. As I said, they need these treatments and care simply to survive.

This is an investment in infrastructure and innovation that also offers hope for many Victorian children and their families during very devastating and difficult times in their lives. The action I seek is for the minister to meet with Associate Professor Andrew Kornberg to discuss how the government can support this vital initiative.

Crime

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (18:43): (1950) I have three adjournment responses that are now overdue. I have emailed the relevant ministers, and I am now requesting an explanation in the house. The questions are numbers 1626 to the Treasurer for the Premier, 1794 to the Treasurer for the Premier and 1626 to the Treasurer for the Premier.

My adjournment matter this evening is for the Premier, and the action I seek is an explanation of why this government continues to deny multicultural communities targeted grants, programs or funds under the Victorian community crime prevention programs. In Victoria there is no clear picture of hate crime. Victoria Police do not publish statistics on crimes against multicultural or ethnic communities, which means these incidents are effectively invisible in official reporting. The Labor government have announced they are keeping Victoria free of hate, yet when we look at their prevention response the picture is not so reassuring. At the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in 2024 the then Minister for Crime Prevention admitted that crime prevention funding had been shifted into broader budget categories, making it impossible to see what is really being spent to ensure community safety. In 2025 the Labor government pointed to a whole-of-government approach to crime prevention, youth justice, prisons and countering violent extremism, but these are reactive responses that come after the harm has already happened. They are not the same as prevention that keeps communities safe in the first place. There is no sustainable investment to keep multicultural communities safe from the daily violence they face, from racist assaults and hate crimes to discrimination and overpolicing. Current programs fail to respond to the fear multicultural communities feel. Just yesterday one of our Greens candidates was racially abused while out minding his own business. He was told, 'Indians do not belong here. This is our space.' And then right after that, he was kicked in the face, an unprovoked and shocking attack that points to the real danger and risks that so many in our communities are facing right now.

There is no visible dedicated stream that funds multicultural community organisations to do prevention, recovery and resilience work at scale, and critically, there is no routine, transparent publication of hate crime data by Victoria Police that would tell us the true scope of the problem in our state. Without clear data and a clear program, we are asking communities to endure harm and then navigate completely fragmented services after the fact. Prevention means tackling root causes – racism, exclusion, poverty, disconnection – before they become violence. It means backing and trusting our grassroots groups, who know how to best serve their communities. It also means supporting the recovery and resilience work that these communities know how to deliver.

Climate change

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (18:46): (1951) The iconic emperor penguin is facing extinction within just 75 years, but we know that the Liberals do not care about action on climate change. Victorians under 25 will possibly outlive the entire species of emperor penguins. The years of denial and delay by the Liberals see droughts impact farms and all of us at the supermarkets harder. Fire, flood and wind events raise insurance, costing us all more. And the western Antarctic ice shelf is shrinking, so baby emperor penguins every year are having to go into the water earlier, and their feathers are not developed and they are literally drowning at sea. So while the Liberals are happy to turn their backs on the emperor penguins and do not care about action on climate change, I am proud to be part of a Victorian Labor government that is a world leader, with our target of net zero emissions by 2045 and, in the last year, over 42 per cent of our electricity generated from renewables. Can the Minister for Climate Action please outline what actions the government is taking to continue to rapidly decrease our emissions to ensure a better world for every single one of us and to give the emperor penguins a fighting chance.

Toorourrong Reservoir Park

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:48): (1952) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action that I seek is for the minister to implement several actions that I will outline in my contribution to reduce the fire risk at the Toorourrong Reservoir Park.

Toorourrong Reservoir is a Melbourne Water facility just north of Whittlesea township, and the surrounding park is managed by Parks Victoria. I recently met with members of the Friends of Toorourrong, together with the Whittlesea and surrounds fire guard group, who are highly concerned about the increasing fire risk at the Toorourrong Reservoir Park. This is a high-risk bushfire area that was devastated in the Black Saturday bushfires of 2009, and all steps possible must be taken to reduce the chance of future fires. Since the bushfires of 2009 regrowth in the area has been tremendous, and there have not been any controlled burns to reduce the increase in fuel load. There is also confusion amongst park visitors about where and when cooking fires can be lit. The park provides both electric and wood fire barbecues as well as pits for disposing of ash and coals. The wood fire barbecues give the false impression that lighting open fires is permissible around the park when it is not. Some visitors are also unwilling for cultural reasons to cook on barbecues where meat has been cooked and instead cook over fires in the ash pits or open fires on park grounds. These inappropriate fires could easily get out of control and lead to bushfires, with deadly consequences.

Friends of Toorourrong volunteers have made several recommendations to reduce the fire risk in the park, and I am supporting their call for action to be taken. First, there should be controlled burns in the surrounding bush to reduce the fuel load. Second, the wood fire barbecues should be removed and there should be a ban on all open fires in the park. Third, there should be signs in a variety of languages to make it clear that no open fires are allowed. Fourth, Parks Victoria should close Toorourrong Reservoir Park when there is a total fire ban, just as other parks and picnic areas are regularly closed on fire ban days. Fifth, Parks Victoria must do more to ensure that CFA vehicles will have reliable access to the park when a fire does break out. This means better forest management to remove vegetation that is obstructing vehicle access tracks. It also means fixing the automatic electric gate at the entry to the park on Jacks Creek Road, which has malfunctioned several times, including one occasion when visitors were left trapped inside and lit a fire, fearing they would have to stay overnight. The CFA responded to a call about the fire but could not get access to the park through the malfunctioning gate and had great difficulty finding another way in. The CFA has been told that if the gate fails, trucks can go around on either side, but I have seen the gate, and that is not possible. Parks Victoria must take immediate action to ensure that the gate is fixed and that fire trucks have reliable access. These issues immediately affect the members of the Friends of Toorourrong – *(Time expired)*

Housing affordability

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:51): (1953) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing and Building, and the action I seek is that this government's affordable housing policy be updated so that it actually does what it says on the tin. If you are aged 25 to 39, if you earn \$129,000 a year and if you have somehow managed to save a deposit, you could only still afford to buy just 17 per cent of all homes sold last year. And speaking of 17 per cent, residents living in this state's new so-called affordable housing just copped a 17 per cent yearly rent rise, and this government wants to push this privately run, affordable housing lottery model as the future of housing in this state.

Young people cannot buy a home, but then they also cannot afford to rent, because even the bragged-about and limited affordable option is still slugging people with huge rent increases. I mean, what a future! Also, Melbourne house prices, we have seen, are on the rise again – rapidly. If you are an investor that is fantastic news, but it is soul-crushing news for anyone looking to buy a home. The major parties have shown no interest in house prices slowing down. First home buyers and renters are being forced to fit a square into a circle because you keep giving them more squares – any small hope short-lived, almost every housing announcement a smokescreen and every question asked met with deflection, met with finger-pointing. But the question is simple: if young people cannot buy a home or afford to rent them, what can they even do? How will we ever make housing affordable if the word 'affordable' means nothing to this government?

Waste and recycling management

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (18:53): (1954) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment. Victoria has a waste governance scandal hiding in plain sight, and the action that I seek is that this government make the regulator and the law fit for purpose to protect industries, the environment and human health. It is becoming very clear that bad faith contractors handling contaminated soil are mixing different classes of contaminated loads together in order to dilute them so that they scrape under the lab-testing thresholds. They then sell this off or give it away as so-called clean fill. It is contamination laundering, and it cheats honest businesses, endangers families, harms the environment and corrodes public trust. The regulations state that blending or diluting priority waste to change its classification is prohibited, yet in practice the EPA can wave it through with special approvals, and the rest is clearly slipping by undetected. Once mixed it is almost impossible to police.

In New South Wales the asbestos-in-mulch scandal forced inspections at more than 300 sites and triggered multiple prosecutions, all because traceability failed, and in Victoria we still have not closed those same loopholes. The Auditor-General and the Ombudsman have both warned that Victoria lacks reliable data and oversight of waste flows. This is the blind spot. It is the exact thing that means contaminated material gets rebagged and reused without any credible chain of custody. But when the unsuspecting landowners or councils take it in, they are the ones who end up possibly being liable for pollution or the ruinous clean-up bills, plus they have their investment and their property devalued. This government cannot even service the interest on their debt and the daily operating costs of this state, and yet it is missing out on precious tax revenue. At landfill levy rates of around \$250 a tonne, this represents tens of millions of dollars in lost revenue that should be going to hospitals, schools and roads. Instead, it is just vanishing under this government's nose, while compliant operators are undercut and everyone is put at risk. Please just take action and fix this.

Energy policy

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:55): (1955) My adjournment is to the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action I seek is for the minister to pause the rollout of high-voltage transmission projects in western and northern Victoria until full consultation, fair compensation and community consent frameworks are in place. This is actually affecting everybody, and all of us know people in the regional areas where families and farmers are hurting. Whether it is the farmers on the outskirts or throughout the areas of Victoria, the CFA volunteers or the young families who are moving into areas and struggling to find a home, the message is simply the same:

everybody is feeling sidelined by this government. They feel that this government is incredibly reckless in the decisions that it is making. Its lack of consultation, its lack of thought and process, are hurting everybody. I have to say, this is a constant theme throughout my area in the south-east, where I am witnessing a growing backlash to the government's heavy-handed approach.

The heavy-handed approach to the renewable energy rollout, land access legislation and planning enforcement policies made by this Labor government may find its friends in the city, but it is acutely felt in the rural areas. Recently, residents in my area, particularly in the areas of Cardinia and Casey, where people have farming connections, have raised serious concerns about the transmission powers planned near homes and farms, with no real consultation once again and no local input. The Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Act 2025, which now allows infrastructure companies to enter private land without consent, is being described by locals as a land grab by legislation. Whether it be to do with rezoning or just looking at people's areas and just walking in, we find that, throughout the horticultural area in my region and just beyond in the eastern region, land is being rezoned and squeezed out, either for housing or for industrial-scale energy infrastructure. It is unsustainable; you cannot talk about food security on one hand and erase the food bowl on the other. We are, in my area, absorbing thousands of residents each year. Our roads are clogged, our schools are full, our hospitals are stretched, and now we are going to have to see more farmers sell their land because they cannot abide by this.

Minister, I formally call on you to (1) amend the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Act to remove forced land access powers from energy companies; (2) allow local council sign off and landholder consent for any transmission projects in surrounding urban and rural zones; (3) protect food-producing farmland with zoning safeguards from industrial-scale energy developments; and (4) pause major transmission builds until there is proper local consultation, route transparency and compensation clarity. The people – *(Time expired)*

Economy

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (18:59): (1956) My adjournment is to the Treasurer. According to the state budget papers, Victoria's state net debt will soon pass \$194 billion, and interest repayments are skyrocketing to \$29 million every day. This debt estimate is expected to be far higher because the government signed contracts to build the Suburban Rail Loop project without securing all the funds. S&P Global has warned that if spending and debt continue to grow unchecked, Victoria risks a credit rating downgrade which would escalate borrowing costs further. According to the budget forward estimates, Victoria's net debt will reach 25 per cent of its gross state product. Analysis by the Parliamentary Budget Office over the last decade to 2023–24 shows that net debt has increased by an average of 22.9 per cent each year. Victoria's debt is now out of control – last year the daily interest bill was \$15 million every single day. I thought that was bad, but over the next three years the interest bill will nearly double that, at \$29 million every single day. But when you look at the debt graph, it just looks very steep, like Mount Everest, and I am worried that it is about to get worse.

I understand that the Victorian government borrows predominantly by issuing state government bonds and debt securities via the Treasury Corporation of Victoria. These are bought by institutional international investors such as superannuation funds, banks and bond markets, but when they mature they need to be repaid. TCV estimate that the state will need to refinance \$86 billion in debt between 2029 and 2034, which has been called a debt time bomb. According to MacroBusiness the average interest rate on the debt is only 2.4 per cent, reflecting the cheap money available during the pandemic. However, global interest rates have risen sharply and are expected to average between 4.5 and 5 per cent in the future, potentially increasing the interest cost on Victoria's debt by \$2 billion. It is a repeating pattern; we have seen it before. It was mentioned in the Auditor-General's annual financial report back in 2023–24 – a similar issue. A further credit downgrade will make borrowing money even more expensive. As interest repayments skyrocket, less money is available to fund essential services, like roads, police, schools and hospitals. Every Victorian deserves to know where their tax money is

going, and I ask the Treasurer to clearly outline what action the government will take to help Victoria get out of this rapid descent into debt and explain who Victoria owes money to.

Responses

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (19:02): There were 21 adjournments, and I am very happy to provide those to the relevant people for response in accordance with the standing orders. In response to Mr Batchelor's adjournment matter I would be delighted to join him at Essex Street in Prahran to discuss and see for ourselves the further work that is happening as the ongoing investment into social housing in our inner-urban environments continues.

Mr Puglielli, the matter that you have raised this evening on affordable housing is something which I know that you have a deep interest in, and it is something which we have discussed in this chamber on a number of occasions. Melbourne is in fact comparatively much better than many other states for housing affordability for renters. We know that the vacancy rate is also indicative of a greater availability of properties, and this is not happening by accident – it is happening because of a combination of factors, including planning reform, more than 130 changes to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and the development and delivery of mixed-tenure models of housing, and the eligibility requirements, as you have indicated are a focus for you, on social and affordable housing are really important.

I just want to take you to a couple of those components for the way in which we develop and deliver affordable housing around the state. We know, for example, that median prices and income are a significant driver for financial hardship, and that is where the affordable housing system comes into play. That is defined by way of singles and family household incomes for both metropolitan and regional Victoria. It is really important that as we work to deliver affordable housing we are doing so in a way that makes sure there is an added layer of protection there, not only setting rates at 10 per cent below the area's median market rent but having that additional protection of a cap set at 30 per cent of the median income, with rent increasing each year but not more than 5 per cent. This is where again, as I indicated in response to a question yesterday in this place, working alongside Consumer Affairs Victoria is a big part of making sure that we do have that measure of certainty around affordability and affordable housing within that class of typologies. Homes Victoria's affordable housing homes are rented under a three-year fixed-term rental agreement, which also provides renters with more security, with an option to extend for a further three years after the expiry of that further term.

It is also important, though, that we preserve the balance on eligibility for the purpose of the affordable housing system at the same time that we develop and deliver more housing stock. As we know, the delivery of additional housing stock puts downward pressure on prices both for purchasing and for renting, and we know that the record investments that we have made, alongside planning reforms in the housing statement, have contributed to Australia's best numbers of commencements, planning approvals and completions for housing. That, alongside rental reforms, is ensuring that we are able to address the issues and the opportunities around delivering better affordability, along with a range of measures such as private rental assistance and the affordability mechanisms provided in a range of other parts within government. Again, Mr Puglielli, we are looking forward to continuing to deliver on that work, including through mixed-tenure models and including through the development and delivery of housing, particularly in those inner-ring suburbs as we treble the density of high-rise tower sites to ensure that more people can get access to a home closer to where they grew up.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7:05 pm.