

PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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Thursday 11 September 2025

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Thursday 11 September 2025

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

James Newbury: On a point of order, may I take you to Tuesday's debate, around 2:30 or 3 o'clock, in which I raised a point of order and, Speaker, you responded in relation to the parliamentary system when I raised a point of order about a number of items:

They are on the website and will be answered by the end of today.

That was two days ago, and I raise that particular point of order because, Speaker, when you provided advice to the house that those matters 'will be answered by the end of today', I said, 'Well, they're not answered until they're actually answered publicly.' If they are somehow in some system, that does not mean they are publicly responded to, and therefore they are not answered. A commitment was given to this house that they 'will be answered by the end of today'. That was on Tuesday. None of those items have been answered two days after the fact.

The SPEAKER: We will have the matter looked into for you, member for Brighton.

Jess Wilson: On a point of order, Speaker, last night during debate it has come to my attention that the member for Werribee, who was out of his seat at the time, was interjecting. I note yesterday you spoke about the importance of respect while members are on their feet. I ask you to review the footage because the member for Werribee called me a piece of trash. I would ask him to withdraw.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Kew. I will review the footage.

Matt Fregon: On the point of order, Speaker – and I appreciate the commentary of the member for Kew – I was in the chair at the time, and I counselled members to be respectful. I note I also counselled the member for Werribee to acknowledge the Chair as he passed the mace, as is appropriate, which he did not do. I feel that it was dealt with at the time, but obviously I bow to your wisdom in treating it differently.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Ashwood. I will review the footage.

James Newbury: On the point of order, Speaker, and I note the Deputy Speaker's contribution to this issue, considering the egregious nature of the allegation, it does I think need to be dealt with separately and considered separately.

The SPEAKER: I said I would review the footage. Can I just say that this week has been one of the most disappointing weeks in this Parliament that I have ever experienced in my 15 years. I have not seen such disrespect in the chamber at this level, and I think it is incumbent on all members to take a long, hard look at how they behave in this chamber. This chamber does not operate unless members follow the standing orders, respect the Chair and respect each other.

Bills

Electoral Amendment (Group Voting and Vote Counting) Bill 2025

Introduction

Tim READ (Brunswick) (09:37): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Electoral Act 2002 to abolish group voting tickets in Council elections, to change the way surplus votes are counted in Council elections and for other purposes.

Victoria is the only state where politicians are allowed to decide where your preferences go. When voting above the line in Victoria, as 90 per cent of voters do, voters are only allowed to mark their first preference. Second and subsequent preferences are ignored, and preferences go where your first preference party chooses. So parties do deals, often lubricated with cash, which decide where

Victorians' preferences go. When Victorians vote above the line, to quote Antony Green, 'that sends their vote off on a preferential magical mystery tour across the ballot paper', and deals are often structured to help micro-parties accumulate preference votes at the expense of other parties that received a much higher primary vote. With 12 months left for the term of this Parliament, it is becoming urgent for the government to legislate to eliminate group voting and to allow time for the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) to implement the change, which is why we need to debate this bill now.

We have saved the government time by drafting the Electoral Amendment (Group Voting and Vote Counting) Bill 2025. There is nothing wrong with getting elected on second or lower preferences, and there is nothing undemocratic about a candidate overtaking another with a higher primary vote by accumulating preferences, if that is what the voters want. But when the voters have no control over where their preferences go, as is still the case when voting in the Victorian upper house, then that is not democracy.

Preventing voters from choosing and leaving it to dealers like the infamous preference whisperer leads to some remarkable outcomes. In 2018 Transport Matters won the final seat in the Eastern Metro Region from a primary vote of 0.63 per cent.

Voters for Animal Justice probably had no idea that their vote would elect a taxi campaigner, but that is what the deal meant. The Commonwealth and the states that use this system have all discarded group voting and now ask voters to number their preferences above or below the line. The last state to eliminate group voting was Western Australia, whose Labor government could not justify it with a straight face after the Daylight Saving candidate was elected off a primary vote of 98 votes. He thought he was so unlikely to win he was in the US at the time of the election and had to fly back to take his seat. It is worth asking what other micro-parties could be lurking around the next Victorian election, hoping to win a seat off a few hundred votes. So far, we have been spared the worst, but the far right is organising, and with group voting, the outcomes are in the hands of just a few backroom dealers. The WA Labor government got rid of group voting and decided that Western Australian voters would probably do a better job of choosing who to preference, and that is what this bill does. It allows voters to number their preferences above the line, just as we all did in the federal election a few months ago. It eliminates group voting tickets.

Just as the WA government did, this bill also replaces the outdated and curiously named inclusive Gregory method of counting surplus votes, which was designed when computers were not available to help with complex counts. That method gives surplus votes from some candidates a far greater value than the votes for the other candidates. We replace this with a weighted method so each vote is of equal value at all stages of the count. This is urgent now because there is not much time left to start the process of electoral reform ahead of the next election. We have drafted the legislation. That needs to be passed and then the VEC needs time to prepare for the new, more democratic system. At least we will not need to teach Victorians how to use it, because we do this in every federal election. Politics is about trust, and it is time Victorian Labor trusted Victorian voters to allocate their own preferences.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (09:42): I usually say it is a pleasure, but it is incredibly frustrating to stand up here this morning to not speak in favour of the bill that has been introduced, a bill that is nothing more than an absolute stunt by the Greens political party. I think they have been sitting in here during the week watching the opposition act like children for the entire week so they thought they would get in on the act. A proposed –

The SPEAKER: Member for Tarneit, if you cannot speak to the bill that is being introduced, I will sit you down.

Dylan WIGHT: I will speak to the bill that is being introduced, Speaker – sorry – a bill that I flicked through very briefly before I came into the chamber. It is about four pages long and sort of looks like it has been written on the back of an envelope – student politics sort of stuff. Group voting

tickets is an issue that has been spoken about in a roundabout way since the beginning of this term. We know what the Greens' view is on it – we already know that; we know what it is. We do not need a ridiculous stunt and a ridiculous attempt to introduce an ill-thought-out piece of legislation to know what their view is. We know what their view is because their party has presented their view –

James Newbury interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton!

Dylan WIGHT: at two different inquiries. What I would like to say about this and why I think this stunt this morning is so ridiculous and so dangerous is because the Electoral Matters Committee, of which I am the chair, has just undertaken an inquiry into the potential –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Kew! Member for Brighton, this is your last warning.

Dylan WIGHT: It has just conducted an inquiry into structure of the upper house. Accompanying that was group voting tickets and the system we use to count votes. The point that I would make is that that inquiry is yet to hand down a report but will do so by the end of the year. My view, and I think the view of everybody on at least this side of the house but I would say the entire Parliament, is the attempt to force, foreshadow or even circumvent the recommendations of that inquiry is incredibly irresponsible by the Greens political party, and they are doing it for no other reason than they think that they can gain political benefit out of the elimination of group voting tickets. That is the only reason that they are doing this. 'The Greens do politics differently' – I mean, not really. This is nothing more than grandstanding, a cheap political stunt for their own political gain.

Any electoral reform in Victoria is a serious, serious issue – one that warrants far more consideration, consultation and thought than an ill-thought-out, ill-conceived, opportunistic piece of legislation introduced by the Greens political party on a Thursday morning in the Victorian Parliament. The advice that I would give to the Greens political party is to wait for the report to be tabled from the inquiry into the structure of the Victorian upper house and then engage. You have got a member on the committee, so engage in good faith in deliberation and then engage in good faith thereafter. Introducing this bill this morning is doing none of that. It is a cheap political stunt. The Greens or anybody else in this house can go onto the Parliament website and go through the evidence that was provided within that inquiry. They can go through that and they can form their own view, and then they can wait for the report to be tabled like everybody else does. This piece of legislation introduced by the Greens should not be supported by anybody within this chamber. It should not be supported by anybody in the Victorian Parliament, because it is nothing more than cheap opportunism, and I would suggest that we all vote it down.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:46): I rise to support the member for Brunswick, who has moved to urgently debate the Electoral Amendment (Group Voting and Vote Counting) Bill 2025, which will eliminate the undemocratic group voting ticket system where political parties and preference whisperers direct voters' preferences and will finally, if passed, allow Victorian voters themselves to choose where their vote goes, as should be the case in any democracy. It is urgent we debate it today because this change cannot be made at the last minute. The Victorian Electoral Commission needs time to implement it, and time is running out.

I have to say I was quite surprised by the contribution by the member for Tarneit, because I had thought that he was supportive of giving Victorians the right to decide where their vote goes rather than giving that right to preference whisperers. He talked about needing to wait for the outcome of a parliamentary inquiry, but something the member for Tarneit should know is that we already had a parliamentary inquiry into the group voting system by the Electoral Matters Committee. That report came out and said explicitly that we should not wait for another report into how the upper house might change overall before we implement group voting ticket reform. It said explicitly that we could reform the

group voting ticket system itself, by itself, without having to wait for other reform which might need a referendum. I understand that report was made under his predecessor, a different chair of the EMC. Perhaps that is a bit of a sore point, but maybe he needs to go back and read that report by his predecessor, which says in fact the opposite of what he said in the chamber today.

Currently you can buy a seat in the Victorian upper house for the pretty cheap price, I have to say, of \$55,000. I can see some members in this place checking their phones and their computers, perhaps marginal seat holders looking to see how much is in their account. Let me tell you how this works. First, you pay a preference whisperer like Glenn Druery \$5000 as a down payment to participate in the system. Then you need 500 signatures to form a micro-party. And of course you need to come up with a catchy name to trick voters into thinking they are voting for an actual, real political party with real policies rather than a front for a preference whisperer. Then Druery or another preference whisperer will go and organise preference deals with multiple micro-parties, swapping preferences on group voting tickets. Then, as Antony Green said, their vote will go off on a magical mystery tour across the ballot in a preference spiral and someone will eventually get elected who often has the opposite policies of the parties that the voters actually voted for, even though they got only a tiny, tiny fraction of a per cent of the vote.

Then when you get elected you pay Glenn Druery the rest of the \$55,000 fee. And are you accountable to the Victorian voters? No. You are accountable to Glenn Druery, who is the one who got you elected. Unfortunately, this is legal in Victoria, and Victoria has elected several upper house parties this way. After the 2018 election 20 per cent of the upper house was filled with people elected in this undemocratic way. Twenty per cent of our upper house were elected and the voters did not get to decide their preferences. It is urgent that we fix this undemocratic quirk in Victoria's system that allows people to essentially be scammed.

In 2018 the Sustainable Australia Party were elected with a first preference vote of 1.3 per cent, overtaking parties that got 10 times that vote. That is not democracy. The Liberal Democrats got in on 0.84 per cent of the vote. Transport Matters got in on 0.63 per cent of the vote. The Australian Liberty Alliance got a primary vote of 0.56 per cent and only just missed out. They were a far-right outfit that would have been right at home marching in the anti-immigration rally the other day. As the member for Brunswick has said, it is urgent because we have seen what is happening with the rise of far-right extremism. We have seen neo-Nazis organising. We have seen them say that they have intentions to start their own political parties. They could get 98 votes like the Daylight Saving Party did in WA, stitch up a preference deal with a preference whisperer and get elected to the Victorian upper house. I do not think Victorians want their laws decided by far-right extremists. I have faith in Victorians. I have faith in the Victorian voters that they should decide where their votes go. They should decide who gets elected to our Parliament. I hope everyone agrees.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (09:52): It is my pleasure to make a contribution on this procedural motion to move a bill to consider group voting tickets. The work around group voting tickets was quite well advanced when I was chair of the Electoral Matters Committee. There have been two chairs subsequently. I am probably speaking against my own interest as one who may or may not be contemplating a chance at a campaign in the upper house, but group voting tickets are a democratic abomination. They ought to be dealt with.

The suggestion from the member for Tarneit that a report that is going to get tabled at the end of the year is going to produce a result that will be ready for action, ready to be put into the field, by November of next year is farcical. I mean, Labor pretends to care about homelessness: three years it took them to respond to the upper house report on homelessness. That is three years on an issue they actually say they care about. What chance is there then that they are actually going to get their act together and respond to this prospective report, which may or may not land this year and get this very, very important reform done? I say zero – absolutely no chance whatsoever that this government has any reformist zeal. You have got a non-reformist minister responsible for this part of the legislative landscape. You have got your third electoral matters chair in the space of three years, and you have

got a report that is yet to be written that maybe will be dealing with this issue and in turn government has to deal with that. Well, there is not a prayer, not a hope, that this gets done – on my political assessment of the moving parts here – in time for this election.

That is a missed opportunity by Labor, because what you have is the wholly undemocratic outcomes we see in the other place where people are paying money to – hell, we have got privilege in here – the basically criminal activity of Glenn Druery, who is happily in there shovelling votes for cash. He is just organising this preference-harvesting exercise in the most cynical and base manipulation of the process imaginable. It is a cynical, base and I would say criminal manipulation of the process, because to traduce the democratic intent of Victorians is simply bloody outrageous. He ought to be held furiously to account, and we should shut the door. We should put an end to that particular money-making enterprise. We should put an end to it as soon as we possibly can. And that means dealing with the group voting tickets issue. I think it is a great thing that the Greens have put this issue before the house today, because it is an issue that needs to be dealt with urgently.

The Greens are in fact right when they say it will take the Victorian Electoral Commission some time to get their heads around it. I know the member for Bulleen and I sing from the one song sheet on this. The capacity of the VEC to frankly tie their own shoelaces is limited most days of the week, and their ability to introduce and implement and fairly run an election in this period of time under a new system is frankly pretty slim. So my assessment is that if we do not deal with this legislation, we have absolutely no prayer of getting reforms to group voting tickets done in this term – absolutely no prayer.

It needs reformist zeal from the government. It needs reformist zeal from the minister. It needs a consensus on the floor of the house. It needs the ability of everyone to get around this important and necessary reform. More importantly, it needs bipartisan support, because the micros upstairs are clearly going to vote in their own interest and vote against it. We are pretty familiar with political parties voting in their own interest in this place, clearly, but that would be yet another thwarting of the democratic intent of Victorians. I think voters are fed up, frankly. They have had the reform federally, and they have had the reform in other states. They are fed up of having predetermined preference deals dictating the elected member outcomes in the upper house in the state of Victoria.

It is an important reform. It needs to happen. It needs to happen quickly if the VEC are going to be even within daylight of being able to conduct an election under a new system, because their competence, frankly, on most matters is a matter of not much conjecture. Certainly, they might very well argue that they are good at this stuff, but when I was chair of the Electoral Matters Committee, the reports they served up, the inaccuracies, the denial of claims that voting centres had been shut down when in fact they had been shut down on election day – they are not a competent organisation. Their resources are not well directed as an organisation. If we are going to give them any chance of getting their head around this reform, we need to debate this legislation. We need to debate it in the next sitting week and ensure that this reform finally gets done.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Preston, can I just remind members about the use of unparliamentary language and also the use of ‘you’, which is a reflection on the Chair.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (09:57): I rise to oppose the introduction of the bill by the member for Brunswick. Certainly no-one in this place is ignoring the issue of group voting tickets. Of course all of us who saw that particular video featuring the Angry Victorians Party and Glenn Druery – I think I would safely say that I do not agree with Heston Russell or Chris Burson on almost any political matter, but I do recognise their bravery in coming forward and really showing everyone what was going on. It was a video that shocked all of us with concern for our electoral system.

Having said that, though, for very good reason we have always adopted a cautious approach to reforming the electoral system of this state, and that is of course because when we do so we are changing rules that we also stand to benefit from as parties. It is a process that should always be done with care.

As all of the speakers are well aware, the Electoral Matters Committee has looked into this issue, as the member for Tarneit said, in some detail. There is an entire chapter of the most recent report, chapter 6, devoted to reforming the upper house system. Indeed, as the Greens have mentioned, recommendation 17 of that chapter addresses group voting tickets. Indeed separate recommendations address the weighted inclusive Gregory reforms that the member for Brunswick alluded to. Importantly, everyone who is familiar with that body of the work and the work of the Electoral Matters Committee knows that there are significant unanswered questions that the report notes but does not answer.

I can say to you that one unanswered question for the Greens to answer, which they have not yet been able to, is: why is it that as a political party they supported group voting tickets for years? I sat opposite members of the Greens in 2010 and literally negotiated group voting tickets with them. At no time was it suggested there was anything wrong with the system. That is because we have to recognise, and the Greens must recognise, that this all started from a very well intentioned place – to deal with problems of informality in a complex upper house ballot paper. It is also undeniable that it has now been taken by people like Glenn Druery into a very bad place that those of us talking in 2010 did not anticipate.

Fundamentally, not only is that question unanswered, but a second really important question is unanswered, which is: how are we then going to deal with the question of proportionality in the upper house? We always have the discussion in the Electoral Matters Committee. Probably all of us agree that we do not need a thousand MPs in the upper house; we do not need a massive amount of proportionality where there would be literally thousands of parties. At the same time, we probably all agree that there should not be two members in the upper house. We need to represent Victorian views more broadly. There is a right number somewhere in between. Currently that number is 40 MPs in the upper house, divided into eight regions. We all know the current structure.

But there is also no doubt that group voting tickets currently provide a bit of additional diversity into the upper house that you would not have if you removed them. This was addressed by the Electoral Matters Committee and is the precise reason that we are now finishing a report into reform of the upper house in order to answer this unanswered question: if you get rid of group voting tickets, do you have to make a counterbalancing change to maintain proportionality? The Greens in their remarks today have yet again, as they did in their testimony, refused to answer that question, despite the fact that that is a key question for people to answer.

Instead all they have brought before us is a bill that does little but restate positions that were already well known throughout the electoral matters debate and indeed a bill that I do not think brings anything new to the debate, but most importantly does not answer that question of fundamentally, do we need to –

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Speaker, I very much appreciate the contribution of the member for Preston, but he is misleading the house. I did actually address this directly in my speech.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, member for Melbourne.

Nathan LAMBERT: It may be that the Leader of the Greens has just, in the last couple of minutes, revealed their answer to this question. I am very pleased because I asked during an Electoral Matters Committee hearing about whether they are happy to reduce the proportionality of the upper house and maintain it at the 40 members – is that right?

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Preston.

Nathan LAMBERT: Sorry, Speaker. Through you, Chair, I am pleased, perhaps, that we now do have an answer on that, but I suppose I would only put to you in the short time I have remaining that we perhaps need a little longer than the couple of minutes since we have just finally had an answer to that question.

More importantly, though, to bring you back to where I started, there is an established process for this. There is an Electoral Matters Committee process for this. As the member for Tarneit referred to, there is a report that is on its way and an inquiry that has been completed that answers and addresses those unanswered questions that I have set out in my contribution today. There is absolutely no reason to move to a bill now, when we are waiting for a process, a process the Greens know well and have participated in – a process that has been the one we have used in this Parliament to make our electoral reforms for a long period now. There is no reason to move away from that particular approach. I oppose the member for Brunswick's bill.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (10:02): The Liberals and Nationals will be supporting the Greens in allowing this bill to be introduced to the house, not because we necessarily agree entirely with the bill itself but because we actually do not believe that the government has a monopoly when it comes to good ideas and introducing legislation in this place. I note that the member for Tarneit said this is a frustrating thing to do this morning, but he may have missed the section of the notice paper that says 'Introduction of bills'. It does allow any member in this place to introduce a bill.

Now, on the bill put forward by the Greens, there have been recommendations on this by the Electoral Matters Committee a number of times, as far back as 2022, and we agree that there does need to be reform in this space. But at the same time we do also note that there is an ongoing inquiry.

On the procedural debate, though, I do want to talk about the introduction of bills into this place. Seventeen times since I have been here in this chamber the opposition has moved to introduce bills, introduce legislation into this chamber, that we believe would make this state better. And what we have seen over the last three years, or the last 11 years, under this government, the Allan Labor government, and under the Andrews Labor government prior is an increase in crime. I will go through some of the private members bills that those on this side of the house have sought to introduce over the last three years that could have stopped some of the heinous crimes that we have seen over the last week in terms of the alleged murder of a 15-year-old and a 12-year-old boy in Cobblebank. I will also mention that, even though we support the Greens in this today, the Greens have only ever supported three of the bills that we have sought to introduce into this place. So while we stand here and support the Greens today on the introduction of this bill – we never seek to stifle free speech when it comes –

The SPEAKER: Member for Nepean, through the Chair.

Ben Carroll interjected.

Sam GROTH: If you want to be on their side –

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, Member for Nepean.

Sam GROTH: The Minister for Education would like to be on the side of the Greens in terms of stifling free speech.

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair. Back to the bill before the house.

Sam GROTH: Well, on the procedural motion, I would say that speaking about bills that have previously been brought into this place not allowed to go through is completely on the procedural motion. In this place from the now Leader of the Opposition, the member for Berwick, Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Repeal Bill 2023 – the Greens did not turn up, and it was voted down by the government. The Summary Offences Amendment (Move-on Laws and Exclusion Orders) Bill 2023 was sought to be introduced by the Shadow Attorney-General, the member for Malvern, in November 2023; the Greens opposed the introduction of that bill. The Control of Weapons Amendment (Machetes) Bill 2023 by the member for Berwick on 28 November 2023 – almost two years ago – was brought into this place, was voted down by the government and was voted down by the Greens political party.

How many of the heinous crimes that we have seen, the machete attacks, the attacks on young people in this state, the attacks on families in their homes, could have been avoided had that bill been allowed to be introduced, to be debated, to be discussed – some of the ideas, maybe not all of them, within that bill? How many times could that have stopped what we have seen in Victoria over the last week, six months, 12 months, two years, three years, since these bills were introduced?

The Bail Amendment (Indictable Offences Whilst on Bail) Bill 2024 by Michael O’Brien, the member for Malvern, on 20 February 2024 –

Dylan Wight: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I was happy to let it go for a bit, but, on relevance, I cannot see how we are relevant at all here.

Sam GROTH: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a procedural debate on the introduction of a bill, and I think to debate previous bills that have been looked to be introduced into this place and the procedure behind them is completely relevant.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I actually agree with you, member for Nepean.

Sam GROTH: I appreciate it. The Emergency Management Amendment (Port of Melbourne) Bill 2024 by the member for South-West Coast – the Greens opposed the introduction of the bill. The Sentencing Amendment (Sentencing Practices for Child Sexual Offences) Bill 2024 by the member for Malvern – the Greens did not show up to support the introduction of that bill. The Payroll Tax Amendment (Schools) Bill 2024 by the member for Kew when it comes to private schools – the Greens opposed the introduction of that bill. The Government Construction Projects Integrity Bill 2024 – isn’t that relevant this week? Imagine with what we are seeing on the front page of the *Age* newspaper today. Had these bills been able to be introduced, would what we are seeing on the Big Build sites under the Allan Labor government still be continuing, had the member for Caulfield been allowed to introduce that bill at the time? Well, I do note, surprisingly, the Greens did not turn up to vote for the introduction of that bill.

The Bail Amendment (Strengthening Conduct Conditions) Bill 2024 by the member for Malvern the Greens opposed. The Tobacco Amendment (Stamping Out Fire Bombings) Bill 2024 by the member for Ovens Valley in terms of the firebombings – what do you know, the Greens supported it. Oh my gosh, I found one – something they have actually supported in this place. I can go on: family violence, corrections amendment, bail amendment, control of weapons amendment, worker screening amendment. This place should have the ability to debate bills put before it.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (29): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Will Fowles, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Michael O’Brien, Kim O’Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Noes (48): Jacinta Allan, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.

Business of the house**Orders of the day**

The SPEAKER (10:12): General business, orders of the day 10 to 14, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Documents**Documents****Incorporated list as follows:****DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission – Annual Plan 2025–26 – Ordered to be published

Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 – Government response to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee’s Report on the 2023–24 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission – Report 2024–25

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 65

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission – 2024 report on the Operation of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* – Ordered to be published

Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board – Report 2024–25.

Motions**Motions by leave**

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (10:13): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Casey by 22.4 per cent and condemns the member for Narre Warren South for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep their community safe.

Leave refused.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (10:14): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Maroondah by 23.1 per cent and condemns the member for Ringwood for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep their community safe.

Leave refused.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (10:14): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Wyndham by 29.1 per cent and condemns the member for Point Cook for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep their community safe.

Leave refused.

Danny O’BRIEN (Gippsland South) (10:14): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Hume by 23.9 per cent and condemns the member for Greenvale for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep their community safe.

Leave refused.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:15): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Golden Plains by 16 per cent and condemns the member for Eureka for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep their community safe.

Leave refused.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (10:15): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Greater Geelong by 12.2 per cent and condemns the member for South Barwon and the Labor government for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep the community safe.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:15): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Glen Eira by 10.9 per cent and condemns the member for Bentleigh for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep their community safe.

Leave refused.

Chris CREWITHER (Mornington) (10:15): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Frankston by 20 per cent and condemns the member for Frankston for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep their community safe.

Leave refused.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (10:16): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in the Yarra Ranges by 22.1 per cent and condemns the member for Monbulk for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep our community safe.

Leave refused.

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (10:16): By leave, I move:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Monash by 18 per cent and condemns the member for Mulgrave for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep that community safe.

Leave refused.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (10:16): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Whitehorse by 23.2 per cent and condemns the member for Box Hill for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep his community safe.

Leave refused.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:17): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Brimbank by 7.5 per cent and condemns the member for St Albans for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep their community safe.

Leave refused.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:17): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Central Goldfields shire by 18.2 per cent and condemns the member for Ripon for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep their community safe.

Leave refused.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:17): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Whittlesea by 35.1 per cent and condemns the member for Yan Yean for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep their community safe.

Leave refused.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (10:18): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Melton by 22 per cent and condemns the member for Melton for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep their community safe.

Leave refused.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (10:18): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that crime has risen in Bass Coast shire by 13.2 per cent and condemns the member for Bass for failing to advocate for police resources and powers to keep her community safe.

Leave refused.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:18): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for failing to tackle retail crime and protect frontline workers after promising action 480 days ago, noting Victoria has the nation's highest retail crime, with theft occurring every 12 minutes, leaving retailers to fend for themselves.

Leave refused.

Business of the house

Adjournment

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (10:19): I move:

That this house, at its rising, adjourns until 14 October 2025.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Power saving bonus

David HODGETT (Croydon) (10:19): I rise today to highlight the significant challenges many constituents in my electorate are facing when attempting to apply for the government's \$100 power saving bonus. It is a good program, but there are significant barriers to accessing the \$100 power saving bonus. My office has been contacted by numerous householders who, despite needing the support, are choosing not to apply primarily due to fears of being scammed or a lack of access to the necessary technology. The rise in sophisticated scams targeting vulnerable individuals, particularly those who are not confident with digital platforms, has created a climate of fear and mistrust. We have all been taught to be cautious. If something seems too good to be true, like receiving \$100 for free, it might be a scam. People are rightly wary of sharing personal information online, over the phone or even in person. Unfortunately, the current application process requires individuals to disclose sensitive details, including bank and pension information, often to strangers. This contradicts the very cyber safety principles we encourage. Even when support is available through neighbourhood houses or community volunteers, many elderly residents remain hesitant to hand over personal information. For some, the fear and stress of being scammed outweigh the benefit of applying.

For many residents, the online application process is hard to navigate; especially the uploading of documents such as utility bills and pension cards is simply not feasible. Many do not own scanners or their own computers or smartphones. I urge the minister to invest in targeted support for our ageing population, particularly in digital literacy and secure, accessible application pathways.

Youth crime

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (10:21): There has been a lot of discussion about crime in the Parliament this week. I want to take this opportunity to put a few facts on the table. The fact is there is no better way to prevent crime than through a good education. For Labor, education is our light on the hill because we believe every young person deserves a fair go, no matter where they come from or the size of their parents' bank balance, and we believe education must be at the heart of the youth justice system. When a young person gets caught up in the justice system, we do not give up on them. That is not who we are on this side of the chamber. We know that rehabilitation is not the soft option, rehabilitation is the smart option, and we know that education is more than reading and writing. It is about building hope, and it is showing a

young person that they matter, that they have potential, that their past does not define them, that it is their future that matters most. If you want to live a life of purpose, it is about your future and it is about education.

While the only thing the Liberals are focused on is getting a headline, we are focused on giving vulnerable people the education and the opportunities they deserve right through Victoria, including in Melbourne's western suburbs, because we know the three best crime prevention measures are an education, a job and a stable home – three things that are central to the Labor Party DNA and ethos, because we know when you shut the door down on people, they will eventually want to kick it down. We are not just tough on crime, we are tough on the causes of crime.

Lutfiye Kavci and Vicki Scott

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (10:22): I wish to acknowledge and congratulate two outstanding women in my community, Lutfiye Kavci and Vicki Scott, who were recently inducted into the 2025 Victorian Honour Roll of Women. Lutfiye is a family violence survivor who survived a horrific attempted murder by her ex-husband in 2021, suffering multiple stab wounds that required surgery and extensive treatment. At the trial she gave a moving victim impact statement, declaring 'I'm still here'. Those words have become a rallying message of resilience and survival. Lutfiye realised her strength was inspiring to others. In 2024 she dedicated herself to advocacy for family violence victim-survivors.

I also wish to acknowledge Vicki Scott, who is a personal friend and respected and much-loved community member and an inspiring leader. Vicki refused to sit idle while having treatment for stage 4 bowel cancer in 2022 and turned her attention to helping others. Vicki became the inaugural Goulburn Valley Health Foundation ambassador in 2023. She plays a key role in promoting the foundation's work and fundraising efforts. She also became a GenesisCare consumer advocate for people with cancer. Vicki is involved with many community-based organisations and has contributed significantly to the Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project, who works with the whole community to improve outcomes for young people. Both of these women are making such a positive difference to others and are incredibly worthy recipients.

Friends of Hillcroft Park

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:24): This past weekend I was pleased to join the Friends of Hillcroft Park for a community planting day in South Morang. The Friends of Hillcroft Park, which formed in February this year, hosted the wonderful morning planting event, giving back to the land and helping to nurture a healthier local ecosystem. Supported by Landcare Victoria and Melbourne Water, locals came together in the drizzly weather to plant 332 native trees, shrubs and wildflowers in just 75 minutes, an outstanding achievement that will enrich the park for years to come.

It was great to see so many families, including local resident George and his three kids, coming together to enjoy our local environment. I want to extend my thanks to president Kyoko Izamu, vice-president Gary Murphy, secretary David Legat and treasurer Olek Pogorily for their leadership and for inviting me to join in this terrific initiative. Their efforts demonstrate the best of our community.

Diwali and Annakut

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:25): I was also delighted to represent the Premier at the recent Diwali and Annakut celebrations hosted by BAPS, which has returned to Queen's Hall this year. This annual festival brings together families and friends to mark the triumph of light over darkness, generosity over division and unity over isolation. I wish to thank the many volunteers and organisers from BAPS for the tremendous work they do not only to share Hindu culture and tradition with all Victorians but also to foster inclusion and harmony across our diverse communities. I am very proud that Mill Park is home to one of the two BAPS mandirs in Victoria.

Community safety

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (10:25): Many local residents are experiencing horrific crimes in their homes while Labor keeps the Malvern police station shut 16 hours a day. Residents of Myamyn Street live directly opposite the police station but have experienced serious crime, including just last week. The message from my community is clear: Premier, you shut our police station 16 hours a day while crime continues 24/7. It is time to reopen Malvern police station.

Housing

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (10:26): Fourteen of the Labor government's high-rise activity centres are being imposed on my Malvern electorate; the most of any in the state. Labor wants to see congestion causing high-rise next to the very same train stations where Labor refuses to remove the level crossings. Residents living near Glen Iris or Tooronga level crossings are having insult added to injury. This is not about building more homes. If it was, Labor would work with Stonnington council, which has a housing strategy to provide 67,000 new homes, 34 per cent more than the state government's target. While Labor ignores councils, we see what really motivates them. At 173 Burke Road in Glen Iris, a Woolworths tower proposal was knocked back by council, knocked back by VCAT but approved by Labor's planning minister. Well, guess which company has donated to the Victorian Labor Party? None other than Woolies. If it looks dodgy, it probably is. There is a way to build more homes: listen to locals and work with councils. The problem is, for Labor, it just does not pay.

Chris Gibbs

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (10:27): Chris Gibbs was a Moonee Ponds local for nearly 40 years. He passed away recently following a short but aggressive illness, and he leaves behind a profound void in the lives of all who knew him. He was a proud and loving husband to Lynn, who is in the gallery today; brother to Michael, father to Claire, Dominic and Alex; and grandfather to Elkie and Andy. He was a man of warmth, good humour and kindness, whose presence enriched the lives of all who knew him. Professionally, Chris dedicated his career to mental health, holding significant leadership positions within the Victorian mental health sector, including at the Royal Melbourne Hospital as head of North Western Mental Health and as a founding CEO of the Mental Health Professionals' Network. His career path reflected the strong set of values that Chris lived by personally: that people deserve a chance, support when they needed it and to be treated fairly and with respect. To those who knew him, Chris was remarkable in his capacity to make people feel seen, understood and valued. His extensive and close friendships were a testament to this, and he could always be depended upon, whether it was with a listening ear or a great song recommendation. Often the latter was non-negotiable. To his family he will always be remembered as an extraordinary dad, partner and grandparent who they felt so lucky to have had and will be so deeply missed. Vale, Chris Gibbs.

Community safety

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (10:28): In the last week or so I have been inundated by residents in Manningham who are deeply concerned with issues around law and order, particularly in our municipality. In 2018 the Liberals warned that if you weaken the criminal justice system, you will embolden the criminal element in our society. And over the last week or so, we have seen violent instances and particularly potential home invasions – videos – in Doncaster, Hughesdale, Box Hill, Viewbank and North Balwyn. There were two boys murdered some days ago coming home from basketball – more knife crime in this state. The Premier could not even find it in herself to comment on this issue. She could comment on neo-Nazis coming to her own press conference for the sake of politics but could not come out to explain how knife crime has got so bad in our state under her government that two boys find themselves murdered by this kind of crime that is occurring in our state

today. We have long said that if you weaken the criminal justice system, you will embolden people who will act in these ways. The coalition always stands by those who abide by the law first. The coalition has always said that the criminal justice system should be there to protect those who abide by the law, not those who make excuses for people who break it. And that is the difference between Liberal and Labor in the state of Victoria.

Family violence

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (10:30): Last Saturday afternoon 100 people from my community came together at Watergardens shopping centre to do our second annual Walk With Us event, an event around preventing family violence. I notice those opposite constantly talk about crime figures but never mention, or have not mentioned at all this week, the issue of family violence or in fact the dangers that women in their own homes face at the hands of partner perpetrators.

A sea of orange hats and T-shirts, symbolising solidarity with victims, made their way along the beautiful Taylors Creek, sending a clear message that family violence and violence against women has no place in our community. Local residents walked alongside representatives from the Orange Door, Respect Victoria, the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association, Westjustice, WestCASA, commUnity+ Legal, Lions Club, Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police and councillors from Brimbank and Melton. The walk was a powerful show of unity, and it reminded us that conversations we have at home, at work and in the community are what really matters – conversations that can shift attitudes, change behaviours and prevent violence before it starts. I want to thank all of those that were involved and thank Watergardens shopping centre and particularly the Brimbank–Melton Orange Door and the practitioners from there.

Tee Up for Mental Health Golf Day

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (10:31): On 26 September this year, which is the Friday before AFL Grand Final day, which is a public holiday, I am once again hosting the Tee Up for Mental Health Golf Day. It is a massive instalment this year down in the Latrobe Valley, and this wonderful event just keeps growing year on year. Huge thanks to the Traralgon Golf Club, Traralgon Rotary, Australian Community Support Organisation, Lifeline Gippsland and Gippsland Motor Group. Ron Elliott is the man that is in the hot seat, as he has to try and fit 180 participants into the field. Good luck with that, Ron.

Morwell electorate greyhound racing

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (10:32): Greyhound racing is back at Glenview Park from early 2026. A massive amount of hard work has gone on behind the scenes for this to happen, and our wonderful Gippsland greyhound community will be the big winners, alongside the Traralgon Greyhound Racing Club. Well done and congratulations to everyone there.

Morwell electorate sporting clubs

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (10:32): As we move into September, footy finals, grand final days, in the North Gippsland Football Netball League and in the Mid Gippsland Football Netball League will take place this Saturday. A huge shout-out to all teams on both the football ovals and the netball courts. Good luck to you all, good luck to the umpires, and may the best teams win and may you celebrate in style.

Altona infrastructure

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:33): Last weekend the deputy mayor of Hobsons Bay City Council Rayane Hawli and I popped down to see the newly upgraded Altona foreshore, and it looks incredible. On the Esplanade between Bent Street and Pier Street, this section is now pedestrian-

only access. There are a heap of new seatings, there are shaded areas and there is the most beautiful water playground, which I saw a couple of kids enjoying, even though the weather was not particularly warm. In addition, there are new public showers, new lighting, and fantastic signage that really celebrates Altona Beach. The new pedestrian area will also improve safety for people crossing from the car park to the lifesaving club and the shopping precinct. This is stage 2 of the development, thanks to a \$5.8 million grant from the state Labor government. This builds on the previous investment of \$5.8 million also to upgrade Weaver and Logan reserves a few years ago.

But let us not forget the incredible rebuilding of Altona Pier, which was opened over a year ago. This \$12 million investment has made a lasting difference to our community. On top of that, we have committed funding towards improving pedestrian safety on Pier Street and Blyth Street, with the installation of raised pedestrian crossings. I am proud to be part of a government that has invested millions of dollars into making Altona an even more beautiful part of the world, and now it is in its best shape to host a long summer of fun – safer, smarter, cooler and more beautiful than ever.

Multiculturalism

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:34): There has been a lot of gaslighting and misinformation about who and what the Liberal Party is and what we stand for, and I am proud to stand up here today and put it on record. I am the granddaughter of an illiterate peasant woman from Malaysia who was a World War II survivor, and I am a Liberal MP.

The member for Western Metro Region Trung Luu came here on a boat as a Vietnamese refugee, and he is a Liberal MP. The member for Caulfield's extended family survived the Holocaust, and he is a Liberal MP. I say this to all Victorians: whatever your origin story, whatever your background is – whether your heritage is Chinese, Indian or English, whether you are Indigenous, a new migrant or your family has been here 200 years – we are all Australian and we all belong. My son is both a grandson of Chinese Malaysian migrants and also a seventh-generation Australian, and it is my dream for him and for Victoria that people are judged by the content of their character rather than by the colour of their skin.

We have all had enough of Labor's divisive politics and race-baiting. I am sick of the Premier using multicultural communities to play political games and score political points. How dare she put out press releases to imply to Chinese Victorian kids: 'Hey, some people hate you.' We in the coalition are offering Victoria a new way. I say to every Victorian: you belong and you matter.

Ivanhoe Bowls

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (10:36): I would just like to congratulate the Ivanhoe bowling club and chairperson Pam McColl on the launch of their bowls season at Ivanhoe on 30 August. I was, sadly, unable to attend as I was returning from Wangaratta, where I had spent time at the police station there after the horrific events across that previous week. But I know that it was a successful opening day, and I appreciate the invitation to attend. We were able to provide some gifts for them for some of the prizes. There is also a \$300,000 grant from our government for some upgrades there at Ivanhoe Bowls, which the Banyule City Council are in charge of making happen. I look forward to those works happening at Ivanhoe Bowls club, a great club in my electorate. It is over 100 years old and has been providing great services and great sport.

3081 Angels

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (10:37): 3081 Angels received a grant from the North East Community Fund. I am really pleased that 3081 Angels received that grant. They provide a lot of volunteers. People donate prams, goods and services for families in need, and they are then dispersed by 3081 Angels. They do a great job helping new families and young mums.

Thomas Embling

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (10:37): I also want to acknowledge the launch of the book *The Life and Times of Thomas Embling*, which was done at the Heidelberg repat. Of course Thomas Embling had a great history of supporting people with mental illness, and the Thomas Embling Hospital is in his name.

Camp Sovereignty

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (10:37): Right in the heart of our Melbourne CBD, just across the road from the NGV, behind a small grassy hill is a very special sacred place, and it is called Camp Sovereignty. Aboriginal elders lit a ceremonial fire on this site around the Commonwealth Games 20 years ago and reignited this fire in January last year and have kept it going ever since. The site, which governments called Kings Domain but which is about as far away from the King's Buckingham Palace as you could possibly get, has a long history for First Nations people – before colonisation as a corroboree site and then, shamefully, as an Aboriginal reserve. In 1985 it became a sacred burial ground for 38 people, many of whom had their bodies returned from overseas institutions. Now it is a peaceful place where people come together to talk, yarn, heal and build connection.

So it came as a horrific shock last week when a gang of cowardly, violent neo-Nazis attacked and violently assaulted people at this sacred site. It was a disgusting attack, and it deeply shook so many of our First Nations communities and also our multicultural communities, who are bearing the brunt of a deeply disturbing rise in far-right extremism in our state. Elders at Camp Sovereignty have issued an invitation for the Premier to visit the camp, to visit with elders and victims and to discuss ways the government can support them and fight the rise of far-right extremism. They are calling for government and council investment to rename the site and to build infrastructure for a permanent ceremonial ground. What a great way that would be to show the neo-Nazis they will never, ever win.

Kalkallo electorate Scouts

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (10:39): It was great to recently join the Minister for Youth to officially open the Gilgai Plains Scouts hall in Kalkallo. It was a day of celebration with jumping castles, rock climbing and a free sausage sizzle. The hall, backed by a \$600,000 investment from the Allan Labor government, will serve as a hub for local Scouts and Guides, as well as being available for other community groups. Scouts foster strong, connected communities, so it is fitting that the hall is located on the Gilgai Plains Primary School site and is adjacent to the recreation reserve and opposite the new shopping centre. The hall is more than just a building; it is where young people will learn resilience, make friends, take leadership roles, face challenges and feel accepted in an inclusive space. Congratulations, Gilgai Plains Scout Group, on your opening, and thank you to Chelsea and Oliver for doing such a terrific job as MCs on the day.

While talking about Scouts, I also acknowledge the achievements of the 1st Wallan Wallan Scout group as reflected in their 2025 annual report and celebrated at their recent awards night. Highlights included the return to full management of the Wallan market and significant hall improvements. The Joeys' participation in the Tide Turners Plastic Challenge and the Venturers survival skills camp are just two examples of the diverse activities offered. I congratulate members who achieved peak awards, including Lucas Petrucelli, Hayley Waddell and Jackson Scott; those recognised with the group leaders encouragement award; as well as the leaders who ensure the success of the program, including Erin Petrucelli and Kim Paton. Congratulations, Wallan Wallan Scout group.

Kamaruka

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (10:40): I recently had the privilege of visiting Kamaruka, a remarkable specialist school in South Yarra that serves up to 60 neurodivergent boys from year 2 to year 10. Founded in 2001 by Alfonso Scibilia, Kamaruka provides a lifeline for students with ADHD

and autism spectrum disorder who struggle in mainstream education. Under the leadership of the wonderful principal Michelle Zintschenko, I met their school captain and a number of boys from a range of years, whose stories exemplify how the right environment allows neurodivergent students to survive and thrive. With a modified curriculum, chill-out zones for regulation, and dedicated staff, Kamaruka restores self-esteem and creates pathways to success for students who have been failed in other places. However, small specialist schools like Kamaruka face systemic funding disadvantages. While they receive per-student loading, their total funding capacity remains severely limited compared to larger institutions. More critically, research shows that ADHD and other neurodivergent conditions often attract no additional funding at the school level, despite students meeting disability support criteria. The current census-based funding system, with its 1 August snapshot date, creates a perverse incentive for schools to game enrolment timing rather than focus on genuine student outcomes. The inadequate recognition and treatment of ADHD alone costs our government over \$20 billion annually through reduced productivity and increased healthcare costs.

St Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Church

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:42): I recently attended the St Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Church in St Albans for their annual My Big Fat Greek Festival at the annual parish Panigiri, and it was an absolute honour to join thousands of locals and across Melbourne as well. It was fantastic to see His Grace, the Bishop; Reverend Father Demos; Tony Tsourdalakis from Victorian churches and communities; and of course my very good friend Mario Kalogiannis, the parish president. It was a fantastic day, as I said, and I do want to thank the volunteers for again hosting a great event.

Emine Davut

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:43): On another matter, I do want to express my deep condolences on the passing of Emine Davut. A local St Albans and Labor member, she was a true advocate for women's improvements, including joining the women's group, and gave back to her community.

Yilmaz Cesur

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:43): On another matter, I also express my condolences on the passing of Yilmaz Cesur. A proud local, a Labor member, he will be deeply missed as well. I do send my condolences to my good friend in the other place Enver Erdogan and his family.

Mick Mirovic

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:43): On another matter, I wish to congratulate Mick Mirovic, a teacher at University Park Primary School who has dedicated 42 years of service to teaching. I am wishing him all the very best in his retirement.

Diamond Valley College

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:43): Congratulations to the fantastic team at Diamond Valley College on their wonderful production of *Cinderella*. I really want to acknowledge the fantastic performers, who had great confidence, skill and talent – Ayla Coxford, Leo Liu, Amelia Wilson, Olive Murphy, Jasmine Mierke, Anna Egan, Willow Bullock, River Said, Sara Berecki, Matilda Prendergast, Elise Bidwell, Lucy Brennan, Shyla Campbell, Lucy Cracknell, Lucy Galpin, Evie Gray, Scarlett Hare, Evie Jackman, Aylisha Landy Stanway, Iris Murphy, Matilda Oaten, Sienna Owen, Zoe Sangwin and Lily Stephens – for their fantastic work.

Research Lower Plenty Baseball Club

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:44): Congratulations to the Research Lower Plenty Baseball Club, celebrating 70 years of this great club. Baseball is a fantastic sport, and I thank current winter president Don McKay and summer president AJ Baillargeon, past presidents, committee members, volunteers and players for their commitment to sport and community.

Eltham Wildcats Basketball Club

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:44): Congratulations, Eltham Wildcats, on your diamond jubilee, marking 60 years of continued commitment to basketball in our community. Six decades is an incredible testament to the strength and success of this amazing club of over 5000 members. Thank you to club CEO Richard Irving and past CEOs Connor Matthews and Greg Jeffers, my collaborators on Monty secondary's three-court basketball stadium. Thank you also to fantastic president Peter Meehan and the whole Wildcats family. This is an incredible milestone, and I am sure we will get to celebrate many more.

St Vincent's Care Eltham centenary

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:45): I had the pleasure of joining staff, residents and supporters of St Vincent's Care in Eltham, also known as Judge Book Village, to celebrate their centenary. It was a fun afternoon of music, dancing and stories shared from years gone by, including great stories told by Jim Yarwood. Thank you to all involved in putting together this wonderful afternoon.

Dau Akueng and Chol Achiek

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (10:45): The Melton community right now is hurting and feeling a profound sense of loss and pain after the deaths of Dau and Chol, whose lives were stolen as they walked home from basketball on Saturday night. Dau and Chol were on their way home from Cobblebank Stadium, which is always full of basketball players young and old and a place that has become a cultural hub for all sports and competition in the Melton community. Both boys were barbarically targeted and hunted down just metres from their homes. Disgracefully, the media decided to screen this barbaric attack – shame on them. Melton police are working around the clock trying to bring justice for these victims and their families. These perpetrators will be caught, and they will be held accountable for the murders of these two young boys.

I want to acknowledge the local residents who rushed to the aid of Chol and Dau: the woman who cradled Chol and was with him until the end, ensuring he was not alone and was no longer afraid – what courage you showed – and the other neighbours who rushed outside into the street, who were not sure exactly what they were running out to but without question wanted to help and protect their community. I also want to thank the first responders who attended the horrific scene. It is no easy job. Thank you for your service not only today but every single day in showing up for Victorians no matter what. I extend my heartfelt condolences to the families, friends, teammates and the Melton Secondary and Staughton College communities, who are mourning the loss of Dau and Chol. We stand alongside our community. More work needs to be done, and we will do it. If you have any information, please contact the Melton police or Crime Stoppers.

Eureka electorate crime

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (10:47): I rise today as a very, very proud representative of my wonderful electorate of Eureka. I do not take well to people talking it down and implying that there is something terrible afoot, so I took objection this morning when the member for Warrandyte sought to paint Golden Plains as some sort of terrible crime spot. I just would like to point out a few facts. Golden Plains shire has one of the lowest rates of crime in Victoria. There has indeed been an increase, and I

would point to several things in that increase. One, the figures that the member for Warrandyte was spouting equate to the population increase. We have got a very growing area. But I would also point out the increase there has been in family violence. Those on the other side do not seem to want to talk about family violence, because everybody in this state knows that it is this government that has made real changes, beginning with the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which those on the other side decided to describe as ‘a lawyer’s picnic’. So while they are playing cheap political games and trying to bag out my electorate, let it be known – Riordan represents it too.

Cranbourne food truck

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:48): The Cranbourne food truck is a perfect example of the best of our community, and particularly the best of some of our Cranbourne faith communities, bringing people together to provide food relief. I have visited and have seen the care and hospitality and some topnotch food. I particularly commend the coordinators from St John’s Anglican Church Denis Cody and Phillip Start from the Uniting Church food truck and of course the wonderful Ethan Bailey. I would like to put on the record my thanks to the following businesses: Hot Daily Bread, Cranbourne West; Aspire early learning centre; Gemini Catering Equipment; Ivan’s Pies; Alex Makes Meals; and Cranbourne Air Conditioning.

Michael O’Keeffe

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:49): On another matter, I condole the loss of a great man and a real gentleman, Michael Joseph O’Keeffe, known as Mick, beloved husband and best friend of Mary O’Keeffe. I watched their love as I was growing up and into my adult life. He was the devoted father of Maree, Chris, Janine, Michael, Melissa and Peter, a grandfather of so many and a great grandfather as well. It was a beautiful requiem mass at St Benedict’s. I feel honoured to have had Michael O’Keeffe in my life. Vale, Mick.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I believe the member for Brighton has a point of order, which I will take, but before I do I want to speak to all members. *Rulings from the Chair*, from Speaker Andrianopoulos from 1999, says:

It is appropriate for points of order to be taken and dealt with at the end of the time for making statements. Members should be afforded the opportunity to make statements uninterrupted.

Hence I asked you to wait until the end, and I will now hear your point of order, member for Brighton.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do appreciate and was aware of the ruling. I did think it was important to at least make you aware of the concern. During members statements the member for Warrandyte spoke about her heritage and her grandmother coming to this country, and in the middle of that contribution on her proud heritage, the Minister for Police called her a weirdo. I think by any measure we would consider that behaviour unparliamentary – simply unparliamentary. This is not a matter of personal offence, it is simply unparliamentary. I would ask you if the Speaker could consider this matter, because in the last week, in condoling on the death of a police officer, the member for Eureka attacked the member for Warrandyte and was forced to apologise. Obviously, it was a hollow apology, as we have since seen. However, I would say that twice in two weeks the member has been quite viciously attacked and personally attacked. I think considering this matter has happened in relation to one member, I would ask that the Speaker personally review the footage.

Michaela Settle: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, to the suggestion that it was a hollow apology I take great offence. I made a genuine apology, and for the member for Brighton to decide what my motivations were in that is beyond the pale.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Points of order are not an opportunity for personal statements.

Nicole Werner: Further to the point of order, Deputy Speaker, in terms of it being unparliamentary, it was, for clarity, in the middle of me saying that I am the granddaughter of an illiterate peasant woman from Malaysia who was a World War II survivor. I would like for that to be reviewed as the Minister

for Police called me a weirdo in that very sentence. I would like to seek clarity as to the unparliamentary nature of that. Is it a problem that I am a migrant, or the daughter of migrants? Is it a problem that my grandmother is illiterate? Is it a problem that I am a woman? Is it a problem that I am of Chinese origin? I would like to know.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I am going to rule on the point of order. I will stand up if we do not settle down a bit. On the point of order that you have raised – you have already raised the point of order.

James Newbury: Another matter has just arisen relating to this.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On this point of order I will rule. If the house wishes to raise points of order that are separate to that point of order, we can do that in time. As I mentioned with Speaker Andrianopoulos's ruling, members statements are an important part of our day. It is a chance for all members to speak for their electorates and speak on matters of importance for the state. Therefore sometimes we have robust debate in this house, and whilst all members should be respectful in their conduct, there are times when opinions are given from anyone in this chamber. I accept that you wish the Speaker to review, and I am happy to pass that on to the Speaker, but I would suggest – and this goes towards what our Speaker has said in question times this week – that all members should be respectful of each other at all times. It is not for us to forget who we represent in this house. I am not putting that to anyone in this house. So to your point of order, I will pass it on to the Speaker.

James Newbury: I do note that the member herself has confirmed the offence. To assist, the member has confirmed the personal offence that was taken, which adds to the issue. On a separate point of order, Deputy Speaker, in the debate that just occurred the Minister for Environment suggested that the offence the member took was somehow about seeking publicity for herself.

Members interjecting.

James Newbury: Members are laughing. It is absolutely outrageous that the government continues to target this member. It is clearly a strategy, and it is absolutely outrageous.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! You need to state the point of order, member for Brighton.

James Newbury: I am asking for the Speaker to consider the way that the government is behaving towards the member for Warrandyte, because it is unacceptable.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members, I am going to rule on this point of order. The member for Warrandyte, resume your seat, please. That is not a point of order. I encourage you to visit the Speaker outside this chamber should you wish to take that further.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, there is no process that requires me to raise matters in private with a Speaker. This is actually a matter of privilege.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members, including ministers, will be quieter if they are not in the chamber.

James Newbury: This is a matter of privilege. The behaviour towards the member for Warrandyte is unacceptable, and it needs to stop.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, in your own words you have said that this is a matter for privilege –

James Newbury: Of privilege.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Of privilege – if we are having a conversation when this house is not a place of conversation.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members would be wise to let us get through this quietly. If you have an issue of privilege, there is an avenue for that – there is the Privileges Committee. You have avenues for that. What you have raised is not a point of order, and we shall move on.

Nicole Werner: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I draw your attention to the fact that the minister at the table interjected during the point of order, saying, from what I took down – but I would request that this be reviewed – ‘Stop using the chamber as content for your TikTok.’ I seek advice from the Deputy Speaker. Is it not our job as parliamentarians to actually speak on behalf of our community and put that to our community so that they know that the opposition is holding the government to account? Is that not the role and responsibility of us as members of Parliament?

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Nicole Werner: Is that not our role and what we are required to do on behalf of the 7 million Victorians we represent?

Lauren Kathage interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Yan Yean can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Yan Yean withdrew from chamber.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: This is a chamber of debate. All interjections are disorderly. Wouldn't it be nice if there were not any? Further to that, it is not a point of order.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Frankston! Shall we move on?

Bridget Vallenge: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, under Victorian occupational health and safety law, offensive comments made based on a personal attribute – this is, quite frankly, happening repeatedly from the government members to members on this side, including the member for Warrandyte. I have also received disparaging remarks based on my gender from those government members. This is a workplace. I would ask you to ask the Speaker to review that in terms of this being a workplace and that we are under OH&S law and in terms of offensive remarks that are repeatedly coming from the Labor government members to members on this side based on personal attributes – based on gender, race and all of these things. I would ask you to ask the Speaker to review the footage regularly, because this is happening regularly.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would counsel all members that direct imputations on members are disorderly and members can ask they be withdrawn if offence is taken at the time. If those debates reflect on multiple members, as is the previous wisdom of the Chair, then it is a matter for debate. But I counsel all members that if debate is directed to them individually and it is offensive and they take offence, they should stand and ask for withdrawal.

A member: Happy to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: You have to do it at the time.

A member: It was during members statements. It was at the end of members statements.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, I appreciate that, and that is the complication of the matter.

Steve Dimopoulos: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business impugned the entire membership of the Parliament on this side, when the only person that uses gendered language like ‘nasty’ is the member for Brighton in relation to female ministers of the Victorian government.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, offence cannot be taken communally. That is a longstanding decision of the Chair. There is no point of order.

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the guidance given to the house. I absolutely appreciate the importance of members having the capacity to robustly debate, but I took the opportunity this morning to raise and make you as Deputy Speaker and the Speaker aware of what I felt was a particular targeting towards the member for Warrandyte. That is what the entire conversation was about: the particular targeting of the member for Warrandyte.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Again, part of the problem with points of order is that they become a conversation. This house, as the Speaker has said multiple times, is not a place of conversation; this house is a place of debate. I have already ruled on your original point of order, and it will be referred to the Speaker for consideration. There is no need for further conversation, member for Brighton.

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, this is not a place for conversation, and reflecting on the Chair is unhelpful and disorderly. Frankly, all of us should understand the rules of this house.

Bills

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

Statement of compatibility

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (11:05): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025:

*In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the **Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025.*

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

Overview of the Bill

The Bill:

- creates Mount Buangor, Pyrenees and Wombat-Lerderderg national parks; Cobaw, Hepburn and Mirboo North conservation parks; and Wandong Regional Park
- expands the existing Bendigo Regional Park and several other parks, adds land to the Wimmera Heritage River and revokes several native game sanctuaries
- renames the Yellingbo Landscape Conservation Area, expands the park and provides for riparian management licences
- makes several amendments to improve the operation of the *Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020*
- redefines the areas which can be leased at Princes Park and the St Kilda Marina
- makes other miscellaneous and technical amendments, including modernising outdated, gendered references and repealing spent or redundant provisions.

Human rights issues***Section 12 – Freedom of movement***

Section 12 of the Charter provides that every person who is lawfully in Victoria has the right to move freely within Victoria. It also provides that, every person has the right to enter and leave Victoria, and the freedom to choose where to live within Victoria. The right to freedom of movement is not an absolute right and may be reasonably limited in certain circumstances, including where it is in the public interest to do so.

Creating new park areas

Part 3 of the Bill (clauses 8 and 10) amends the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* (CLR Act) and Part 8 (clauses 51, 55, 58, 62, 65, 71, 73, 82 and 87) amends the *National Parks Act 1975* (NP Act) to create new park areas under those Acts. In doing so, new sections 64 and 65 of the CLR Act (to be inserted by clause 7) and new clauses 3, 6, 10, 15, 19, 22, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30 and 31 of Part 2 of Schedule One to the NP Act (to be inserted by clause 114) provide that certain land ceases to be a road when the new park areas are created.

It may be perceived that the creation of new park areas or the cessation of roads may limit the ability of a person to move freely within those areas. However, the relevant provisions simply change the status of the Crown land. They do not create any restrictions on a person moving freely within those areas or within Victoria.

Therefore, the Bill does not limit the right to freedom of movement protected under section 12 of the Charter.

Extending the leasable areas at Princes Park and the St Kilda Marina

Clause 3 of the Bill amends the *Carlton (Recreation Ground) Land Act 1966* (Carlton Act) to extend the leasable land under that Act at Princes Park (Ikon Park) by 203 square metres, and clause 118 amends the *St. Kilda Land Act 1965* (St Kilda Land Act) to extend the leasable land at the St Kilda Marina by 7,526 square metres.

The grant of a lease under those Acts conveys a right to occupy an area to the exclusion of others in accordance with the terms of the lease may be perceived as limiting the right to freedom of movement within the area over which the lease is granted. However, any limitations to the right are minimal as the additional leasable areas are minimal and the land is already subject to developments under leases under the CLR Act. Any restriction on people's movements would be imposed only to the extent necessary to fulfil the purpose of the leases.

Section 19 – Cultural rights

Section 19(2) of the Charter provides that Aboriginal persons should not be denied the right to enjoy their identity and culture, maintain their language or maintain their kinship ties. It also provides that Aboriginal Victorians must not be denied the right to maintain their distinctive spiritual, material and economic relationship with the land and waters and other resources with which they have a connection under traditional laws and customs.

The right is particularly relevant to several provisions of the Bill which will facilitate the granting of Aboriginal title under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* over several parks to the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and the Taungurung Land and Waters Council in accordance with their recognition and settlement agreements with the State.

The relevant provisions create Wandong Regional Park under the CLR Act (clause 10) and update the plans used in defining Kinglake National Park (clause 84), Avon Wilderness Park (clause 85) and Cathedral Range State Park (clause 86) under the NP Act to provide a suitable basis for Aboriginal title to be granted over the parks.

The right is also relevant to clause 64 of the Bill, which amends the name of Yellingbo Landscape Conservation Area in the NP Act to the Liwik Barring Landscape Conservation Area to reflect an Aboriginal name chosen by the Wurundjeri People.

These aspects of the Bill will therefore promote the cultural rights protected by the Charter.

The right is also relevant to clauses 3 and 118 of the Bill, which extend the areas of leasable land under the Carlton Act and the St. Kilda Land Act (as discussed above in relation to section 12 of the Charter). For the same reasons mentioned in relation to the section 12 rights, granting a lease may limit the ability of Aboriginal persons to continue to enjoy their distinct relationship with the land. However, given that the additional leasable areas in these instances are minimal and the land is already subject to developments under leases under the CLR Act, any limitations are minimal.

Conclusion

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

Steve Dimopoulos
Minister for Environment

Second reading

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (11:05): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025 will amend several public land related Acts. Importantly, it will implement several commitments to create several new park areas in Central West Victoria and at Mirboo North and to expand the opportunities for deer hunting by stalking in 2 existing national parks.

Victoria is home to diverse landscapes, from native grasslands to dense forests, from wild mountain ranges to rugged coastlines. These are important to Victorians from all walks of life and deserve our care to make sure that Victorians today, and in the future, can experience and enjoy them in the ways that they love to.

This Government backs our great outdoors, and we are proud to invest and care for the land that makes Victoria such a great place to live, work and visit. This Government will continue to keep our public land healthy for everyone to enjoy, now and into the future.

In 2019, the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) provided Government with a report on the use of, and care for, public land in Central West Victoria. This is home to 380 rare or threatened species, which rely on Government to ensure their protection. We know that over tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal people have developed enduring and profound connections to Country in this part of Victoria. We also know that residents and visitors now enjoy a whole range of recreational activities here, particularly as more people look for ways to escape their busy lives in our cities.

The Government's response to VEAC's report committed to creating 3 new national parks, 2 new conservation parks and 7 new or expanded regional parks as well as retaining areas of State Forest and creating several nature and other smaller reserves. The Minister for Environment at the time noted the wide-ranging demands on this public land, to not only provide safe homes for our threatened species but also provide more opportunities for Victorians to recreate and connect with nature and their communities. This Bill reflects that need for balance and responds to the needs of the Victorian community and our flora and fauna.

In summary, the Bill will:

- create Mount Buangor, Pyrenees and Wombat-Lerderderg national parks and Cobaw and Hepburn conservation parks, add land to Bendigo Regional Park, extend the Wimmera Heritage River and revoke several native game sanctuaries in Central West Victoria and create Mirboo North Conservation Park in West Gippsland
- enable seasonal recreational deer hunting in parts of the 3 new Central West national parks and Errinundra and Snowy River national parks in East Gippsland
- add land to the Yellingbo Landscape Conservation Area, change its name in the National Parks Act to the Liwik Barring Landscape Conservation Area and provide for riparian management licences in relation to 3 areas
- amend the areas of the existing Alpine, Brisbane Ranges and Dandenong Ranges national parks, Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park and Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park
- create Wandong Regional Park and update the plans of several parks to support the granting of Aboriginal title over those areas
- make several improvements to the *Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020* (Great Ocean Road Act)
- add small areas at Princes Park and the St Kilda Marina to the land that can be leased under a long-term lease at those sites

- make miscellaneous other amendments and improvements to several Acts, including by replacing gender-specific language and repealing spent provisions.

Enhancing the parks system in Central West Victoria

Victoria has a world-class system of national parks

Nearly 3.5 million hectares of Victoria's natural and cultural heritage are protected in an enviable system of national, state and other parks under the National Parks Act for this and future generations to visit and enjoy. The system aims to protect representative samples of the diverse natural environments occurring on public land and is a cornerstone for nature conservation in Victoria.

The areas protected under the National Parks Act are complemented by several million hectares of State forest as well as regional parks and a suite of smaller reserves. Together, the various land categories provide opportunities for the community to enjoy our precious public land in the ways they want to, including recreational prospecting and hunting. The government supports this broad range of uses across Victoria's public land as a means of encouraging everyone to get outdoors and experience nature, as well as growing regional economies and communities.

Through the creation of the new national parks in this Bill in combination with the cessation of large-scale timber harvesting in Victoria, this government is delivering landmark protections for precious biodiversity and endangered species, providing a lasting legacy for future generations. This largely completes the establishment of Victoria's outstanding system of national parks.

The new Central West national and conservation parks will enhance the parks system

The forests of Central West Victoria, located at the western end of the Great Dividing Range and long home of the Dja Dja Wurrung, Eastern Maar, Taungurung, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri peoples, contain important natural and cultural values, as well as the headwaters of several major river systems of critical importance to parts of western Victoria. They are a much-loved part of the State, are relatively close to a significant proportion of Victoria's population and are enjoyed by many visitors.

The government acknowledges the close connection of the Traditional Owner groups to the new park areas and the importance of Country to those groups, and it is committed to working with Traditional Owners in the ongoing management of these areas. It also acknowledges the connection which other Victorians have developed in more recent times with these areas and the enjoyment that the community derives from them.

As part of implementing the government's response to VEAC's *Central West Investigation Final Report*, this Bill will create the Mount Buangor (5,265 ha), Pyrenees (15,150 ha) and Wombat-Lerderderg (44,860 ha) national parks and the Cobaw (2,730 ha) and Hepburn (2,530 ha) conservation parks under the National Parks Act.

The new parks are for Victorians to enjoy

National parks are not only about caring for important natural and cultural values; they are also about providing opportunities for the public's enjoyment, recreation and education. Indeed, in 2022–23 national parks and other parks and reserves in Victoria welcomed approximately 90 million visitors, contributing significantly to local and regional economies.

The Central West parks will add to the attractions for visitors to the region and the nearby historic towns, mineral springs and wineries. Activities in the new parks may include walking, picnicking, nature observation, fishing, camping, car touring, 4-wheel driving, trail bike riding, mountain biking, horse riding and dog walking on leads in specified areas.

Seasonal recreational deer hunting by stalking between 1 May and the start of the September school holidays will be permitted in the 3 national parks, other than in the existing Mount Buangor State Park, the existing Lerderderg State Park and Musk Creek Reference Area (in Wombat-Lerderderg National Park) and the 2 existing nature conservation reserves included in the Pyrenees National Park. This will provide opportunities for deer hunting by stalking during the quieter winter months while aiming to minimise any impact on park visitors during the peak visitor periods.

The addition of Wellsford Forest will enhance Bendigo Regional Park

The Bill will also add the Wellsford Forest (7,100 ha) to Bendigo Regional Park under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*. The addition contains significant natural values, including remnant box-ironbark forest and grassy woodland, several large old trees and habitat for threatened species.

Recreational prospecting, dog walking and dog sledding will be permitted as well as picnicking, nature observation, 4-wheel driving, trail bike riding, mountain biking, horse riding and camping. Consistent with the government's response to VEAC's *Central West Investigation Final Report*, domestic firewood collection will be permitted to continue in designated areas until 1 July 2029.

Enhancing the parks system in West Gippsland

The government has accepted a recommendation of the Eminent Panel for Community Engagement in its first report, *Future Use and Management of Mirboo North and Strathbogrie Ranges Immediate Protection Areas Final Report*, to create the Mirboo North Conservation Park under the National Parks Act.

This park will protect significant remnant biodiversity values in the western half of the largely cleared Strzelecki Ranges. Recreation activities currently occurring in the area will generally be permitted to continue in the park, including bushwalking, four-wheel driving, trail bike riding, mountain biking, horse riding and dog walking.

Expanding deer hunting opportunities into Errinundra and Snowy River national parks

The Bill will expand the opportunities for seasonal recreational deer hunting (by stalking) into Errinundra and Snowy River national parks in far East Gippsland. This will enable such hunting in these remote parks east of the Snowy River, other than in several reference areas, and subject to conditions to help minimise impacts on other users.

Supporting the granting of Aboriginal title

The Bill will help facilitate the granting of Aboriginal title under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* over certain parks in accordance with recognition and settlement agreements between the State and 2 Traditional Owner corporations – in particular, part of Baw Baw National Park and the Avon Wilderness Park in Gunaikurnai Country and Cathedral Range State Park, Wandong Regional Park and parts of Kinglake National Park in Taungurung Country. Following the granting of Aboriginal title, the parks will continue to be managed as parks under the National Parks Act or the Crown Land (Reserves) Act, with no changes to access and current activities for all Victorians.

Before Aboriginal title can be granted, the regional park (850 ha), situated in the forests of the Great Dividing Range east of the Hume Freeway near Wandong, needs to be formally created under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act and the plans defining the boundaries of the existing parks under the National Parks Act updated in line with the current standards of Surveyor-General Victoria so that they are suitable for the granting of Aboriginal title.

Enhancing Yellingbo [Liwik Barring] Landscape Conservation Area

Yellingbo LCA was created under the National Parks Act in 2021 to implement accepted recommendations in VEAC's 2013 *Yellingbo Investigation Final Report*. It currently comprises 7 areas totalling 1,790 hectares in the Yarra Valley and is being established in stages.

The Bill will add 6 further areas totalling 230 hectares to the LCA: Menzies Creek and Woori Yallock Creek nature conservation areas, Britannia Creek, Little Yarra River and McCrae Creek streamside areas and an addition to the existing Yellingbo Nature Conservation Area.

The Bill will also amend the name of the LCA in the National Parks Act to the Aboriginal name proposed by the Wurundjeri People and recorded in the Register of Geographic Names – Liwik Barring (meaning Ancestors' Trail).

The Bill will amend the National Parks Act to enable riparian management licences to be granted to persons whose freehold land adjoins one of the three new streamside areas. The purpose of these licences is to maintain or improve the riparian environment of the area.

Amending the boundaries of several existing parks

The Bill will add land to Brisbane Ranges National Park (14 ha), Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park (12 ha) and Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park (80 ha) to enhance those parks.

In relation to the Alpine National Park, and as part of a longer-term strategy where a forested part of the freehold land containing the track would be exchanged for an area of public land and the freehold included in the national park, an area of 87 hectares will be excised from the park. Pending any land exchange, the station owner has agreed to lease the 4-wheel drive access track to the State to enable ongoing visitor access through the freehold into the national park, and the land excised from the park will remain public land.

The Bill will also correct the boundary of Dandenong Ranges National Park (0.4 ha excision) and excise a section of road from Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park.

Extending the long-term leasable areas at Princes Park and St Kilda Marina

The Bill will amend the *Carlton (Recreation Land) Land Act 1966* and the *St. Kilda Land Act 1965* to enable all of the land at Ikon Park and at the St Kilda Marina to be leased under the relevant Act through a single long-term lease. This involves adding very small areas totalling 203 square metres at Princes Park and 0.7 hectares at the St Kilda Marina to the leasable area under those Acts.

Improving the Great Ocean Road Act

The Great Ocean Road Act provides for the establishment and operation of the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (the Authority) and the protection of the Great Ocean Road and its environs.

The Bill will make several miscellaneous amendments to improve the operation of the Act, including:

- clarifying several of the Authority's functions
- improving the corporate planning provisions
- clarifying the definition of the 'Great Ocean Road scenic landscapes area' to ensure that relevant areas are not inadvertently excluded
- providing a more flexible approach to considering submissions on any draft strategic framework plan that are not adopted, and clarifying the approval and reporting requirements in relation to any such plan
- providing for the preparation of a land management strategy to provide long-term directions, strategies and priorities for the Authority's land management.

Other amendments

The Bill will also make miscellaneous amendments to several Acts by:

- amending the National Parks Act to enable the Minister to authorise a private water pipeline over part of Hattah-Kulkyne National Park to adjoining freehold land and to grant a reasonable right of access over that park and the Bay of Islands Coastal Park to a person whose land abuts or is surrounded by those parks
- amending the *Forests Act 1958* to clarify the status of some land under that Act
- replacing outdated language in the Crown Land (Reserves) Act and National Parks Act and repealing several spent provisions in those Acts
- repealing the *National Parks (Amendment) Act 1989*, which is now spent.

Conclusion

The Bill strikes the right balance between enhancing the protection afforded to some significant areas of Victoria's natural and cultural heritage and providing opportunities for recreation and connection with nature.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (11:06): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday 25 September.

Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025*Statement of compatibility*

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (11:07): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025:

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

The Bill, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, engages the Charter rights to privacy (s 13(a)), freedom of expression (s 15), humane treatment when deprived of liberty (s 22(1)), and recognition and equality before the law (s 8). To the extent that the Bill limits any Charter rights, such limits are reasonable and justifiable in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

The objective of the Bill is threefold.

The first is to give the Mental Health Tribunal additional functions which are currently fulfilled by the Forensic Leave Panel. These functions will be undertaken by a new forensic division established within the Mental Health Tribunal. This forensic division will hear applications for limited on ground and limited off-ground leave from forensic patients and residents to enable them to take part in a range of activities in the community to aid their rehabilitation and community reintegration and to hear appeals from forensic patients and residents regarding refusal of special leaves of absence. These applications are made under the *Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997 (CMIA)*. Further, the forensic division will review decisions of the chief psychiatrist or authorised psychiatrist regarding transfers of forensic patients from one designated mental health service to another, under the *Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 (MHWA)*. The procedures and membership of the Mental Health Tribunal are amended to accommodate its new functions.

The second is to broaden the users of the statewide electronic health information system to enable information sharing reforms recommended by the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (see recommendation 62). It also enables the sharing of information between the electronic health information system (established under the MHWA) and the Electronic Patient Health Information Sharing System (EPHISS) under the *Health Services Act 1988*.

The third is to provide consequential amendments following from those two objectives, and minor other amendments. These include the amendment of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* to exempt documents of the Mental Health Tribunal's forensic division related to their quasi-judicial functions; and to clarify that the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner's employees can disclose information for the purpose of preventing serious harm.

Leave Applications by Forensic Patients and Residents

The functions of the Forensic Leave Panel under the CMIA will be moved to the Mental Health Tribunal in the MHWA. These functions are three groups of applications: limited on ground and off-ground leave, reviews of decisions with respect to special leave, and transfers of forensic mental health patients from one designated mental health service to another. Common purposes of leave granted include leave to attend medical or therapeutic appointments; undertake activities of daily living; build or maintain relationships with family and friends in the community; or attend educational, vocational, volunteering, or employment activities.

In considering applications by forensic patients and residents made in accordance with the CMIA, the Mental Health Tribunal is not required to have regard to the mental health and wellbeing principles provided in MHWA.

Freedom of movement

Freedom of movement is not engaged. The Bill streamlines the hearing of applications through the Mental Health Tribunal, and application processes are aimed at reintegration of forensic patients and residents into the community safely and appropriately. The Bill itself does not create limitations on movement but aims to improve the process by which forensic patients and residents' applications for more movement can be considered in a timely manner. Nothing in the Bill makes it more difficult than the current legislation to apply for or be granted leave.

Humane treatment when deprived of liberty

By the Bill, the Mental Health Tribunal is not required to have regard to the mental health and wellbeing principles in the MHWA during leave applications by forensic patients and residents made under the CMIA. These principles were previously not applicable to forensic patients or residents' leave applications and continue to not apply. No right is being taken away. However, the consideration of mental health and wellbeing principles that is required for non-forensic patients under the MHWA is not required for forensic patients or residents in leave applications.

The function of hearing reviews of a decision to transfer a forensic patient to another designated mental health service (under section 574) originates under the MHWA and not under the CMIA. Therefore, the Mental Health Tribunal will continue to be required to consider the mental health and wellbeing principles when hearing reviews under this section.

Further, people who are forensic residents under the CMIA are not subject to provisions in the MHWA. Forensic residents have been found not guilty or unfit to stand trial due to their intellectual disability, not mental illness. In this way the forensic division is distinct from the general and special division of the Mental Health Tribunal as it is required to have special expertise in the field of forensic disability and is not limited to considerations of mental illness.

The forensic division's functions under the CMIA relate to the granting of leave for individuals subject to custodial supervision orders made by a relevant court under the CMIA. This requires a distinct set of considerations for decisionmakers to address any risk that a patient's or resident's leave poses to themselves

or the community. To consider the mental health and wellbeing principles would introduce a new decision-making framework which may impact on the outcomes of leave applications from outside of the CMIA. Forensic patients will continue to be provided with a Statement of Rights in Part 2.2, including processes that apply. The application process for leave requires the decisionmaker to consider whether the leave would help the forensic patient or resident's rehabilitation without seriously endangering their safety or the safety of another person.

Under the Charter, the Mental Health Tribunal is still required to treat forensic patients and residents with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person. Although the mental health and wellbeing principles are not required to be applied, the Tribunal can still apply them if relevant. In these ways, forensic patients and residents are still procedurally protected against denials of leave that would be inhumane in the context of their supervision order under the CMIA.

Although this right is engaged, the overlapping statutory requirements protect the inherent dignity of forensic patients and forensic residents in leave applications that will now come before the Mental Health Tribunal.

Recognition and equality before the law

By the same token, the exclusion of the mental health and wellbeing principles from consideration in applications for leave by forensic patients and residents treats them unequally compared to applications by other patients before the Mental Health Tribunal heard in the general and special division. This is a limitation on the right to equality.

The limitation on the equal treatment of forensic patients and residents compared to non-forensic patients is justified because, by the fact of being on a custodial supervision order under the CMIA, the forensic patient or resident poses a risk to themselves or to others. The existing decision-making framework is adapted and appropriate to the consideration of leave applications by the forensic division of the Mental Health Tribunal for orders made under the CMIA. These orders are legally different to orders made under the MHW. A.

The making of a supervision order already requires a judicial officer to determine that there is "no practical alternative in the circumstances". The other statutory protections, described above, ensure the limitation is only to the extent reasonably necessary. Given the purposes of the CMIA, the least restrictive means available to not disrupt the protective legislative framework of custodial supervision orders is to legislate that the mental health and wellbeing principles are not required to be considered.

Right to privacy

Several sections in the Bill balance forensic patients and residents' right to privacy against the purpose of improving care, mitigating risk of serious harm, and preserving the privacy and confidentiality of other persons or services.

Section 355 of the MHW. A requires secrecy over the information relating to a person that could identify that person is extended to forensic patients and residents, with specific exemptions. Breach of this section is an offence, showing the balance between disclosure, sharing, and use of information by authorised professionals for authorised purposes, and the protection of privacy in all other cases.

This is consistent with documents referred to during hearings which may be exempt from disclosure to the applicant for leave in very limited situations of risk of serious harm or disclosure of sensitive or confidential information. The Bill limits the right of access to documents by the applicant only where serious harm might arise to that person or to another person, or where another person's right to privacy or confidentiality is "unreasonably" breached. The limitation of the right of a person to have information relating to their leave application is reasonably justifiable by the need to protect that person, or another person, against risk of serious harm or against an unreasonable breach of another person's right to privacy.

Furthermore, hearings in the forensic division are closed to the public unless it is in the best interests of the forensic patient or resident, or in the public interest, for the hearing to be open to the public. Again, the section protects the privacy of the forensic patient or resident with only two exceptions, consistently with the existing protections in the CMIA.

The obligations of secrecy in the CMIA relating to applications for leave and transfer continue.

Overall, limitations on the right to privacy arising from the absorption of the former Forensic Leave Panel's functions in determining leave applications into the functions of the Mental Health Tribunal are justified by the need to address the risk of serious harm to a person, or the risk of breach of another person's privacy or confidentiality.

Freedom of expression

Finally, the *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOIA)* is amended to ensure that FOI Act documents from the Mental Health Tribunal if used in quasi-judicial proceedings in the forensic division are not subject to the FOI Act.

Freedom of expression includes the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, including the right of the public to access information under freedom of information regimes. Section 15 also provides that lawful restrictions may be reasonably necessary to respect personal rights and reputations, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

The Forensic Leave Panel is not currently subject to FOI requests. As the functions of the Forensic Leave Panel move to the Mental Health Tribunal these functions would be subject to the FOIA. To maintain equivalent protections, the Bill proposes amending the FOIA so that requests under the FOIA cannot be made regarding documents related to the quasi-judicial functions of the forensic division, held by the Mental Health Tribunal. Administrative documents relating to the operation of the forensic division of the Tribunal are not exempt from the FOIA. There is no substantive change in rights for FOI applicants.

Although the right to freedom of expression may be limited by exempting documents related to quasi-judicial functions of the new forensic division from FOI, s 15 permits lawful restrictions as reasonably necessary to respect the personal rights and reputations of leave applicants. These applicants are part of a population who are frequently stigmatised, and the public attention can be severely detrimental to their recovery and attempts to reintegrate into the community. The purpose of granting leave is to encourage that reintegration. The limitation on the freedom of expression of FOI applicants is justifiably limited by the need to protect leave applicants from public scrutiny that is detrimental to their recovery and reintegration and, by extension, to the community.

Electronic Health Information System

The MHWA has an electronic health information system (EHIS) that will continue to enable access, sharing, receipt, and use, of health information for specific legislated purposes. These purposes are: providing mental health and wellbeing services, including integrated care, to the person to whom that information relates; or to permit relevant people to provide authorised services and functions.

The Bill continues to permit disclosure of health information without the consent of a person in the circumstances specified in s 730(2). Those circumstances are broadly that disclosure is permitted where it is: permitted by other law or regulations; for the purposes of exercise of legal functions or delivery of health services; in general terms for family and carers; or for legal proceedings.

For the above, there is no substantive change in rights.

The Bill permits all entities that can collect and use information under the current s 728(2) of the MHWA to also be able to input information into the EHIS, to enable timely updates. The current situation is that only employees or people engaged by a mental health and wellbeing service provider or a prescribed emergency service provider may enter a person's health information into an EHIS.

The Bill broadens the types of entities and people able to collect, access and use information on the EHIS. It permits the prescription of future classes of persons to enter, collect, and use information on the EHIS.

It permits the sharing of information between the EHIS with the EPHISS established under Part 6C of the *Health Services Act 1988*. Both data storage systems were established for the purpose of providing up to date, consolidated patient records and integrated care for people who are receiving or have received mental health and wellbeing services. Generally, information on EHIS will be shared with EPHISS where a person is receiving a health service but reference is required to their mental health record for integrated care. Also generally, information on EPHISS will be shared with EHIS where the person will be receiving mental health and wellbeing services, but the service provider will require access to their health records to provide integrated care. In both directions, the aim of the sharing is for the beneficial purpose of improving quality of care by providing clinicians with better access to persons' medical records held across multiple services to improve patient safety and quality of care.

Shared information will only be accessible where it is used for the purpose of providing integrated care to a person receiving mental health and wellbeing services or health services (as the case may be).

Right to privacy

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

The amendments in the Bill allow interference with the privacy of persons to whom the MHWA applies. The information is information held by mental health and wellbeing services on people who have accessed mental health care services. Compulsorily transferring this information into the EPHISS without consent or an option to opt-out will engage the right in section 13(a) of the Charter.

I consider the right will be limited. However, the limitation on the right to privacy is justified and proportionate, because the purpose is for more complete and more coherent healthcare provision to people who are generally more vulnerable to complex and chronic health issues. The Bill fits into an existing legislative framework that circumscribes the uses of the information and makes breaches punishable.

The EPHISS is already heavily legislated and regulated. Those amendments were already the subject of Charter considerations. Access, disclosure, and use is only permitted for legislated purposes and by authorised persons, under pain of financial penalties. Access to shared health information is only justified at the point a person receives treatment from a mental health and wellbeing provider or participating health service, and the purposes for collection, disclosure, sharing, and use of the information is to improve medical treatment for the person. Interferences with individuals' privacy that may occur as a result of information in the EHIS being shared with the EPHISS will only be permitted for the purpose of providing healthcare and integrated care, bounded by the statutory purposes listed in Division 3, Part 6C of the *Health Services Act 1988*.

The Bill does not require the collection of new information. It facilitates the transfer of information held in a smaller local system to a central platform that other healthcare providers can use, recognising that mental health patients can have a range of comorbidities that are not just mental health issues. Access to the system is limited to people who need the information to provide that care. Those people already had a legitimate reason to seek the information from the EHIS or from the health service itself. The EPHISS, the central platform, reduces the bureaucracy and delay of accessing this information.

The same reasoning applies to the regulation to permit the prescription of future classes of persons to enter, collect, and use information on the EHIS. The right to privacy is engaged because more people can access, disclose, and use that information, but people can only use it through the processes and for the purposes set out in the MHWa and the *Health Records Act 1999*. The right to privacy is limited, but only for permitted uses and by authorised people.

Otherwise, there is no substantive change to the right to privacy through this Bill. Greater health information upload powers do not substantively change that right. The health information would have been uploaded to the EHIS in any case, and everyone who would need the information because of the Bill could already access the information by directly contacting a service provider. The Bill only removes a layer of bureaucracy.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission's power to disclose information

The MHWa already permits information to be disclosed by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner if the disclosure is necessary to avoid a serious risk to life, health, safety, or welfare. The Bill permits that disclosure to be made by employees or persons engaged by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, not only the Commissioner.

Right to privacy

The right to privacy is engaged because more people can access, disclose, and use information, including about people, but the Commission's employees or agents can only disclose that information through the processes and for the purposes set out in the MHWa and the *Health Records Act 1999*.

The Bill permits the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner's employees and agents to disclose information if necessary to avoid a serious risk to life, health, safety, or welfare. If information to be shared by an employee or agent is about a person known to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, this power would limit that person's right to privacy. However, this is balanced by the greater importance of protecting life, health, safety or welfare.

Minor Other Amendments

The Bill permits restrictions on the right to communicate, and applications for further treatment orders, to be reviewed by any authorised psychiatrist, not only the psychiatrist who made the original decision. These amendments protect the rights of MHWa patients by increasing the number of psychiatrists who can make decisions about whether to continue limiting their rights to freedom of expression and freedom of movement. Other psychiatrists are already permitted to access the patient's information for the purposes of providing services, so there is no change in substantive rights under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic).

The Bill clarifies that a patient's nominated support person expresses the views of the patient in the support person's advocacy, not that the views of the support person should be sought, reflecting the right of the patient to free expression of their views through their advocate.

The Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas
Leader of the House

Second reading

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance)
(11:07): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:Introduction

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 delivered on a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. As envisaged by the Royal Commission, the Act:

- promotes good mental health and wellbeing;
- resets the legislative foundation underpinning the mental health and wellbeing system; and
- supports the delivery of services that are responsive to the needs and preferences of Victorians.

The 2022 Act encompasses the broader community sector and wellbeing services to enable a connected and coordinated system where people do not fall through the cracks.

Importantly, the 2022 Act places people at the heart of the system, by putting the views, preferences and values of people living with mental ill-health, including their families, carers and supporters, at the forefront of service design and delivery.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank those who have contributed to the successful implementation of the 2022 Act.

Thank you to our sector partners, including those that developed education and training resources, led engagement activities and worked closely with my department to monitor implementation of the 2022 Act.

I would also like to acknowledge our mental health workforce. The workforce are the backbone of our mental health and wellbeing system, supporting Victorians in their hardest moments. I thank you for continuing to provide Victorians with world-leading mental health and wellbeing services during a time of significant reform and change.

To those with lived and living experience of mental ill health and your family, carers, supporters and kin, thank you for continuing to work in partnership with us to improve mental health and wellbeing outcomes for all Victorians.

By working together, we will continue to build a mental health system where every person feels safe, seen and supported.

As envisioned when the Act was passed in 2022, the Act necessarily requires updating and amendment as the service system evolves following the Act's passage.

The Bill before the House includes amendments to the Act and the *Health Services Act 1988* to enable information sharing reforms set out in recommendation 62 of the Royal Commission.

The Bill also establishes a more streamlined approach to legislative safeguards and processes by transferring the functions of the Forensic Leave Panel to a new Forensic Division of the Mental Health Tribunal.

The Bill includes minor amendments to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* to exempt documents related to the quasi-judicial function of the new Forensic Division of the Mental Health Tribunal, replicating an existing exemption applying to the Forensic Leave Panel.

The Bill also includes amendments to address some minor and technical matters in the Act, to ensure it operates as intended.

Transfer of functions from Forensic Leave Panel to the Mental Health Tribunal

The Forensic Leave Panel is established under the *Crimes Mental Impairment (Unfitness to be tried) Act 1997* (the CMIA) and determines when forensic patients or forensic residents can access on-ground and limited off-ground leave.

Under this Bill, the Forensic Leave Panel will cease to operate and its role and functions will be transferred to a new Forensic Division of the Mental Health Tribunal.

The Mental Health Tribunal is well placed to take over the functions of the Forensic Leave Panel.

There is overlap in membership and expertise between the Forensic Leave Panel and the Mental Health Tribunal, including psychiatrist and psychologist members with relevant forensic expertise and community members.

From an administrative perspective, the Mental Health Tribunal has well established procedures for scheduling and conducting hearings, issuing determinations and statements of reasons, and has existing relationship with forensic patients at a designated mental service where it already conducts hearings.

I wish to extend my sincere thanks to the members of the Forensic Leave Panel, and express my appreciation to the President of the Panel, Justice Rita Incerti.

Their work upholds the rights and recovery of individuals, safeguards the community, and strengthens the integrity of our justice and our forensic mental health system. We are grateful for the contribution that present and past members of the Panel have made.

Information sharing and electronic health information systems

The Royal Commission recommended the Victorian Government develop, fund and implement modern IT infrastructure for the mental health and wellbeing system, including a new statewide electronic mental health and wellbeing record, a data review, an information exchange, a consumer portal, and a data repository.

The existing mental health IT system, known as the Client Management System / Operational Data Store, or CMI/ODS, is a 30-year-old legacy system with growing structural limitations unable to meet the needs of a reformed and expanded mental health system.

The government committed \$64.7 million to support the delivery of this recommendation as part of 2022/23 State Budget and work is now well underway to establish a new, fit for purpose IT system, the Electronic Health Information System, or EHIS.

Once fully realised, the modern, interoperable IT architecture envisaged by the Royal Commission will benefit care teams working across public health services and community based mental health services, such as Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals and Prevention and Recovery Care centres.

It will mean that the right information will be available to the right care provider at the right time, so transfers of care are safer and better coordinated.

Recording information once, in an electronic format, at the point of care, removes our reliance on paper, cuts double entry, and gives staff more time with patients.

For consumers, it will help end the exhausting cycle of repeating medical histories, especially traumatic experiences, because key information follows them where they receive care. It will also empower consumers with access to their information and tools to actively manage their care, to promote and enable shared decision-making.

System wide, it will strengthen performance monitoring and lifts our capability for quality and safety oversight.

With strong privacy, security and governance at its core, this modern architecture will support us to deliver safer, more responsive mental health and integrated care for every Victorian.

Replacing a statewide clinical system is a significant and complex project and will continue in stages until mid-2028. This begins with the reforms enabled by the amendments in this Bill for the new Electronic Health Information System and new Mental Health and Wellbeing Record.

The information collected from the system will support the future establishment of other components of recommendation 62, being the comprehensive data repository and associated clinical registries, as well as a new user-friendly consumer portal that allows consumers to view and share their own information.

The amendments will also allow for secure and protected information exchange between this new system, the Electronic Health Information System, and the Electronic Patient Health Information Sharing System, known as CareSync Exchange, for the purposes of providing integrated care.

Established under the Health Services Act, CareSync Exchange is currently being rolled out across the health sector.

There are a range of legislative and operational safeguards in place to ensure that people's information is safe and secure.

Making sure health information is protected, safe and secure is a priority.

Patient information will be stored in and shared across mental health services in accordance with Victoria's privacy legislation.

The Department of Health will implement strict controls on who can access the systems, for example, through the use of security identity credentials and access management protocols, to make sure that information is protected, safe and secure.

The Department of Health must also ensure that the platforms for sharing remain safe and comply with the Victorian Protective Data Security Standards, which is overseen by the Office of the Information Commissioner. There are penalties for data and privacy breaches for unauthorised access to people's medical records.

Minor and technical amendments

The Forensic Leave Panel is currently exempt from the FOI Act in full.

The Bill amends the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act) to exempt documentation related to the quasi-judicial functions of the new Forensic Division of the Mental Health Tribunal from Freedom of Information applications.

This amendment replicates the existing exemption applying to the Forensic Leave Panel, ensuring the continued protection of sensitive information related to Forensic Leave matters.

The Bill also clarifies the Health Secretary's ability to disclose information held on the Electronic Health Information System to the Coroner, related to an investigation or proceeding under the Coroner's Act.

The Coroner's Court plays a critical role in reviewing incidents and making recommendations to improve the mental health and wellbeing system.

I look forward to continuing to work constructively with stakeholders and all members of this Parliament to continue the evolution of the statutory framework that not only delivers the Royal Commission's vision but enables the best possible mental health and wellbeing outcomes for all Victorians.

I commend this Bill to the House.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (11:07): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday 25 September.

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

Statement of compatibility

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (11:09): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025:

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025 (the Bill).

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

Overview of the Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 (Security of Payment Act), the Building Act 1993 (Building Act) and to make minor amendments to several other Acts.

Since 1 July 2025 the Victorian Building Authority has been trading as the Building and Plumbing Commission (the Commission) so, for convenience and to align with the Second Reading Speech, this Statement of Compatibility refers to the Commission.

Part 2 of the Bill amends the Security of Payment Act to implement many of the recommendations of the Report, Parliamentary Inquiry into employers and contractors who refuse to pay their subcontractors for completed works, prepared by the Legislative Assembly's Environment and Planning Committee.

Part 3 of the Bill amends the Building Act to improve the requirements for registration as a building surveyor or a building inspector, to clarify the requirements for when a relevant building surveyor is required to give an information statement to a person who has applied to the surveyor for a building permit and to enable the Commission to issue a code of conduct applicable to registered and licensed plumbers.

Part 4 of the Bill amends the Environment Effects Act 1978 (Environment Effects Act) to enable fees to be prescribed and imposed to recover the cost of assessments prepared by the Minister, deciding whether certain conditions have been met and advice and assistance given by the Secretary under that Act.

Part 5 of the Bill amends the Heritage Act 2017 to clarify that emissions reductions targets and risks associated with impacts of climate change, which are required to be considered under section 12(2A) of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 (Planning and Environment Act) for an amendment to a planning scheme, do not need to be taken into account when a decision is made under section 56 (relating to adding or amending places on, or removing places from, the Victorian Heritage Register) and section 180 (relating to implementing World Heritage Environs Areas and Strategy Plans) of the Heritage Act 2017.

Part 6 of the Bill amends the Planning and Environment Act to widen the scope of matters that may be included in an enforcement order of the Victorian and Civil Administration Tribunal (VCAT) to ensure that there is no net loss to biodiversity as a result of an unauthorized removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation that was carried out in contravention of a planning scheme, a condition of a planning permit or an agreement under section 173 of the Planning and Environment Act.

Human rights issues

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are the right to freedom from forced or compulsory labour under section 11(2), the right to property under section 20, the right to a fair hearing under section 24(1), and the right to be presumed innocent under section 25(1).

The right to freedom from forced or compulsory labour – section 11(2)

Section 11(2) of the Charter provides that a person must not be made to perform forced or compulsory labour. ‘Forced or compulsory labour’ does not include work or service that forms part of normal civil obligations. While the Charter does not define ‘normal civil obligations’, comparative case law has considered that to qualify as a normal civil obligation, the work or service required must be provided for by law, must be imposed for a legitimate purpose, must not be exceptional and must not have any punitive purpose or effect (*Faure v Australia* (Human Rights Committee Communication No 1036/2001)). This has extended to obligations to undertake work in order to maintain compliance with regulatory standards.

Part 6 of the Bill amends section 119 of the Planning and Environment Act to widen the scope of matters that VCAT may include in an enforcement order under Division 1 of Part 6 of the Planning and Environment Act. Under new sections 119(2) and (3) of the Planning and Environment Act, the Bill will enable an enforcement order to require certain persons to plant, protect and regenerate native vegetation on the land on which an unauthorized removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation occurred or on any other land. I am of the view that an enforcement order requiring a person to plant, protect and regenerate native vegetation on the land on which the contravention was committed or on any other land would be imposed for a legitimate purpose, would not be exceptional and would not have any punitive purpose or effect and as such, would not constitute a limit on this right.

This is because an enforcement order is confined in its application to the legitimate purpose of responding to a contravention of the law. Under section 114(1) of the Planning and Environment Act a person may apply for an enforcement order only if a use or development of land contravenes or has contravened, or, unless prevented by the enforcement order, will contravene the Planning and Environment Act, a planning scheme, a condition of a permit or an agreement under section 173 of that Act. Additionally, new section 119(3) of the Planning and Environment Act (to be inserted by the Bill) will provide that, when considering what to order in an enforcement order relating to native vegetation, VCAT may exercise its power for the purposes of achieving or advancing a provision of a planning scheme that relates to native vegetation. This will also direct the purpose of an enforcement order and make the work required to be undertaken – planting, protecting and regenerating native vegetation to offset that which was illegally removed, destroyed or lopped – unexceptional and not punitive. Additionally, an enforcement order requiring a person to plant, protect and regenerate native vegetation is not the only option available to VCAT. VCAT may alternatively order the person to acquire a biodiversity offset, which is explained below in relation to the right to the protection of property.

Therefore, an enforcement order requiring a person to plant, protect and regenerate native vegetation may be imposed only for the legitimate, non-punitive purpose of requiring the person, who has been found to have been partly or wholly responsible for a contravention of a planning law relating to the protection of native

vegetation, to contribute to mitigating the loss of native vegetation (and the related loss of biodiversity) caused by the contravention.

For these reasons, I consider the Bill to be consistent with the right to freedom from forced or compulsory labour under section 11(2) of the Charter.

The right to property in section 20

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. There are three elements to this right:

1. The interest interfered with must be ‘property’, which includes all real and personal property interests recognised under the general law;
2. An interference of concern must amount to a ‘deprivation’ of property, that is, any ‘de facto expropriation’ by means of a substantial restriction in fact on a person’s use or enjoyment of their property; and
3. A deprivation of property may only be ‘in accordance with law’ in that the law must be adequately accessible and formulated with sufficient precision to enable the person to regulate their conduct.

Limiting the effect of certain provisions in construction contracts

Part 2 of the Bill will amend the Security of Payment Act to regulate the legal effect of certain types or classes of provisions of construction contracts and, to the extent that the right to property includes the value of a contractual right to a party to the contract, it will limit the right to property under section 20 of the Charter.

Clause 11 of the Bill inserts a new section 12(1B) of the Security of Payment Act to provide that a term or provision in a construction contract has no effect to the extent that it provides for the payment of a progress payment or the release of a performance security later than the day occurring 20 business days after a payment claim is served under Division 1 of Part 3 of that Act in relation to the progress payment or a performance security claim is served under Division 1A of Part 3 of that Act in relation to the performance security.

To the extent that clause 11 of the Bill limits the right to property, I am of the view that this clause is precise and appropriately prescribed, is not arbitrary and is in accordance with the law. This is because new section 12(1B) is necessary to clarify that the payment terms set out in new section 12(1) and (1A), which is also inserted by clause 11 of the Bill, are intended to provide a standard for the maximum period of time in which a progress payment becomes due and payable or a performance security must be released and to ensure this standard cannot be contradicted or overridden by the terms of a contract. New section 12(1B) of the Security of Payment Act is justified as it promotes the protection of subcontractors who don’t have the bargaining power to negotiate more favourable contract terms that impose unreasonably long periods of time, being more than 20 business days, before a respondent is required under the contract to pay a progress payment or release a performance security after a claimant has served a claim on the respondent for either of these entitlements.

Section 13 of the Security of Payment Act makes ineffective in certain circumstances, for the purpose of the payment of money owing, a “pay when paid” provision in a construction contract. Clause 12 of the Bill amends the definition of “pay when paid provision” in section 13(2)(c) of that Act so that section 13 will also make ineffective a provision in a construction contract that makes any of the following contingent or dependant on the operation of another contract: the liability to pay money owing, the due date for payment of money owing, a person’s right to claim money owing and a person’s right to claim the release of a performance security.

To the extent that clause 12 of the Bill limits the right to property, I am of the view that this clause is precise and appropriately prescribed, is not arbitrary and is in accordance with the law. This is because the certain types of ‘pay when paid provisions’ are already taken to be ineffective under section 13 of the Security of Payment Act and clause 12 of the Bill will be in accordance with the law as it adds only two new types of rights under a contract – that are contingent or dependent on the operation of another contract – that will be made ineffective under section 13 of the Security of Payment Act: a person’s right to claim money owing (under new s.13(2)(c)(iii)) and a person’s right to claim the release of a performance security (under new s.13(2)(c)(iv)). The description of these types of contractual provisions is very precise and is not arbitrary because the purpose of clause 12 is to promote the protection of potentially disempowered subcontractors who could otherwise have payments unreasonably and unfairly withheld because of the actions of head contractors and their principals. There is no less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purpose that clause 12 of the Bill seeks to achieve.

Clause 13 of the Bill inserts a new section 13A of the Security of Payment Act to provide, under section 13A(1) that a notice-based time bar provision of a construction contract may be declared to be unfair in relation to a particular entitlement under the contract if compliance with the provision is not reasonably

possible or would be unreasonably onerous. Notice-based time bar provisions in contracts provide that certain entitlements under the contract are contingent on a party to the contract giving a notice to the other party within a specified timeframe. Failing to give notice within that time defeats the contractual right to the claim. Under new section 13A(3)(a) of the Security of Payment Act, a notice-based time bar provision of a construction contract that is declared to be unfair has no effect on the particular entitlement that is the subject of an adjudication or proceeding in which it was declared to be unfair.

To the extent that clause 13 of the Bill limits the right to property, I am of the view that this clause is precise and appropriately prescribed, is not arbitrary and is in accordance with the law. This is because the types of entitlement to which clause 13 applies (under the definition of “notice-based time bar provision in new section 13A(8) of the Security of Payment Act) are drafted precisely; they are an entitlement to be paid, an extension of time for doing a thing that affects an entitlement to be paid and an entitlement to the release of a performance security. Clause 13 is not arbitrary because the circumstances in which the power can be exercised are confined. Before making a declaration of unfairness about such a provision, the person making the declaration must form the view that the notice-based time bar provision is not reasonably possible or would be unreasonably onerous. Additionally, new section 13A(5), (6) and (7) also specify the matters that the person making the declaration must take into account and must not take into account before declaring the provision to be unfair. New section 13A(2) empowers only certain persons (an adjudicator, a court, an arbitrator and an expert) to make a declaration. Further, under new section 13A(3) the declaration has effect only for the purpose of the adjudication or proceeding over which that person is presiding and the notice-based time bar provision will continue to have effect in other circumstances or proceedings arising under the relevant contract or a related contract. Clause 13 is justified as it promotes the protection of potentially disempowered subcontractors who could otherwise have payments unfairly withheld, or performance securities retained, by head contractors.

Clause 16 of the Bill inserts a new section 14B of the Security of Payment Act to provide that a provision of a construction contract has no effect to the extent that it provides that the earliest day for service of a payment claim in respect of any type of progress payment must be on a day that is later than the last day of each named month in which the construction work was carried out or the related goods and services were supplied; or provides that a payment claim for a milestone payment (within the meaning of paragraph (c) of the definition of “progress payment”) must be served less frequently than once a month.

To the extent that clause 16 of the Bill limits the right to property, I am of the view that this clause is precise and appropriately prescribed, is not arbitrary and is in accordance with the law. This is because new section 14B is necessary to clarify that the payment terms set out in new section 14A, which is also inserted by clause 16 of the Bill, are intended to provide a minimum standard for the earliest day and frequency of serving payment claims and to ensure this standard cannot be contradicted or overridden by the terms of a contract, apart from allowing for any earlier day for serving a payment claim that is permitted under the contract (refer to new section 14A(3)). Clause 16 is justified as it promotes the protection of subcontractors who don't have the bargaining power to negotiate more favourable contract terms compared to terms that delay for unreasonably long periods of time a subcontractor's right to serve a claim for payment for their provision of work, goods or services. There is no less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purpose that clause 16 of the Bill seeks to achieve because it is intended to override a certain type of provision of a contract.

Clause 20 of the Bill inserts a new section 17D into the Security of Payment Act to provide that a provision in a construction contract that purports to do any of the following has no effect: override the right of a claimant to serve a performance security claim under new section 17A of the Security of Payment Act, provide that the earliest day on which a performance security claim may be served is before the earliest day referred to in new section 17B of that Act, and provide that the latest day on which a performance security claim may be served is after the latest day referred to in new section 17C of that Act.

To the extent that clause 20 of the Bill limits the right to property, I am of the view that this clause is appropriately prescribed, is not arbitrary and is in accordance with the law. This is because new section 17D is necessary to clarify that the rights to claim the release of a performance security conferred under new sections 17A, 17B and 17C of the Security of Payment Act are intended to provide a minimum standard for the right to make this type of claim and to ensure this minimum standard cannot be contradicted or overridden by the terms of a contract. There is no less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purpose that clause 20 of the Bill seeks to achieve because it is intended to override certain types of provisions of a contract.

Clause 20 also inserts a new section 17H(3) into the Security of Payment Act to provide that the requirements in new section 17H(1) and (2) of the Security of Payment Act are taken to form part of every construction contract and are to have effect despite any other provision of the contract that purports to override these requirements. To the extent that clause 20 of the Bill limits the right to property, I am of the view that this clause is appropriately prescribed, is not arbitrary and is in accordance with the law. The requirements in new

section 17H(1) and (2) are that if a party holding a performance security intends to have recourse to the whole or a part of a performance security under a construction contract, the party must first give the party providing the security under that contract at least 5 business days' notice in writing of this intent, or any longer period of notice that is provided for in the contract. The written notice must identify certain details about the performance security. New section 17I(3) is necessary to ensure that the mandatory process under new section 17I(1) and (2) will set a minimum standard. The mandatory requirements that will be taken to form part of every construction contract are reasonable, easy to comply with and they will not override any longer period of notice that a contract may require. There is no less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purpose that new section 17H of the Security of Payment Act seeks to achieve because it is intended to affect construction contracts.

Clause 53 of the Bill amends section 52(1) of the Security of Payment Act to insert a power to prescribe in regulations made under that Act a provision or a class of provision in a construction contract or in a class of construction contract that is to be taken to be of no effect and the circumstances in which a such a provision may be excepted from having no effect. To the extent that clause 53 of the Bill limits the right to property, I am of the view that this clause is precise and appropriately prescribed, is not arbitrary and is reasonable. Clause 54 of the Bill will insert new section 54(10) of the Security of Payment Act to provide that any such regulation will not apply to a provision of a construction contract entered into before the commencement of any such regulation. I also note that any regulations made under this new regulation making power will be assessed for compatibility with the Charter under the requirement for the Minister to certify a Human Rights Certificate.

Each of the Bill's clauses referred to above that limit one party's right to property by regulating the legal effect of certain provisions in construction contracts also support the property rights of the other party to the contract. These clauses aim to achieve a fair and reasonable balance between the competing property rights of all the parties to a construction contract, after taking into account the relatively different financial resources and negotiating powers of head contractors and subcontractors as informed by the "Parliamentary Inquiry into employers and contractors who refuse to pay their subcontractors for completed works" and for this reason these clauses are justified.

Fees

Part 4 of the Bill amends the Environment Effects Act to enable fees to be prescribed in regulations and imposed under that Act to recover the cost of assessments by the Minister, and advice and assistance given by the Minister or the Secretary, under that Act. A requirement to pay fees in the form of money, where money is a form of property interest recognised by law, engages the right to property.

The deprivation of property will be in accordance with the law because the power to impose a fee will be confined to the exercise of a function by the Minister or the Secretary under the Environment Effects Act. The amount of the fees imposed may only be prescribed by regulations and the regulation making power enables this amount to differ according to different circumstances. This will further enable the fees to be reasonably referable to the various costs incurred by the State in the performance of each of the functions to which each prescribed fee will relate. The Bill also provides for significant flexibility as the regulation making power inserted by the Bill will allow for the fees to be reduced or waived (in part or in full) and refunded if necessary.

Enforcement orders relating to native vegetation

Part 6 of the Bill will insert new section 119(2) and (3) into the Planning and Environment Act to enable an enforcement order to require certain persons to plant, protect and regenerate native vegetation on the land on which an unauthorized removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation occurred or on any other land, which may include other land owned or under the control of the person against whom the order is made or land of a third party. In this respect, the Bill engages the right to property that is land and imposes a restriction in fact on a person's use or enjoyment of their property.

This deprivation of property will be in accordance with the law because a person's right as to how they use or enjoy land that they own or occupy, or hold an interest in, is not absolute; it is limited by the Planning and Environment Act and the planning scheme. The Planning and Environment Act and the planning scheme set out clear and precise requirements for how a person can obtain approval for the proposed use and enjoyment of their land and this enables the person to regulate their conduct.

Under section 114(3) of the Planning and environmentact, an enforcement order may only be made against one or more of: the owner or occupier of the land, any other person who has an interest in the land and any other person by whom or on whose behalf the use or development was, is being, or is to be carried out. Therefore any deprivation of this property right is limited in its application to a person who is found by VCAT to be wholly or partly responsible for a use or development of land that contravenes or has contravened, or, unless prevented by the enforcement order, will contravene a planning scheme, a condition of a planning

permit or an agreement under section 173 of that Act (refer to section 114(1) of the Planning and Environment Act).

New section 119(2) and (3) of the Planning and Environment Act will also enable an enforcement order to direct any person or persons against whom it is made to take any other action in relation to any other land for the purposes of achieving or advancing a provision of a planning scheme that relates to native vegetation. A provision of a planning scheme that relates to native vegetation is clause 52.17 of the Victoria Planning Provisions, which provides that its purposes are: (i) to ensure that there is no net loss to biodiversity as a result of the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation, and (ii) to manage the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation to minimise land and water degradation. The first purpose of clause 52.17 incorporates the “Guidelines for the Removal, Destruction or Lopping of Native Vegetation” published by the then Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2017) (the Guidelines). The Guidelines are incorporated into all planning schemes in Victoria as they are included in the Table to clause 72.04 of the Victoria Planning Provisions.

Therefore, Part 6 of the Bill will enable VCAT, using an enforcement order, to direct the person against whom it is made to pay for a biodiversity offset, if an offset is available. The Guidelines (on page 13) explain that the biodiversity loss from the removal of native vegetation is required to be offset in accordance with the Guidelines. Offsets are designed to compensate for the biodiversity value of native vegetation only, not its other values.

In this respect, a requirement to pay in the form of money for a biodiversity offset, where money is a form of property interest recognised by law, engages the right to property. This deprivation of property will be in accordance with the law because a person’s right as to how they use land they own or occupy, or hold an interest in, is not absolute; it is limited by the Planning and Environment Act and the planning scheme and, if relevant, any conditions of a planning permit or an agreement under section 173 of the Planning and Environment Act. VCAT’s power to make an enforcement order under Division 1 of Part 6 of the PE Act is confined to a contravention of the law and, under section 114(3) of the PE Act, the order may only be made against one or more persons who have been found by VCAT to be wholly or partly responsible for the contravention.

For these reasons I consider the Bill to be consistent with the right to property under section 20 of the Charter.

The right to a fair hearing – section 24

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

Clause 34 of the Bill will substitute section 28R of the Security of Payment Act to set out a procedure for a claimant who has been provided with an adjudication certificate under section 28Q of the Security of Payment Act to file the adjudication certificate as a judgment for a debt due to the claimant in a court of competent jurisdiction for the unpaid portion of an amount payable or to be released under section 28M of that Act.

New section 28R does not include current section 28R(4), the latter of which provides that judgment in favour of a person is not to be entered under this section unless the court is satisfied that the person liable to pay the amount due has failed to pay the whole or any part of that amount to that first-mentioned person. This requires the court to determine whether the respondent is liable to pay an amount to the claimant, which duplicates the process of a claim undergoing an adjudication process and becoming the subject of an adjudication determination, the latter of which must be certified by the relevant authorised nominating authority. New section 28R does not require the court to make such a finding. In this respect, clause 34 of the Bill engages the right to a fair hearing, which has been held to encompass a right of access to courts to have one’s civil claims submitted to a judge for determination. However, the right to access the courts is not absolute and may legitimately be limited by the needs and resources of the community and individuals.

This limitation on the right to a fair hearing by a court is within the law and is reasonable. The purpose of the limitation is to support the object of the Security of Payment Act, which section 3 of that Act states is to provide a statutory right to receive and recover progress payments and to the release of a performance security using the means of a procedure set out in the Security of Payment Act. In the course of an adjudication of a claim presided over by an adjudicator, the Security of Payment Act as amended by the Bill gives a respondent several opportunities to dispute a claimant’s claim for a progress payment or for the release of a performance security. This includes being given two opportunities to serve on the claimant a payment schedule (under sections 15 and 18) or a performance security schedule (under new sections 17E and 18A) and, if the matter goes to adjudication, lodging an adjudication response (under section 21) which may include any schedule already served, and making a further submission to the adjudicator (under section 22) if requested. Therefore, the respondent receives a fair hearing of their position and views during the adjudication process.

The object of the Security of Payment Act would be defeated if, after following the timely and streamlined process under that Act, a respondent could delay the right of a claimant to have an adjudication determination (endorsed as an adjudication certificate) readily enforced by a court by re-litigating matters already considered and determined under the adjudication process. Additionally, sections 3(4) and 47 of the Security of Payment Act preserve the right of a person to bringing separate proceedings under the relevant construction contract.

Also under clause 34 of the Bill, new section 28R(4) re-enacts current section 28R(5) by providing that if the respondent commences a proceeding to have the judgment set aside, the respondent is not entitled to commence a cross-claim against the claimant, to raise any defence in relation to matters arising under the construction contract or to challenge the adjudication determination. New section 51(2) of the Security of Payment Act, which is substituted by clause 52(2) of the Bill, provides that it is the intention of section 28R of the Security of Payment Act, as amended by the Bill, to alter or vary section the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court under section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975.

Clause 52(2) of the Bill will limit or prevent the bringing of proceedings in relation to enforcement of an adjudication determination that is the subject of an adjudication certificate. In this respect, the Bill engages the right to a fair hearing, which has been held to encompass a right of access to courts to have one's civil claims submitted to a judge for determination. However, the right to access the courts is not absolute and may legitimately be limited by the needs and resources of the community and individuals.

This limitation on the right to access the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court is within the law and is reasonable. The purpose of the limitation is to support the object of the Security of Payment Act, which section 3 of that Act states is to provide a statutory right to receive and recover progress payments and to the release of a performance security using the means of a procedure set out in the Act. The intent is to enable this by setting out a timely, streamlined process under the Act. The object of the Security of Payment Act would be defeated if, after following the timely and streamlined process under that Act, a respondent could delay the right of a claimant to have an adjudication determination (endorsed as an adjudication certificate) readily enforced by a court by re-litigating matters already considered during the adjudication process. Additionally, sections 3(4) and 47 of the Security of Payment Act preserve the right of a person to bringing separate proceedings under the relevant construction contract.

Clause 47 of the Bill amends section 46 of the Security of Payment Act which provides that an adjudicator is not personally liable for anything done or omitted to be done in good faith in the exercise of a power or the discharge of a duty under the Security of Payment Act or the regulations made under that Act, or in the reasonable belief that the act or omission was in the exercise of a power or the discharge of a duty under the Security of Payment Act or the regulations made under that Act. Section 51(1) of the Security of Payment Act, which is substituted by clause 52(1) of the Bill, provides that it is the intention of section 46 of the Security of Payment Act, as amended by the Bill, to alter or vary section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975.

Clause 52(1) of the Bill engages the right to a fair hearing as it will limit or prevent the bringing of proceedings against an adjudicator in relation to how they adjudicated a dispute under the Security of Payment Act. The limitation on this right is reasonable and justified as it is necessary to encourage appropriately qualified persons to act as adjudicators of disputed claims under the Security of Payment Act. It is also intended to support the independence and impartiality of adjudicators by providing them with an immunity from civil proceedings where they exercise their statutory powers and discharge their statutory duties in good faith. The limitation on the right is also subject to a qualification. Section 46 of the Security of Payment Act will protect an adjudicator only to the extent that they exercise their statutory powers and discharge their statutory duties in good faith; it does not protect an adjudicator who acts with misfeasance.

For these reasons I consider the Bill to be consistent with the right to a fair hearing under section 24 of the Charter.

The right to be presumed innocent – section 25(1)

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law. The right is relevant where a statutory provision allows for the imposition of criminal liability without the need for the prosecution to prove fault.

Clause 39 of the Bill substitutes section 41(2) of the Security of Payment Act with a new section 41(2) and inserts new section 41(3) of the Security of Payment Act to restate the current offence under section 41(2) as two offences in relation to a requirement under section 41(1) of the Security of Payment Act. Section 41(1), as amended by clause 39 of the Bill, provides that if an adjudication determination has been made in respect of a construction contract, the respondent must, on the demand of the claimant, give to the claimant within 10 business days a notice in the prescribed form that sets out the name of any person, such as a principal, from whom the claimant may be able to recover the adjudicated amount or part of the adjudicated amount. New section 41(3) of the Security of Payment Act provides it is an offence if the respondent fails to give a notice to the claimant under section 41(1). The offence against new section 41(3) is a strict liability offence because

it does not require proof that a respondent intentionally, knowingly or recklessly failed to give a notice to the claimant. In this respect, the Bill engages the right to be presumed innocent.

To the extent that new section 41(3) limits the presumption of innocence, I consider that this limitation is reasonable, proportionate and justified. The offence against new section 41(3) is directed at the respondent's conduct – whether the respondent has provided a notice under section 41(1) in response to a claimant's demand for certain information within the required period of time. It is reasonable for this offence to not require that the prosecution prove whether the respondent knew that they had not complied with section 41(1), or was reckless about this fact, because it is reasonable to assume that a respondent knows of their own actions in relation to giving a notice to the claimant. The offence under new section 41(3) is also reasonable because the amendment to section 41(1) will specify a reasonable period of time in which the respondent is required to give a notice, which will make it easier for a respondent to understand how they are to regulate their conduct. A respondent charged with this offence can also raise the defence that they held an honest and reasonable belief in a mistaken fact.

For these reasons, I consider the Bill to be consistent with the right to be presumed innocent under section 25(1) of the Charter.

Conclusion

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

The Hon Gabrielle Williams MP
Minister for Transport Infrastructure
Minister for Public and Active Transport

Second reading

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance)
 (11:09): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech, except for the section 85 statement, be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows, except for statement under section 85(5) of the Constitution Act 1975:

The Bill amends the *Building Act 1993* (Building Act), the *Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002* (Security of Payment Act), the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (Planning and Environment Act), the *Heritage Act 2017* (Heritage Act) and the *Environment Effects Act 1978* (Environment Effects Act).

The main purpose of the Bill is to deliver a series of important construction, building and housing-related amendments including:

- Amendments to the Security of Payment Act as part of the Government's response to the *Parliamentary Inquiry into employers and contractors who refuse to pay their subcontractors for completed works*.
- Amendments to the Building Act to improve the effectiveness of the Victorian Building Authority as a regulator. Since 1 July 2025, the Victorian Building Authority has been trading as the Building and Plumbing Commission so for convenience this speech refers to the regulator as the Building and Plumbing Commission (the Commission). The Bill improves the regulator's effectiveness by delivering building surveyor and building inspector registration reforms, by enabling the Commission to create a code of conduct for licensed and registered plumbers, and by making minor changes to the information statement requirements for building surveyors.

The Bill will also deliver a series of planning-related amendments to:

- The Planning and Environment Act to widen the scope of enforcement orders issued by VCAT to require native vegetation offsets amongst other remedies;
- The Environment Effects Act to enable cost recovery fees to be charged; and
- The Heritage Act to clarify the types of decisions that need not have regard to climate change impacts.

These reforms will improve outcomes for all participants in the building industry, including practitioners, consumers, industry associations and subcontractors. This Bill is part of a broader package of the Allan Victorian Government's reforms to Victoria's regulatory framework for housing, building and construction matters.

Amendments to the Security of Payment Act in response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into employers and contractors who refuse to pay their subcontractors for completed works

Security of payment problems in the building and construction industry have been repeatedly acknowledged by Australian governments over the last 100 years. Recent government-initiated reviews have examined systemic poor payment and abusive contracting practices in the building and construction industry. Such practices take advantage of the highly fractured nature of an industry where subcontractors complete over 80 per cent of construction work – reportedly the highest proportion in the world – to pass financial risk down the construction contracting chain. Such practices contribute to high levels of financial insecurity for subcontractors and other participants in the building industry, which are reflected in historically high, insolvency rates in the industry.

Victoria's Security of Payment Act, like its counterparts in other jurisdictions, has two main objectives:

- First, to ensure that the vast majority of persons who carry out construction work or supply related goods and services under a construction contract are entitled to receive, and can recover, progress payments for carrying out that work and for supplying of those goods and services; and
- Second, to provide such persons with access to a quick, inexpensive process for resolving payment disputes that arise without the need for expensive litigation in courts.

An effective security of payment framework is particularly important for the building and construction industry due to unique structural vulnerabilities that characterise it, such as the hierarchical contracting structure for most construction projects.

Although the Security of Payment Act was enacted in 2002 and amended in 2006, it was not reviewed again until 2023. John Murray AM's December 2017 report to the Federal Government noted the need for greater harmonisation of security of payment legislation across Australia.

In November 2022, the Andrews Labor Government committed to launch an inquiry to 'crack down on bosses and contractors who refuse to pay their subcontractors for completed work'. Following through on this commitment, an inquiry was referred to the Legislative Assembly's Environment and Planning Committee (Committee), which examined the Security of Payment Act's effectiveness and its consistency with other jurisdictions' legislation, resulting in a comprehensive report tabled in November 2023.

The Committee's 216-page report included nine factual findings and confirmed the same chronic and persistent problems with larger firms' contracting and payment practices observed in other Australian jurisdictions since 2002. Based on those findings, the Committee provided 28 recommendations for reform, which the Government supported in its October 2024 response. The Government supported in full 16 of the Committee's recommendations for targeted reforms to the Security of Payment Act. These reforms are generally referred to as 'Tranche 1 reforms' and are the subject of the amendments contained in this Bill.

Twelve other Committee recommendations were supported either in principle or in part because they warrant additional consideration or stakeholder consultation. These 'Tranche 2 reforms' which are not contained with this current Bill will seek to further improve conditions in Victoria's construction and building industry and are the subject of ongoing stakeholder consultation.

Making claims for progress payments

To implement the Committee's recommendations 3 and 7, the Bill makes numerous changes to the Act's procedures for claiming progress payments and claiming the release of performance securities. The Bill will remove provisions establishing 'reference dates' for the purposes of calculating when a payment claim must be made. The current Security of Payment Act's complex and confusing formulae for determining 'reference dates' are replaced with a new, simplified process for determining when payment claims may be made, which will effectively be the last day of each named month in which the work was carried out or the related goods or services were supplied. The Bill also repeals the 'excluded amounts' and 'claimable variations' regime to implement recommendations 2 and 19 of the Committee's report.

The Bill will also make it clear that parties to construction contracts have a right to claim progress payments – including milestone payments – no less frequently than monthly and makes invalid any contractual provision to the contrary. The Bill provides for maximum payment terms, capping contractual periods of time for payment at 20 business days and establishing a default 10-business day term for progress payments where a construction contract is silent on this point. This amendment implements recommendation 8 of the Committee's report.

The Bill provides that termination of a contract does not affect the entitlement of a person to submit a final payment claim. It expands the current Security of Payment Act's absolute limit in which a payment claim can be served from three to six months, to align Victoria's legislation with the legislation of several other

jurisdictions. The Bill provides that no more than one progress payment claim may be submitted for each month, with certain exceptions.

Creating a clear right to claim release of a performance security

Significantly, the Bill will make it clear that the release of a performance security, such as retention money or a bond or guarantee, provided by contractors' and subcontractors' to ensure the satisfactory completion of their contractual obligations, is a proper subject for claims under the Security of Payment Act and that these claims may also be adjudicated under the Act. This will implement recommendation 9 of the Committee's report.

The Bill sets out the procedures and processes for serving and responding to claims for the release of performance securities given under a construction contract. The Bill also recognises the entitlement of a party holding the benefit of a performance security to have recourse to it. However, the party may do so only after giving at least five business days' notice of the party's intent to exercise that right, which allows the party who provided the security to forestall that action, such as through negotiation or by going to court.

Adjudication of disputed claims and enforcing adjudication determinations

The Bill also improves many of the Security of Payment Act's provisions relating to the process and procedure for adjudicating disputed claims for progress payments and for the release of performance securities. Significantly, the Bill implements recommendations 15 and 16 of the Committee's Report by repealing or amending provisions in the Act that have allowed respondents to insert new reasons for non-payment of a claim that were not previously identified by the respondent in a payment schedule. This amendment makes it clear that respondents will be given two opportunities to explain, in a payment schedule or in a performance security schedule, the reasons why they are not wholly accepting what is being claimed by a subcontractor. Any reasons not included in a schedule will not be permitted to be raised by a respondent or considered by an adjudicator during an adjudication process. The Bill also gives adjudicators more time to determine adjudicated disputes and gives the parties the chance to give an adequate extension of time for a determination to be made, to facilitate better-reasoned determinations and avoid disputes from 'timing out' if an adjudication is not resolved quickly enough. This amendment implements the Committee's recommendation 17.

Another key amendment is that the Bill will enable adjudicators and other persons presiding over a proceeding to declare that a notice-based time bar provision in a construction contract, after taking into account various matters set out in the Bill, is unfair if compliance with the provision is not reasonably possible or would be unreasonably onerous. The effect of such a declaration is to make the provision of no effect for the purposes of that adjudication or proceeding. The Bill also inserts a power to prescribe in regulations that a type or a class of provision in a construction contract is of no legal effect, which may be in certain prescribed circumstances and may be subject to prescribed exceptions. These amendments will implement the Committee's recommendations 5 and 6.

Finally, the Bill implements the Committee's recommendation 26 to simplify and expedite the process for enforcing unpaid adjudication determinations in court as a judgement debt.

Other amendments

The Bill makes also several miscellaneous amendments to the Security of Payment Act. It will exclude from the definition of 'business day' the period from 22 December to 10 January during which the construction and building industry typically closes for business. This will implement recommendation 4 of the Committee's report. The Bill widens the power of the Minister to make guidelines relating to the authorisation of authorised nominating authorities, which are the businesses that recruit and provide the adjudicators. This will include requiring fee sharing arrangements between an authorised nominating authority and its adjudicators to be made publicly available, as requested in the Committee's recommendation 24.

The Bill also implements recommendation 11 of the Committee's report to expressly require the Commission to take on a greater educational role by providing information and other materials related to the Security of Payment Act to builders and other building practitioners, authorised nominating authorities and adjudicators and to promote the security of payment laws to the construction and building industry generally. Recommendation 20 of the Committee's report is implemented by the Bill by authorising modern methods of service of all notices and other documents, including by email or other electronic means prescribed by regulations.

Section 85(5) of the Constitution Act 1975

Danny PEARSON: I make the following statements under section 85(5) of the Constitution Act 1975 (Constitution Act) of the reasons why it is the intention of this bill to alter or vary that section.

Clause 52 of the bill substitutes section 51(1) of the Security of Payment Act to provide that it is the intention of section 46 of the Security of Payment Act, as amended by clause 47 of the bill, to alter or vary section 85 of the Constitution Act.

Section 46 of the Security of Payment Act, as amended by clause 47 of the bill, will provide that an adjudicator is not personally liable for anything done or omitted to be done in good faith in the exercise of a power or the discharge of a duty under the Security of Payment Act or the regulations made under that act, or in the reasonable belief that the act or omission was in the exercise of a power or the discharge of a duty under the Security of Payment Act or the regulations made under that act. The reason for limiting the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court is to encourage appropriately qualified persons to act as adjudicators of disputed claims under the Security of Payment Act and to support their independence and impartiality by providing them with an immunity from civil proceedings where they exercise their statutory powers and discharge their statutory duties in good faith. For this purpose to be achieved it is necessary that the immunity that section 46 provides to adjudicators applies to the Supreme Court.

Clause 52 of the bill also substitutes section 51(2) of the Security of Payment Act to provide that it is the intention of section 28R of the Security of Payment Act, which is substituted by clause 34 of the bill, to alter or vary section 85 of the Constitution Act.

New section 28R will set out a procedure for a claimant, who has been provided with an adjudication certificate under section 28Q of the Security of Payment Act, to file the adjudication certificate as a judgment for a debt due to the claimant in a court of competent jurisdiction for the unpaid portion of an adjudicated amount payable or to be released under section 28M(1) of that act. New section 28R(4) provides that if the respondent commences a proceeding to have the judgment set aside, the respondent is not entitled to commence a cross-claim against the claimant, to raise any defence in relation to matters arising under the construction contract or to challenge the adjudication determination. The reason for this restriction is to provide a timely, streamlined process for enforcing the adjudicated amount as a debt by disallowing certain grounds on which a respondent might otherwise seek to challenge a claimant's action to enforce an adjudication determination. This provision will not prevent a person from bringing separate proceedings under the construction contract to recover any amount allegedly overpaid or underpaid or to have recourse to, or have released, the whole or a part of a performance security. Sections 3(4) and 47 of the Security of Payment Act, the latter of which is amended by clause 48 of the bill, preserve this right.

Incorporated speech continues:

Enable the Commission to approve a code of conduct for plumbers

The Building Act enables the Commission to approve and publish codes of conduct for the various categories of building practitioners. The Commission has utilised this power to create a code of conduct for building surveyors, which has improved their professional accountability.

Registered and licensed plumbers are critical practitioners in the built environment. Plumbing work is directly linked to public health, water services, consumer protection and the structural integrity of Victoria's infrastructure. This Bill will enable the Commission to approve and publish a code of conduct for plumbers.

A code of conduct will establish rules and principles by which all licensed and registered plumbers should operate and will help standardise and regulate plumbers' behaviour. Ensuring professional accountability in the plumbing industry is critical to ensure that Victorian consumers are safe, practitioners operate with integrity, and buildings are safe, sustainable and durable.

Improve building surveyor and building inspector performance through registration reform

The Bill reforms how building surveyors and building inspectors are registered, in response to key recommendations of both the Building Confidence Report by Professor Peter Shergold AC and Ms Bronwyn Weir and the Government's Expert Panel on Building Reform.

Specifically, the Bill establishes two new registration pathways for these categories of practitioners, each grounded in clear and objective competence benchmarks to ensure that, on registration, building surveyors

and building inspectors will have the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to successfully perform their authorised work.

Pathway One to registration offers the most efficient route for new entrants who hold the recognised qualifications and practical experience requirements. It aims to avoid the Commission duplicating an assessment of an applicant's competence, which will have already been assessed as part of the applicant having attained the approved prescribed qualifications and the prescribed amount of supervised practical experience. Removal of the duplication of effort will be achieved by aligning these qualifications and practical experience with the competence criteria. This will make the pathway to registration in Victoria more certain, faster and appealing to new entrants.

Pathway Two to registration offers a flexible route for those changing careers, particularly from related building professions. It will enable tailored recognition of prior learning and experience, together with any required 'top up' training to demonstrate an applicant holds the required competence for registration. This pathway is intended to support growth in the supply of registered building surveyors and building inspectors in Victoria.

The Bill also establishes an approvals framework to support implementation of the new pathways to registration. The Commission will be able to approve prescribed qualifications for Pathway One and approve the types of 'top up training' that will assist a person to obtain registration via Pathway Two.

The Commission will also be able to approve appropriately qualified persons to assist it with assessing applications for registration, including advising the Commission whether a prescribed qualification should be approved for the criteria under Pathway One and whether an applicant meets the registration criteria under Pathway One or Pathway Two. This is intended to reduce the regulator's assessment burden and support timely registration decisions, while maintaining assessment quality.

The Commission will be required to approve clear and objective competence standards for registration, which is expected to lift building surveyor and building inspector performance by ensuring these registered practitioners are competent to carry out the work authorised by their registration. After registration, the approved competence standards will also be able to inform practitioner guidance, including practitioner auditing, by serving as a clear and objective measure of practitioner performance. The introduction and integration of these competence standards into the building surveyor and building inspector registration scheme is also expected to speed up registration decision times, especially under Pathway One, as there will be less need for the Commission to reassess an applicant's competence.

Changes to building surveyor information statement requirements

Consistent with the Government's commitment to promote and protect the interests of consumers of building work, the Building Act requires relevant building surveyors to provide their clients with an information statement that clearly details their role and responsibilities under building legislation. This requirement will be brought into effect through supporting regulations.

The Bill improves consumer access to this information by requiring the surveyor to provide the statement to their client at an earlier stage in the building permit process. Minor amendments will bring forward the required stage for giving a statement to no later than 10 business days after the relevant building surveyor applies to the Commission for a building permit number, rather than in relation to when the building permit is issued.

Amend Environment Effects Act 1978 to enable cost recovery fees to be charged

The Bill amends the *Environment Effects Act 1978* to require proponents to pay a prescribed fee for the assessment of an environment effects statement and for other services provided under that Act. The assessment of environment effects statement has been undertaken by the Government with no mechanism to recover any of the cost associated with this critically important assessment process. The ability to recover costs will ensure that the Government can continue to carry out high quality assessments of the environmental impacts of works, in line with Victorians' expectations and the user-pays principal.

The process of prescribing fees in regulations will be subject to a separate, regulatory impact process. The collection of user-pays fees will support a faster assessment of environment effects statement in line with the Government's initiatives to cut red tape and speed up environment effects statement processes as announced in this Government's 2024 Economic Growth Statement – Victoria: Open for Business.

Widen scope of enforcement orders to require native vegetation offsets

The Bill amends the Planning and Environment Act to strengthen the consequences for the illegal removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation by expressly enabling VCAT, as part of an enforcement order, to require a person take remedial action on 'other land', not only on the land on which the contravention was committed, and to acquire biodiversity offsets on other land.

These amendments will ensure that, if native vegetation has been destroyed or removed without a planning permit or in contravention of the conditions of a planning permit or a section 173 agreement, the vegetation and biodiversity loss can be offset through the planting, protection and regeneration of native vegetation on another site, if that cannot be achieved on the land where the vegetation was destroyed, lopped or removed from, or it can be offset by the acquisition of a native vegetation biodiversity offset on other land. This approach is consistent with the purpose of native vegetation controls in the Victoria Planning Provisions, which seek to ensure that there is no net loss to biodiversity as a result of the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation.

This amendment will address a long-standing gap in the enforcement of illegal native vegetation removal and will act as a further deterrent to those wishing to remove native vegetation, without first obtaining a permit, by removing the perverse incentive that exists as a result of the current inability for an enforcement order to require the purchase of biodiversity offsets.

The Bill makes various other technical and consequential amendments, including two amendments to the Heritage Act 2017 to exclude requirements to consider emissions reductions targets and the risk arising from climate change under section 12(2A) of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* when amending or removing places on the Victorian Heritage Register and when implementing World Heritage Environs Areas and Strategy Plans.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (11:12): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday 25 September.

Business of the house

Orders of the day

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (11:12): I move:

That:

- (a) the following order of the day, government business, be read and discharged:

DISABILITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES REGULATION AMENDMENT BILL 2024 – Second reading – *Resumption of debate* and that the bill be withdrawn;

- (b) the following orders of the day, government business, be read and discharged:

HEALTH WORKFORCE – That this House acknowledges the massive investment of the Allan Labor Government in the health workforce, including – (1) Growing the workforce by more than 50 per cent; (2) Increasing nurse and midwife pay by 28.4 per cent; (3) Growing the on-road paramedic workforce by over 50 per cent; and (4) Upskilling thousands of health professionals – *Resumption of debate*;

COMMITMENT TO WORKING FAMILIES – That this House recognises the Allan Labor Government's commitment to working families by expanding free breakfast clubs, saving parents \$400 through the School Saving Bonus, and extending the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, ensuring every student has access to essential programs, no matter their circumstances – *Resumption of debate*.

I am a great admirer of this institution of the Parliament. In my time in this place I have always admired the fact that we have been able to ensure the institution keeps pace with 21st-century technology but that we have got the underlying notions of respect, going back to the Speaker's comments earlier this week, about this great institution.

A key part of the way in which this house operates is through the notice paper, and I think it is timely and important that we regularly update the notice paper to ensure that it is current and accurate. This is a housekeeping measure, and it will be removing older notices so the business before us as parliamentarians is clear. This is standard practice in Westminster parliaments when items have outlived their purpose. We are not going to waste this chamber's time or the time of the Parliament's

staff by stacking out the notice paper with a dozen of the same motion, like those opposite do. Just as any organisation keeps its agenda current, this Parliament has the responsibility to do the same.

The people of Victoria expect this Parliament to focus on the issues that matter most – the cost of living, jobs, health and education. That is where our attention should be, not tied up with old and redundant items sitting on the paper. Clearing the decks allows us to get on with the business that makes a real difference for Victorians. This motion demonstrates respect for the processes of the house and shows that we treat the notice paper seriously and do not treat it as a dumping ground for items that have no pathway forward, like those opposite do. This is about keeping our house in order, something those opposite could learn from given the time they took up earlier today. The government has considered the best use of the house's time and determined that these matters do not need to proceed further.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (11:15): I rise to make a few comments, too. I am surprised to get up and contribute and say a few words on this, because in my discussions with the Leader of the House she indicated she had not intended to make any remarks in moving this motion, so perhaps that memo did not get through to the minister at the table.

I noticed that in this motion at point (a) the government seeks to discharge the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2024. This is a bill that has been sitting on the notice paper, as you can see, for about 12 months. Quite frankly, you have got to wonder why the government introduced a bill to this chamber – and parliamentary counsel has obviously determined that the government wants to proceed with the bill – and engaged parliamentary counsel to do all the work that they do. We have got to value parliamentary counsel, and we should not be wasting their time. But they got parliamentary counsel to draft this bill, they introduced it to the chamber and then it has just sat on the notice paper for a very, very long period of time, only for the government to realise that they got it wrong. The government has realised that when it comes to this disability bill, they have got it wrong. Again, you have got to wonder; the disability sector must be scratching their heads. Certainly I know the Shadow Minister for Disability, Ageing, Carers and Volunteers is aware of this change, and he is looking forward to the government, hopefully, introducing another disability bill, because otherwise, quite frankly, the government will be vacant in this space.

On the other point, point (b) of this motion, the government seeks to discharge two motions – on the health workforce and on their commitment to working families in a cost-of-living crisis. I find it quite interesting why the government would fail to put these to a vote. Are they afraid of how the vote might turn out? I am not sure why they are not putting these two motions to an actual vote. On the health workforce, our health workforce do amazing work. They are at the frontline. On our paramedics, I give a shout-out to those at the Lilydale ambulance station and the work that they do. They point out to me regularly the challenges in their jobs and the constant ambulance ramping at Maroondah Hospital. That is because the Allan Labor government has, due to their incompetence and financial incompetence, has a problem in the hospital system such that when ambulances and paramedics take a patient to Maroondah Hospital they are unable to then transfer them into a hospital bed because of the problems at Maroondah Hospital as a result of the failures of the Allan Labor government. It strikes me as odd that the government would not put this health workforce motion to the vote but just seeks to discharge it and get it off the notice paper. There must be something awry there.

Perhaps, too, with the motion on the commitment to working families – the government's motion refers to breakfast clubs, the \$400 school saving bonus and extending the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund. Again, it strikes me as odd as to why the government would not put this to the vote. I know there are many families through my electorate of Evelyn who are really struggling with the cost-of-living crisis at the moment, and any assistance they can get is valued. I wonder if the government seeks to strike this off the notice paper because perhaps in the next budget they cannot afford it, and they do not want to have voted for it. Perhaps they do not want to have on the parliamentary record that they voted for something that they are going to cut from the budget.

I would suggest to you that the Allan Labor government is probably going to cut these cost-of-living measures for Victorian families, and that is precisely why they are seeking to quietly try to just take this off the notice paper and fail to put it to a vote. I would challenge them to put it to a vote, but perhaps they just want it off the notice paper. So we will be looking very closely at this Allan Labor government's budget when they hand it down next year.

We already know that debt is soaring to record levels, with nearly \$200 billion of debt under this Allan Labor government. The interest repayments on that debt are over \$1 million an hour. It is crazy. Of course taxes have increased, with tax after tax after tax. I have lost count –

James Newbury: 63.

Bridget VALLENCE: Thank you, member for Brighton. There are 63 new or increased taxes, despite the fact the former Premier at an election committed to no new taxes under his Labor government. Well, that was a promise that completely and utterly failed. We will be looking closely at the budget, because now, given the fact that the government do not want to vote on their own motion on cost-of-living measures for families, I would suspect that they are actually going to cut it from the budget. So we will be looking at that very closely when the budget comes around next year.

But that is all I have to say. As I said, the Leader of the House did convey to me that she had no desire to speak on this motion, and yet given that the Minister for Finance did stand up to speak to the motion, I thought it best to put some of these concerns with this motion on the record. However, we will not be opposing it.

Motion agreed to.

Standing and sessional orders

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (11:21): I move:

That, effective from 13 October 2025, this house:

- (a) adopts the proposed amendments to standing and sessional orders as detailed in appendix B as recommended by the Standing Orders Committee's interim report 2 on the inquiry into including sessional orders and ongoing resolutions in the standing orders, June 2025; and
- (b) deletes existing standing order 52.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:22): Just for the house's assistance: this notice of motion, moved on behalf the Leader of the House, who is not here, seeks that the proposed amendments to the standing and sessional orders, as detailed in the interim report, be incorporated into the standing orders. It is an important issue. It is one that we as the Standing Orders Committee worked on for some time. I do acknowledge the Deputy Speaker. The Deputy Speaker took a leadership role in working through these issues. It would be fair to say that the house considering changes to the standing orders is always a difficult thing, and when he was given the job of leading a subcommittee to work on changes to the standing orders, I am sure that he probably thought to himself, 'How are we going to get any agreement on anything?' But of course we did, because people came to the discussion with goodness of mind in relation to the standing orders. The Deputy Speaker has just come back into the chamber and missed all the nice things I said about him. You will have to review it, Deputy Speaker.

The committee worked hard and did come to agreement on a number of items, and primarily in this case that we are dealing with today they are around incorporating petitions into the standing orders. I do think it is worth noting that, though on this issue there was a spirit of bipartisanship and a positive outcome, there have been a number of other changes to the practices of this place that did not go through the same process. It is worth noting that the Leader of the House made changes with regard to the scheduling of notices of motion without any consultation with the other side of the chamber. There was no discussion, though there was a formal process in place through the Standing Orders Committee that could have enabled her to facilitate discussion should she have had the goodwill. She

clearly did not. Also, the Speaker has made changes in relation to the way that the opposition can raise concerns about when outstanding matters are dealt with, and we see that outstanding matters can no longer be asked about at the end of question time, at the start of the constituency questions section. It now is a requirement that they be asked about at the end of constituency questions.

I have said in this chamber many times that my view is that it only disadvantages an opposition and hides the ministry's lack of responsiveness, and we have seen an incredible lack of responsiveness in relation to these matters. Only today, after a commitment was given that a number of outstanding matters would be answered on Tuesday – and frankly, when I asked about those matters on Tuesday I felt there was almost a personal push off for having raised them – those matters still have not been answered. The house was advised they had been, which clearly was not the case, and they would be by the end of the day, which clearly has still not been the case. I was given almost a push off for having raised them.

I use the outstanding matters issue and also the notice of motion issue by way of examples to show the difference with the matters that have been tabled today by way of this motion, in terms of what has been reached on the standing orders and the incorporation of a matter like petitions into the standing orders, which we reached in a bipartisan way through robust conversation, very important conversation, between ourselves, the coalition; the Greens and the government. I repeat that I am sure the Deputy Speaker, on taking the job of managing that conversation, probably thought, 'How are we going to reach a point where we get to achieving that one item can be incorporated into the standing orders?' But we did, and we are here today to say so.

I would say, in relation to those other two examples that I have just given, that it shows that with some kind of good spirit you can reach outcomes that ensure that the house works smoothly but also make sure the house works in the way that Victorians would expect. I would hope that when the Leader of the House seeks to make changes without any conversation or consultation, perhaps wiser heads around the Leader of the House could provide her some guidance and, I suppose, encouragement to appeal to her better nature, if it is there, as opposed to ramming things through without that good spirit. Today we can see that we will not be opposing the matter we are considering now and hope that in the future, on other matters in relation to the standing and sessional orders, we can do so in a similar way, with the good spirit of this house and on behalf of all Victorians.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ros Spence:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (11:28): I rise today to speak on the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025, and I do so with deep respect for the thousands of volunteers across Victoria who dedicate their lives to rescuing and rehoming our most vulnerable animals. As someone who shares their home with two beautiful cats – they are Gucci and Lulu, two exotics who are fully fledged family members – I understand the profound bond between humans and their companion animals and the lengths that people will go to to ensure their welfare. The opposition acknowledges the government's stated intent to improve oversight and to strengthen outcomes for dogs and cats in need. This is a worthy goal that we all share. However, good intentions alone do not make good legislation, and I stand here today to voice serious concerns about how this bill, in its current form, risks undermining the very community organisations that it claims to support.

Let me be clear about what we are discussing here. Victoria's animal rescue sector is built on the dedication of volunteers – people who actually open their homes, their hearts and their wallets to save animals that would otherwise face euthanasia. These are not large corporate entities with teams of administrators and are not compliance officers. These are ordinary Victorians doing extraordinary work, and at great personal cost. These volunteers work tirelessly seven days a week to give animals a second chance. They are foster carers who bottle feed orphan kittens through the night, retirees who dedicate their golden years to rehabilitating traumatised dogs and working families who squeeze rescue animals into already very busy households.

This is not the first time we have seen well-intentioned legislation create unintended consequences for the Victorian rescue sector. In 2016 the Andrews government introduced the voluntary community foster care registration scheme. At that time concerns were raised by community foster carers, the Municipal Association of Victoria and the wider community about the lack of proper consultation, and an upper house inquiry was established to examine these issues. The committee's recommendations were pretty clear: that the government withdraw the current bill and immediately establish a stakeholder group of industry, municipal and community representatives to consult on the drafting of a new bill. Had the government heeded this advice in 2016 and 2017, we might not be here today discussing similar concerns. Instead the current voluntary system has achieved critically low uptake, with only approximately 50 registered community foster carers across the state, leaving thousands unable to access the support they were promised.

Now we see history repeating itself. The government describes this new scheme as voluntary, but let us examine what 'voluntary' really means. When you remove access to government funding, increase administrative costs and create a two-tiered system that favours large organisations, how voluntary is non-participation really? The bill creates what rescue groups accurately describe as a punishment system for those who do not opt in. Small volunteer-run rescues, the backbone of Victoria's rehoming efforts, will find themselves pushed to the margin, unable to compete for the already limited pool of funding available to them.

First, there is the financial burden. The bill proposes mandatory council notifications within seven business days for each foster placement, address change or adoption. For a single dog this could mean up to nine separate communications and notifications, and each missed notification carries a penalty of approximately \$610. For small rescues already operating on shoestring budgets these penalties could be absolutely devastating. The removal of the \$6 foster carer registration fee, replaced with fees of \$60 to \$150 per animal, shifts the costs directly from individual carers to rescue organisations. This is not administrative streamlining, it is cost shifting that will force smaller groups out of operation.

Second, there is the reporting burden. The bill requires multiple events to be reported within seven days: foster placements, age milestones, adoptions and address changes. This demands dedicated tracking systems and administrative staff that most volunteer organisations just do not have. Meanwhile pounds and shelters that foster and rehome animals face no equivalent reporting burden to councils under their code of practice.

Third, the penalties are disproportionate. At over \$1700 per missed notification, penalties could quickly bankrupt small rescues. These are not corporate entities that can absorb such costs; these are community groups running on donations and volunteer labour.

The bill's expanded search powers allow authorised officers to enter backyards, to enter garages, to enter sheds and to enter vehicles without a warrant, and this represents a disproportionate intrusion into the privacy of foster carers – people who are volunteering their time for our four-legged friends, the majority of whom are law-abiding citizens, providing a very valuable community service.

Additionally, requiring public disclosure of the names of persons responsible for administering pet rehoming organisations creates both privacy concerns and safety risks that will deter volunteers from participating. There are also genuine concerns about the public release of euthanasia data without

proper context, which risks causing reputational harm and divisiveness within a sector that relies heavily on public donations and community support.

The opposition will not oppose this bill. We recognise that some elements represent improvements. The clarification of authorised officers powers and the prescribed classes of dogs eligible for discounted registration have been welcomed by councils. The current system simply does not work, and this bill does deliver a marginally better framework. However, we cannot stand by whilst the same mistakes of 2016 are repeated.

We will be pursuing amendments in the upper house to ensure this legislation truly serves the community organisations it claims to support, rather than creating other systems destined for low uptake and unintended consequences. The opposition does not oppose reform. We support measures that genuinely improve animal welfare outcomes, but reform must be practical, proportionate and informed by proper consultation with stakeholders.

We call on the government to implement the constructive amendments proposed by the rescue sector. Firstly, make the scheme voluntary by writing this guarantee into the code of practice, ensuring rescues cannot be forced to participate in the future. Second, streamline reporting through a central register rather than multiple council notifications and allow monthly reporting instead of seven-day deadlines that create unnecessary stress and administrative burden. Third, ensure the proportionate requirements across all organisations. If pounds and shelters are not required to report foster care addresses to councils, why should rescue groups face this burden instead? And fourth, remove the link between government funding and scheme compliance. Support should be based on animal welfare outcomes, not administrative compliance with a voluntary scheme. And fifth, implement positive incentives rather than punitive measures. The sector suggested practical incentives like master rescue status, official recognition and website listings. These cost nothing, but they provide valuable credibility.

Let me share what rescue groups told the government during consultation. They proposed constructive, practical incentives for participation. Instead the government offered benefits entirely out of step with the sector's needs, including the suggestion that rescues could give dogs and cats to pet shops to sell. The rescue sector was horrified by this suggestion, and rightly so. This disconnect illustrates how far removed the government's thinking is from the day-to-day reality of rescue work.

These organisations exist precisely because they believe animals are not commodities to be sold but living beings deserving of being carefully matched with appropriate homes. The statistics speak for themselves. In 2024 pounds and shelters had over 14,000 dogs and cats in foster care and still euthanased 12,000 animals. Community rescue groups work tirelessly to reduce these numbers, taking in animals that might otherwise be destroyed and investing time, money and love in finding them homes. These volunteers are the unsung heroes of animal welfare in Victoria. They deserve our support, not additional red tape that threatens their ability to continue their very good work.

We have an opportunity to learn from the failures of 2016 and create legislation that truly supports Victoria's rescue community. The opposition will work constructively through the parliamentary process to achieve meaningful amendments that address the genuine concerns raised by rescue organisations.

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (11:38): I rise to support the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025, an important step forward for animal welfare in Victoria. Its essence is to embed the dedication of our rescue groups and shelters into the legislative framework, recognising the vital role they play in giving them the support they need to continue their invaluable work.

This bill introduces a voluntary authorisation scheme for pet rehoming organisations, and for the first time these groups will be formally recognised under the Domestic Animals Act 1994. It reflects years of consultation. In 2021 the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets delivered its final report after engaging widely with the sector. Recommendations 7 and 11 called for a regulatory framework to recognise and

support rehoming organisations. Since then the department has conducted interviews, workshops and surveys and established the rehoming pets working group in 2023. The draft bill was refined with the sector in late 2024. This reform reflects the insights of those who live this work every day.

To qualify for authorisation, organisations must be registered charities with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. This ensures accountability and public trust and highlights that rehoming work is driven by service to the community, not profit.

Members interjecting.

Jordan CRUGNALE: Can I ask for a little bit of quiet in the chamber, please. Authorised organisations may be granted permission to conduct dog and cat adoption events at registered animal pounds, shelters and pet shops. In addition, these organisations will be exempt from registering foster cats and dogs with the local councils for the first 12 months that the animals remain in foster care. The bill also clarifies the powers of authorised officers under the Domestic Animals Act. Officers will be able to enter the whole or part of any premises or any vehicle, excluding any building or vehicle that is occupied as a residential home. This bill empowers rehoming organisations – it does not restrict them – and our government will continue to work with stakeholders to ensure the regulations are practical and effective.

This bill builds on the extraordinary work already underway across Victoria, and it is important to acknowledge individuals and organisations that have carried this responsibility for many years. I want to take a moment to acknowledge the wonderful work of Michelle Dryden from One at a Time Pet Rescue in Lang Lang. She is one of the most beautiful, caring and grounded people I have ever met, with a humongous heart for cats – and people – dogs, chooks, llamas, horses and sheep. Many know Michelle not just in the Cardinia Shire but in wider south-eastern Gippsland for her incredible dedication and compassion in caring for animals in need. Last year she received a grant of around \$27,000 to fund the establishment of a quarantine and isolation care centre for vulnerable cats and kittens, ensuring they can receive the care and protection they need during the most critical stages of recovery. In a text exchange she spoke about being in such shock about being successful in receiving this grant but very humbled, grateful and relieved to be able to help cats. Her work continues to make a real and lasting difference and it is important that we recognise her contributions today on the public record.

In the Bass Coast area of my electorate, I want to recognise Marion Munro and her remarkable work at the Corinella Boarding Kennels and Dog Rescue. She is a recent recipient also in our annual Community Gem recognition, where for the fifth year running since we have been doing this, we have put a call out to the people of Bass to nominate someone exquisite living amongst us who has made their heart sing and shown their true community colours. We had over a hundred nominations this year come in with remarkable stories of remarkable people. People in our kinders, schools, clubs, men's sheds, servos and shops. Of no surprise, we had many delighting in telling me about Marion's amazing work, and they spoke to her generosity of spirit, stellar dedication, super caring demeanour to all animals, always looking out for each and every rescue she befriends, and pets looked after. Some of the quotes that were said of Marion included 'a quiet achiever with a beautiful spirit', 'Marion does everything with grace and kindness – she helps people in need as well as animals', 'is a living treasure' and 'everyone knows and loves her – a delightfully very funny person, too'. As part of the Community Gems Sunday series on my socials, the comments, likes and shares were in abundance as well. Just to quote a number of them:

So well deserved. Marion does so much for our community.

Congratulations ... We know you don't like the spotlight but sometimes the light switch needs to be turned on.

Marion ... you deserve to wear that crown –

because each of the Community Gems received a very glittery tiara –

never forget that. Imagine how many breathe easier because of your selflessness. Imagine how many lives you have changed. Amazing effort, and you do it every single day.

Then there is the RSPCA crew in Pearcedale who are just gold. My dog Pippa, a pup at the time, accompanied me to officially launch their Pet Net project late last year. I could not leave her at home, so what better place to take her than to officiate at the RSPCA over in Pearcedale? We know that people love their pets, and this community-driven initiative is all about promoting animal welfare and responsible pet ownership. The program supports pet owners in our Cardinia, Casey, Frankston and Greater Dandenong communities and its services include accessible education to help families support the health and wellbeing of their pets, low-cost desexing and vaccination, pet food through food banks, emergency pet boarding and behaviour support. The RSPCA Victoria staff and volunteers' commitment to improving the welfare of our precious pets is remarkable. The Peninsula Pet Net project is already providing vital support for our local Bass communities and their beloved pets, so I just want to thank Dr Sarah Irwin, the CEO Dr Liz Walker and the extraordinarily spirited, caring, professional, kind and amazing team at Pearcedale and across the RSPCA for all the work they do supporting our community members needing extra pet support and caring for the many pets that come in for care.

The RSPCA Victoria also cares for more than 20,000 animals each year across the state, and their work spans shelters, veterinary treatment, cruelty investigations and community education.

They protect animals in need while helping others understand how to care responsibly.

Across the state countless other animal organisations are working tirelessly caring for, rescuing and protecting animals every single day. The Lost Dogs' Home, established in 1910, provides refuge for more than 20,000 lost, stray and abandoned animals each year. Their services include medical treatment, rehabilitation and rehoming, and with a 24-hour animal ambulance and a strong foster care network, they ensure help is available wherever pets are vulnerable. Wildlife Victoria has operated since 1989, responding to calls about sick, injured and orphaned native animals. Their 24-hour emergency response service and statewide volunteer network ensure that wildlife receives care and rehabilitation. Their work reminds us that animal welfare includes the unique native species that enrich our environment.

Grassroots organisations also play a vital role. Australian Animal Rescue Incorporated, founded in response to the 2009 bushfires, rescues both domestic and wild animals, provides rehabilitation and responds in times of crisis. There is the Cat Protection Society of Victoria, established in 1947, the largest cat welfare organisation in the country. Together these organisations show what is possible when communities are motivated by compassion. They demonstrate that responsibility for animal welfare is shared across society, from large statewide charities to local volunteers.

In conclusion, the bill acknowledges this reality by creating a structure that works with the sector rather than imposing unnecessary obstacles. It ensures that care is delivered to high standards while providing flexibility and benefits that make rehoming more sustainable. It also sends a clear message that government values and supports the work of shelters, foster networks and adoption groups. Volunteers and foster carers are central to this story. They take animals into their homes, often at their own expense, and provide the stability and love that vulnerable animals need until a permanent family is found. Their contribution is not measured only in the numbers but in lives saved, in the relief of frightened or injured animals and in the joy of new beginnings. Every person who has fostered a dog or a cat and every volunteer who has answered an emergency call for wildlife has helped create a more compassionate state. To every shelter worker, every rescuer, every volunteer and every foster carer: thank you. Your work transforms lives. This bill is for you and for the animals that cannot speak for themselves, and I commend the bill to the house.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (11:48): I too rise to speak on the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. It is raining cats and dogs in the chamber here this morning. I have to say from the outset, I am probably more of a dog person than I am a cat

person. I know that is probably an electorally unpopular and unwise thing to say. But I respect the role of cats in our society and the importance of them to many Victorians.

Annabelle Cleeland: Emotional wellbeing.

Jess WILSON: Indeed. But as the co-chair of the Parliamentary Friends of the RSPCA and, I must say, the very proud parent to my cairn terrier Audrey, this bill is of great interest to me. Can I just start by thanking the team at the RSPCA and Dr Liz Walker. I know the RSPCA sits within the member for Box Hill's electorate. The member for Box Hill serves as the secretary of the Parliamentary Friends of the RSPCA and is the co-chair with the member for Eltham as well. It is certainly a bipartisan parliamentary friendship group here, and we love the opportunity when it presents itself to have events in Parliament and bring – I think we have only had dogs in, but potentially maybe in the future some cats as well. Can I really put on the record the incredibly important work that the RSPCA does do to

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Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Members will come to order. I am a cat person – stop it.

Jess WILSON: Now I have got the Acting Speaker offside. Can I thank the people at the RSPCA for the wonderful work that they do to promote and provide for animal welfare. They truly are saints. Having visited the facility out in the member for Box Hill's electorate, you can see firsthand the dedication and care they provide to the animals that they are looking after out there and the terrific service they offer. But can I also thank the myriad of volunteers and individuals and organisations who work tirelessly in that completely volunteer capacity to find new homes for pets across the state. I think, like many in this place, few things pull at the heartstrings more than cats and dogs that are looking for a new home – a forever home, we would hope to see. To the people who do the work behind the scenes to make those new homes a reality, whether they be foster carers or those who devote countless hours to managing rehoming organisations and networks: a sincere thankyou to all of you for all the work that you do. I know that this bill will make changes to the way a lot of these organisations will operate going forward, and I will certainly address those changes shortly.

But first, can I just make a couple of broader comments about the Domestic Animals Act 1994. As this bill does make amendments to it, I want to use this opportunity once again to call for a review into strengthening the guidance under the act provided to local councils around when dogs should be declared dangerous. A constituent of mine in Kew recently lost her beloved dog after it was attacked by another dog, and having met with her a couple of times now, I can understand the incredible pain that her and her family have gone through as a result of that awful attack and the loss of their beloved pet. Despite the tragic fatality caused by the dog in question, it was not declared a dangerous dog under the act by Boroondara council.

When a dog is declared dangerous, it ensures owners are required to keep the dog in an appropriate enclosure and display appropriate warning signs. Section 34 of the Domestic Animals Act indicates council may exercise discretion to declare a dog dangerous if the dog has caused the death of or serious injury to a person or animal by biting or attacking that person or animal. However, it does not provide specific guidance on how this discretion should be exercised, and this means that councils are left largely to their own devices when it comes to implementing the criteria. I have called on the Minister for Agriculture previously to develop more specific statutory guidance around declaring dogs as dangerous animals under the Domestic Animals Act so that councils have greater clarity around the circumstances that warrant such a declaration. Today I take the opportunity to renew that call to the minister on that opportunity to take a real review of that section of the act. I do note there has been a change to the act recently which now does provide for councils to be notified when a dangerous dog moves into a new council area. This is a welcome change, but there is certainly more to do around

providing more specific guidance around that discretionary power for councils to declare an animal a dangerous animal.

But I go back to the bill before us today. This is a bill that seeks to establish a new pet rehoming authorisation scheme. Under the scheme, which I understand is voluntary, pet rehoming organisations can apply for authorisation. So while pet rehoming organisations will not be required to be authorised, certain benefits will be offered to organisations within the scheme. This is certainly a practical step forward, but it is clear that the bill before us today is a consequence of not consulting and not taking the appropriate steps in the first place, and that is why we have had to bring it back before us today. Much of this could have been avoided a decade ago, as I said, with proper consultation at the time. Back in 2016 the government introduced the Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Bill 2016, and this initial piece of legislation introduced the voluntary registration system for community foster carers, a move that almost immediately was a cause of concern for many in the industry. These red flags were not just raised by foster carers but also by the Municipal Association of Victoria and the broader public. The core issue was that the system had been designed with very little input from those who would be most affected. That is unfortunately a hallmark of many of the pieces of legislation that come before us – the lack of consultation with those most affected. As a consequence, here we are today bringing forward amendments that could have been put in place the first time.

Turning to some of the key elements of the bill before us, chief among the benefits that will be offered by the scheme to the registered organisations is permission to hold adoption days to rehome dogs and cats. I understand that at the moment this permission is only granted to pounds and shelters, and adoption days have the potential to provide rehoming networks with greater opportunity and wider exposure to support their rehoming efforts, including at pet supply shops. Authorised organisations will also be able to use these days to promote and educate the community about the ongoing rehoming work that they do. The bill also provides a key benefit for registered organisations by way of a 12-month exemption from the requirement to register foster cats and dogs with their local council. Presently, foster carers are required to register their cat or dog with the local council, even though the arrangement is not intended to be permanent because a forever home is still being sought for that animal. This registration requirement is both an administrative and a financial burden on organisations and foster carers, so the exemption represents an attractive benefit for becoming authorised under the scheme.

I note in the minister's second-reading speech it was argued that setting these requirements will improve animal welfare outcomes for cats and dogs and enable pet rehoming organisations to demonstrate their high standards of animal management and care. I am sure this was the intention of the bill, but like many of my Liberal and National colleagues, I have been contacted by a number of individuals and organisations expressing concerns about these additional requirements. There are concerns the scheme will simply add to the administrative load, and there are concerns about the lack of detail and definitions around the criteria for the organisations that will become authorised. I thank the member for Lowan for her contribution earlier on this debate, which highlighted the coalition's deep appreciation for the work of foster care networks across the state in caring for vulnerable animals. We share the concerns of these organisations – namely, that the government has overlooked the importance of the work these organisations do in drafting the bill – and I understand that we will be looking at pursuing options and amendments to this effect in the upper house.

While we certainly do not oppose the bill before us today, and it does go some way to improve the current system, there is a clear need to monitor its impact for unintended consequences on the sector. More broadly, can I just finish by thanking my Audrey, my cairn terrier, for being a wonderful big sister to Patrick. I think sometimes he loves her more than she loves him. Every morning when he wakes up and sees Audrey next to his cot, it is one of the most lovely things in the world.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Northcote, I hope you are a cat person.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (11:58): Acting Speaker, unfortunately for you, I must declare to this house that I too am a dog person, though, like the member for Kew, I do respect the role of cats in our society.

Gary Maas interjected.

[NAME AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Kat THEOPHANOUS: They do have a role to play. This bill is about cats and dogs, but really it is about those bonds that shape our lives. It is about muddy paw prints on a freshly mopped floor, the jingle of a collar as a dog bounds to the door and the soft weight of a cat curled up beside you after a long day. It is about second chances: the dog waiting at the pound to be reunited with its owner; the rescue cat peering through the bars of a shelter, hoping for a home; and the volunteers who open their doors and their hearts, giving those animals a future. When we talk about rehoming cats and dogs, we are really talking about building families; we are talking about homes filled with love and laughter and companionship. Pets are not just background characters in our lives; they walk with us through our stories, they share our secrets, our sorrows and our joy, and they are a part of us.

When I think about the difference a pet can make in a family's life, I cannot help but think about my own childhood dog. We got her on Christmas Day when I was seven years old, a tiny little Australian terrier crossed with a silky terrier and so small she could fit in the palms of my two hands. Because she was a Christmas gift and a pooch, she was dubbed 'Chooch', and she truly lived up to her special name. Chooch was whip smart and emotionally savvy; she was cheeky and independent; and she loved her freedom, and when she ran, she ran like the wind. When she was happy her tail would wag furiously and she would leap all over us, licking our faces. If you got too close to her when she was eating, she would growl and nip at you.

My older brothers and I used to set up obstacle courses down the hallway of our house in Alphington, pillows and teddies lined up as hurdles, and she would tear through them at lightning speed to claim the piece of ham at the other end. She was resourceful too, finding ways to sneak out of the house and explore the neighbourhood, sometimes even enlisting other dogs to bring her scraps of food. She loved a tummy rub and hated baths. If we did bathe her, she would dash straight outside to roll in the dirt, undoing all our efforts. So many of my childhood memories are coloured by her fluffy little face, her soft pointy ears and those clever brown eyes. She filled our childhood with happiness. It was devastating when she went missing about 10 years later. She left a big hole in our hearts, one so deep that we never brought another dog into our family. But if we ever did, I know that rehoming would be a pathway we would really consider, because every dog and cat deserves the chance to bring joy to a family like Chooch brought to us.

For the very first time, our laws will formally recognise the extraordinary contribution of Victoria's pet rehoming organisations – the rescue groups, the adoption networks and the volunteer-run charities who dedicate themselves day in and day out to give cats and dogs a second chance at life. That is why this bill matters. It recognises the simple truth that pets are not just animals, they are family. By strengthening the rehoming system we are helping to build more happy homes full of muddy paws, wagging tails and the kind of unconditional love only an animal can give.

This is something I see reflected every day in Northcote. We are a community who care deeply about the welfare of animals and have long campaigned on animal justice issues, pushing for a ban on recreational duck hunting and better treatment for greyhounds and conservation efforts for our swamp wallabies and other species along our waterways and creeks. As the member for Northcote, I have been proud to champion these causes and represent the deep affection my community feels for all living things. By a vast majority, we believe that all animals are sentient beings capable of experiencing fear, pain and suffering and therefore it is our moral responsibility to protect them from harm.

That is why I have been proud to be a part of a Labor government that has led the nation on animal welfare. We introduced Victoria's first ever *Animal Welfare Action Plan*, providing a framework for the protection of all animals, whether they are pets, farmed animals or wildlife, and recognising the sentience of animals. We banned cruel puppy farms with the strictest breeding laws in the country, and we changed the rules so pet shops can only source cats and dogs through registered shelters and organisations, helping to put an end to large-scale illegal breeders. We also banned puppies and kittens from languishing in pet shops in their windows. But the list goes on; it does not stop there. We made it the law that every pet sold must have a microchip and source number, so families know where their pets have come from. We established a pet exchange register to improve the traceability of cats and dogs being sold or rehomed, and we became the first state to introduce mandatory reporting of animal fate data for dogs and cats in shelters and pounds. We gave renters the right to keep a pet in their home, and we removed the cruel and outdated requirement for greyhounds to be muzzled in public. These are reforms that reflect our values as Victorians, that animals deserve to be treated with dignity and that every dog and cat should have the chance to live in a safe and loving home.

In my office in Northcote this is our lived experience. My former staffer Johanna used to bring Frank to work under her desk, her adorable little Jack Russell. Now my staffer Heidi tells me about her three cats that live with her as her family at home, each with their own unique quirks and personalities. Walk through Northcote on any given day and you will see it everywhere. On High Street dogs sit at cafe tables with their owners, bowls of water are welcomingly laid out for them, cats perch on windowsills ruling their little kingdoms and in All Nations Park neighbours meet and dogs tumble together on the grass.

We are so fortunate to have wonderful local vets as well: Northcote Animal Hospital, Northcote Plaza veterinary clinic, Thornbury Veterinary Hospital, Preston Veterinary & Hospital, Alphington and Fairfield Vet and ARC. I thank these vets and their staff who are there for families through very difficult moments, holding their hands as they say goodbye to a beloved pet or celebrating them when a sick animal has pulled through.

I also want to thank our local pet rehoming shelters and services, including the Wat Djerring Animal Facility, which is the animal pound for Darebin, but also other local rescue groups like Maneki Neko Cat Rescue and the Lost Dogs' Home.

And it is worth noting that in the last year, Darebin rangers collected over a thousand pets, with many not returning home. So foster carers and rehoming is really critical work.

What we are doing in this bill matters, because these reforms will shape the kind of lives our pets lead, the care they receive, the chances they are given and the love they get to share. This bill takes forward five of the recommendations from the independent Taskforce on Rehoming Pets. At the heart of the changes is a new voluntary authorisation scheme for pet rehoming organisations. Right now the law regulates individual foster carers, but it does not give proper oversight or support to the organisations that actually manage the whole rehoming process, and the sector has been calling for change. Under the new framework organisations that choose to become authorised will receive important benefits, including reducing financial burdens and giving them the same opportunities that pounds and shelters have to rehome cats and dogs. They will be able to hold adoption days with no dogs under six months and no kittens under eight weeks, and authorised officers will be empowered to shut down an event if welfare is ever at risk. This means they will be better placed to find safe and loving homes for more animals. Those organisations that do not opt in can continue to operate as they always have, but they will not have access to those benefits. These changes have been shaped by extensive consultation with rehoming groups and animal welfare advocates across Victoria. They will take effect in 14 months after detailed regulations are developed in partnership with the sector and community. The bill also makes one important clarification around powers of entry. It confirms that authorised officers can enter a backyard without a warrant in order to seize a dangerous dog, but it does not extend those powers to people's homes or vehicles.

[NAME AWAITING VERIFICATION]

This bill strengthens Victoria's proud record of animal welfare reform. It gives proper recognition to the organisations and volunteers who devote themselves to rescuing, rehabilitating and homing our state's cats and dogs. For the first time their contribution will be formally enshrined in law, backed by a framework that provides the support they need to keep doing their vital work. I want to acknowledge again the tireless dedication of Victoria's rehoming community, from large organisations to the smallest volunteer rescue groups. The compassion, persistence and care that they bring has shaped these reforms and ensures that more animals will find their way to safe and loving homes. Step by step, reform by reform, we have been making Victoria's laws more compassionate, more humane and more reflective of our values. Animals are not property. They are not disposable. They are living, feeling beings. They experience fear, joy and love just like we do. Whether it is my Chuchi, the terrier who made my childhood brighter, Heidi's three cats waiting at home or the rescue dog finding its forever family, this bill is about valuing them, protecting them and recognising that the sector supports them. On behalf of my community, I thank the minister, the taskforce and of course the sector itself for bringing more kindness to our laws.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (12:08): It is an absolute joy to stand up, like so many people today, to rise and speak on the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. It is a wonderful opportunity for everyone to talk about the other family members that they have, and we are continuing the theme. I think I should mention that we are dog people, but as farmers we have an emotional support dog in the house and every other dog is a working dog and has to stay outside the house because of the smell that they have, but they are very happy and honestly live just as well. So we have our Ray and Tempe, who are our working dogs and are just amazing. Honestly, they are like two staff members in how effective they are, but they are just beautiful and they are very handy.

A little anecdote: when I was elected I said to my children, 'How are you going with Mum being away from home so often?' And they said, 'Oh, you know' – a bit of an exposure about how domestically useless I am. They said, 'Oh, Mum, we're fine without you. We just don't get as many cuddles from Dad.' Well, any parent would feel that is quite heartbreaking, and so a couple of days later I brought home our beautiful dachshund, Alphonse Kitchen Louie Cleeland. You know, each person got to choose a name to bring them together, and my son was hungry at the time, so he is Alphonse Kitchen Louie Cleeland, aka Fonz, Fonzie, Fonzarelli or Alphonse Gangitano. We have lots of different names for him – some of them probably should just stay in the house. But he is just beautiful. He regulates our emotions, and he is a joy of our life. And you know, we cannot have favourite children, but let me tell you, he competes for that title often.

As farmers we also act as foster carers, and a bit of a more sombre comment that I wanted to make while we are talking about our love for animals is that the farmers that have gone through some really tough times in the past month have gone out on a limb to ensure they have prioritised the health and wellbeing of their animals above all else. I just wanted to give a little shout-out to those that have been feeding relentlessly – yes, we have had some rain, which is wonderful, but it has been a really tough time. Every farmer that I know always prioritises, no matter their financial position, feeding their animals and their livestock over themselves. I hope that we have turned a corner. I hope that the season starts to see grass growing and it is a better time for our farmers in the electorate of Euroa and really right across the state.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

We also have just a couple of other pets that we have adopted over the last few years, Ivy and Mary – Mary had a little lamb, obviously – which have gone on to be our pets, which are more work than the other thousand-odd sheep that we have. We also have an off-the-track thoroughbred, which my

husband calls the most expensive lawnmower you will ever come across. A nice little shout-out to the Nagambie breeders, because I have got some of the best, world-class thoroughbred breeders in the electorate, and their whole-of-life care for these magnificent animals is just inspiring – hence where our expensive lawnmower came from, who has a wonderful retired life grazing the hills. His name is Killer Valley, but I would not get on a horse called Killer, so we called him Manu because of his New Zealand genetics. In the past couple of months we have helped care for a koala, a turtle and a duckling. A nice little shout-out to Seymour, because we have the best greyhound adoption program based in Seymour, which is another rehoming program to support the greyhound industry, making sure that they are whole-of-life supported, these magnificent animals. Gosh, we sound like we have a zoo at home, but we have also adopted a greyhound called Gertrude.

Because you now know our family genetics and our love of who is in our home, I am going to get back to the bill. As we have heard, there are some tweaks. Honestly, a lot of people have mentioned earlier today that had it been done right in 2016 we probably would not have spent an enormous amount of resources and a couple of days dedicated to debating it, but here we are. The focus is on improving the way dogs and cats are rehomed through introducing a new authorisation scheme for pet rehoming organisations. The bill seeks to enhance transparency and oversight. It also attempts to tighten rules around when authorised officers can enter certain premises and clarifies access to backyards. There are provisions around reduced registration fees for certain classes of dogs, which I understand have been very well received.

At face value the bill is a practical step forward, but scratching the surface it is clear that much of this could have been avoided with just proper consultation in the first place, which we have heard extensively throughout this Parliament, really. Get it right the first time, and we save an awful amount of money and time in this place.

The initial piece of legislation back in 2016, the Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Bill 2016 – as soon as it went through, there were red flags straightaway. They were raised by foster carers but also by councils, the Municipal Association of Victoria and really right across the state. The core issue was designed with very little input from those it would affect, a move, unfortunately, that we see quite often in this place. Councils were particularly concerned about the financial burden to administer these new registrations and the lack of support to shoulder that. Understandably, people did not feel comfortable registering these foster animals in their own names for what might be just a short period of time, so there was a practicality element that we really had to take on board.

The concerns were substantial enough to prompt the upper house inquiry, which we have heard about, and they resulted in a report from the inquiry that had the first finding and recommendation, finding 1, that consultation with relevant stakeholders was inadequate. The report said that the government should withdraw the bill and immediately establish a stakeholder group of industry, municipal and community representatives to consult on the drafting of the new bill. Essentially, we had to go back to the drawing board. Fast forward nearly a decade later and we are still cleaning up the consequences of that poor consultation to begin with.

Back to this bill: at its core, authorised organisations will be required to report information about the animals in their care, including what happens to them, whether they are desexed or microchipped and how long they remain in foster care. These organisations will also be eligible for certain grants to help offset the costs of reporting administration and also receive exemptions from some council registration requirements. There are also new powers allowing these authorised groups to hold adoption days at pet shops and other venues; it is a small but welcome change. The bill also tidies up some grey areas, such as confirming that authorised officers can enter a backyard to seize dangerous dogs and clarifying fee reductions for dogs that are microchipped.

It is tidy on paper, but there are some fairly big questions. There is still some controversy around the voluntary authorisation scheme and whether it could have implications for smaller organisations that

operate as foster carers as well. Although it is technically optional, the pressure to participate is strong and quite concerning.

[NAME AWAITING VERIFICATION]

There is one comment I want to refer to, because I think on our side we have gone through some of the holes and the concerns about it, but it is a great opportunity to highlight I guess what was ignored, the missed opportunities of the past and the ways that we must do better in listening to those who are already doing the hard work on the ground. It is also a great opportunity to thank all of our incredible animal foster carers, wildlife sanctuaries and community groups doing absolutely exceptional jobs across the Euroa electorate.

I want to finish by reading some words by Melody Moses, a student from FCJ College Benalla who recently participated in the Parliament Prize competition and spoke on the importance of our local wildlife and the need to keep them safe. Her family actually operate a shelter outside of Benalla and do an absolutely magnificent job.

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I am a 12-year-old girl from Benalla and my family run a wildlife shelter. We have almost 50 animals in care, and they all have their own unique and heartbreaking story. In case you did not know, 2245 species in Australia are endangered and 90 are critically endangered, and 202 animal and plant species have made the list of threatened species between 2016 and 2021. Wow! Crazy, right? Tens of millions of our animals are dying every year because of us, and it is just so unfair.

In this speech she talked about the impact of different developments on wildlife as well as the road toll. Those words are a powerful reminder of why bills like this can make a difference. But at its heart, the debate is not just about regulation or compliance but about the lives of animals and the communities who care for them.

John LISTER (Werribee) (12:18): I thank the member for Euroa for her really endearing contribution, particularly about her family pets as well. I really appreciated that. To bring a positive tone to this place is really appreciated. I too would like to just briefly reflect on how important our animals are.

In my contribution to this bill I do want to talk a little bit about some of the data that we have looked at as a government around the role that pets play in our lives. But before I do that I want to recall back to when I was not in this place and was just a civilian and saw the reforms coming through around banning puppy farms. It was a key feature of what we took to 2014 and elections after that. This government has remained committed to animal welfare and since 2014 has been at the forefront of reforms that reflect Victorians' relationship with their pets. Our reforms led the country and included banning those cruel puppy farms, making it an offence to sell a pet without a valid microchip and source number from the pet exchange register and removing the need for greyhounds to be muzzled in public. That was great, because if anyone has met a greyhound, they are just nervous boys and girls. They are beautiful. I love greyhounds. We produced Victoria's first *Animal Welfare Action Plan*, which recognises this idea that animals are sentient, and putting that into a formal policy led the country.

One thing that was particularly important to me as a renter for so long was giving us the right to keep a pet – no longer having to bundle up whatever animal you have, put them in the car and drive around to your family's place during those inspections – and making sure that what is a normal thing is protected in our law.

We reformed the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to make sure we get expert advice; we became the first state to introduce mandatory reporting of animal fate data for dogs and cats, which is particularly important to some of the reforms we are seeing today; we launched a targeted cat desexing program; and we developed a statewide cat management strategy.

In our 2023 pet census Victorians were asked where their furred or feathered family came from. In that data, when we looked at where people were getting their dogs from, although a significant amount still came from breeders, 17 per cent came from rescue, rehoming or volunteer-run organisations, 9 per cent from a family member or friend and 6 per cent from an animal shelter. Cats were a little bit different. The majority came from rescue, rehoming or volunteer-run organisations, animal shelters, or from a family or friend. Very few cats came from breeders, and I think we have all heard the jokes about the cat distribution network and the way that cats just suddenly appear in your life. I am someone who has two rehomed cats in their life. One spent the first few months of her life behind a bakery in Nhill – my fiancée adopted Pebbles – and the other was actually found underneath the G block portables at my school along with her sisters when their mum had abandoned them. We took them to the local vet just down the road on Market Road and discovered that all of a sudden we had to register and work with one of our local rehoming organisations to foster these three little kittens. I am happy to say that two out of the three ended up in good homes and one ended up with me, which is sometimes a little bit of an interesting scenario given my relationship with cats, because I am terrified of getting scratched, so a lot of my interactions are spent being very careful around them.

With this data and some of that reflection on my interactions with rehoming animals, it is important to look at these rehoming arrangements. In 2021 the Labor government's Taskforce on Rehoming Pets delivered its report on how pet welfare can be improved through this process. One of the things that that report looked at was support for the rehoming sector. To read from the report:

Consultation found that the main barriers to rehoming animals are costs and access to long-term foster care.

Some of those costs include around \$500 to rehome a dog, between \$200 and \$500 to rehome a cat – depending on how precious these cats are – and up to \$200 to rehome other animals. This bill delivers on five recommendations from the taskforce by establishing a regulatory framework for pet rehoming organisations in the Domestic Animals Act 1994. The framework will introduce a voluntary authorisation scheme for these rehoming organisations in Victoria through the amendments and repeal current provisions that establish the voluntary foster carer registration scheme. This scheme regulated the individual carer rather than those rehoming organisations, meaning that oversight was not focused on the organisations that oversee all aspects of the pet rehoming process. Those rehoming organisations that choose to participate in the scheme will receive specific benefits to support those rehoming activities, things like discounts for desexing and some of the other things that were included in that earlier scheme to make it cheaper for them to find forever homes for these furry friends.

Rehoming organisations that do not participate in the new scheme can continue to do what they do, as they have always done, but they will not receive those same benefits that we are putting through. Just to go a little bit further into some of those benefits that they can expect if they do join this, if they voluntarily participate in the scheme, they will have an exemption from registering foster cats and dogs with local council for the first 12 months while they are in foster care. They will have the authority to hold dog and cat adoption days at registered animal pounds, shelters and pet shops, which is really good. If anyone has ever been to one of their local pet shops on a foster day, it is a lot of fun. It is really hard not to walk away with three cats, but there are lots of people out there who want to help find a home for these furry friends.

One of the things, as someone who has helped rehome an animal, is getting source numbers via the pet exchange register. There will be a three-year no-cost source number for those organisations, and they will have limited access to the declared dog register to make sure that dogs they may be helping to rehome – particularly some that might have been surrendered – can be checked for their status to make sure that they are ready and okay to be rehomed with families.

I want to move briefly to some of the other things. The 2025–26 state budget provided \$16.7 million over two years towards the future of Victoria's agricultural sector and supporting animal welfare, including significant funding for RSPCA Victoria in addition to the regular funding that they receive each year from government. This substantial increase in funding will support RSPCA Victoria to

continue to deliver critical animal welfare regulatory services while getting to that two-up model, which is a really important community safety measure for some of our inspectors.

I want to turn briefly to the safety aspects of that inspection process. We know that the relationship between violence and animal welfare is so close. There is a high probability that if someone is experiencing violence, there is an animal in that household that has also had violence directed towards them. Our RSPCA inspectors are the front line between this abuse of animals and violence towards humans, and it cannot be understated. We must always remember the life of Stuart Fairlie, who was murdered while undertaking his duties as an inspector in Mortlake in 1989. This is why I commend that clarification. It is a small clarification but really important to support the work of these brave inspectors.

The powers that our inspectors have with the RSPCA – they are some of the few authorised officers in the state that have this kind of power of entry. In a previous life, working closely with police, RSPCA inspectors in some cases had powers of entry that were mirrored only by sworn police officers, so it is really important to clarify what that looks like. This clarifies those powers of entry and makes sure that places like backyards can be classified as somewhere that they can enter without a warrant.

The role of our RSPCA inspectorate is a vital part of our entire community safety framework, and making sure they are confident in the powers they have in exercising these critical duties is important not just for the animals they protect but also for the humans that they encounter along the way. These reforms are another step in making sure that our system continues to be robust and puts not only the lives of people and their wellbeing first but also the lives of our furry friends, making sure that they can live the best lives that they can. In conclusion, I commend the bill to the house.

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (12:28): I rise today to speak on the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. Let me first begin where this debate truly starts, not with clauses and subclauses but with the people – the volunteers, the foster carers and rescue organisations who open their homes, their weekends and their bank accounts so that cats and dogs, and indeed many other animals, get a second chance or indeed a first chance. These people are the backbone of Victoria's rehoming system. Our position is clear: we will not oppose the bill. It makes some improvements on a voluntary registration framework that, by the government's own history, has not worked. But we will seek sensible amendments to keep what is good, fix what is weak and ensure we do not unintentionally reduce rehoming capacity or increase euthanasia.

I want to mention some of my own experiences with animals and pets, because I do understand the bonds that pets form which shape our lives. They are much needed in many cases, such as for company and to reduce isolation and so forth and for those dealing with PTSD, blindness and much more. We have our own cat, Jase, who is a couple of years old now, who we got from Mornington Moggie Rescue. They do a terrific job in my local area. I got Jase as a rescue cat for my daughter's eighth birthday a couple of years ago. It was not quite with the permission of my better half, who was not too keen on cats, but our daughter's wishes sort of trumped that in some regard. But I grew up in Horsham in western Victoria surrounded by a number of pets. I must say, I am a bit more of cat person than a dog person. I grew up with many cats: Sooty, Sam, Tammie – who lived to around 20 years of age – Ginger, Salem and Miko. I also had a little dog called Shea.

So I do know and understand the benefits that pets bring to our lives, and many of us here in this chamber would have similar experiences as well.

On the positives of this bill, credit should be given where it is due. Establishing a voluntary pet rehoming organisation authorisation scheme creates a coherent pathway for rescue organisations to be recognised. Three-year authorisations will reduce churn, access to grants can help offset compliance costs and allowing adoption days to prescribed domestic animal businesses broadens the places where animals can find homes. The bill also clarifies that authorised officers can enter backyards to seize a dangerous dog, while leaving intact the warrant requirement for entry to a dwelling or vehicle used as

a residence. These clarifications reflect issues councils have long raised. However, there are also uncertainties.

That all being said, the test is not just today in the chamber or in Parliament if the bill passes or not; the true test is if more animals are rehomed and fewer are euthanised. On that test, the concerns put to us by the sector are serious and well evidenced. From Victorian Dog Rescue, president Trisha Taylor has warned that a longstanding practical interpretation of the Domestic Animals Act 1994 that rescues can take unmicrochipped and undesexed animals from pounds and act as the pound's agent to complete vet work has been reinterpreted by the bureaucracy. For 14 years that practice has saved countless animals. If that door is quietly closed, pounds that lack resources will or may revert to euthanasia rather than incur time and expense. Why does the government refuse to clarify it when ambiguity keeps resurfacing? This bill should put that matter beyond doubt.

From Gumtree Greys, Jeanette Danos has written to me outlining concrete risks that will choke volunteer capacity. For example, there are reporting burdens: multiple seven-day notifications to councils or a register for each animal – on intake, turning three months, changes of address and adoption – meaning three to nine or more touchpoints per animal. Small volunteer-run rescues simply do not have the capacity for paid compliance staff. On penalties and fees, each missed notification attracts fines in the hundreds of dollars, plus there are concerns that the bill enables future application fees. Replacing the \$6 foster carer fee with \$60 to \$150 fees per animal shifts costs from councils and carers onto rescues, right where there is the least capacity to pay. She also raised privacy and personal risks: publishing additional 'responsible persons' details will deter, she says, volunteers and committee members, especially in unincorporated associations, where personal liability can already be acute. She also mentioned the expanded powers of entry, saying warrantless entry to backyards, garages, sheds and vehicles – not dwellings – has spooked foster carers, who have always complied with reasonable inspections. Without better guardrails and guidance, we risk pushing carers away. Their proposals, on the other hand, are practical and straightforward – for example, they propose creating a single state register to centralise reporting, let rescues submit returns monthly rather than every seven days, keep the low-cost foster registration option so smaller rescues are not pushed out, separate funding eligibility from scheme enrolment and provide basic training and tech tools to make compliance easier.

Most importantly, they want to guarantee that the scheme will remain truly voluntary so it cannot become mandatory by stealth through new regulations or by limiting section 84Y agreements. On section 84Y, which governs council agreements with rescues, vets and other groups, there is a genuine fear, backed up by ministerial correspondence, that future regulations could limit these agreements to only those rescues that sign up for authorisation. That would effectively make the scheme compulsory. Right now, the law clearly allows councils to partner with a 'person or body' – including shelters, vets, community foster care networks and carers – to give animals as many rehoming options as possible. If the government wants to formalise certain classes of partners in regulations, then this bill should also explicitly protect councils' ability to work with skilled unauthorised rescues when it is in the best interests of the animals.

At its heart, though, this debate is not just about legislation or compliance deadlines but about compassion. Every pet in a pound is there, mostly, because of human choices, and society has a moral responsibility to ensure those animals are given safety, care and a second chance. The volunteers and foster carers who step up are not just ticking boxes; they are opening their homes and their hearts to creatures that would otherwise have no voice.

Supporting rehoming therefore is not just about bureaucracy, it is an expression of the values we hold as a community and society: kindness, responsibility and respect for life. On this point I just want to mention a number of local organisations who do a terrific job in the Mornington electorate and beyond, working tirelessly day in and day out to protect, rehabilitate and rehome animals. Of course we have the RSPCA, who operate across Victoria but also in my electorate. While they are underfunded and under-resourced currently, they still have a very important role with enforcement related to cruelty in our communities, supporting pet owners and rehoming countless animals. Community groups like

Save Kangaroos on the Mornington Peninsula and the Mornington Peninsula Koala Conservation Group are champions of our local wildlife as well, leading advocacy, habitat protection and more. We also have so many animal rescue organisations, including Mornington Peninsula Dog Rescue Inc, Mornington Moggie Rescue – where I got our cat from – and Peninsula Cat Rescue, as well as sanctuaries that take care of our animals, like the Briars wildlife sanctuary, Animalia Wildlife Shelter, Agapi’s sanctuary for birds and so many more, looking after dogs, cats and other animals. We also acknowledge the essential role of the Mornington animal shelter and pound, our council-run shelter, which is very important, and we hope that animals can be rehomed from there.

Local pet stores have stepped up as well. Petbarn Mornington, Petstock Mornington, Best Friends Pets Mornington and so many others actively partner with rescue groups, host adoption programs and help families connect with their new furry friends. In wildlife care we are also fortunate to have world-class organisations right here at our doorstep, like AWARE Wildlife Rescue, Animalia Wildlife Shelter and Wildlife Help on the Mornington Peninsula, WHOMP, who provide around-the-clock emergency services and care for injured, sick and orphaned animals of a variety of kinds, while of course Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park, right nearby my electorate, is a leader in threatened species conservation and education.

It does not just end with animal rescue. Animals need constant nurture and care. Groups like the Mornington Peninsula Community Dog Club and Mornington Obedience Dog Club do vital work in this space, and the latter I have been working with to find a new facility for the last few months. Also, our catteries and kennels do a great job. Treetops Cattery in Moorooduc looks after our cat Jase on a regular basis and so many other cats when their owners are away. We also have a snake catcher in Mornington, Barry, who has been described as professional, proficient and more. Thanks to all these local organisations.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (12:38): It has been a joy to hear other members’ contributions on the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. I have loved hearing about everyone’s pets and their passion for animal welfare. I would like to acknowledge the Minister for Agriculture and her team for their work on this important piece of legislation. Some policies should be kept in the doghouse, but this is not one of them. This reform is the next part of our government’s work in strengthening animal welfare in Victoria. The member for Werribee earlier spoke passionately about our work in banning puppy farms in Victoria. That was an important first step, and the work that we are seeing being done today, led by the Minister for Agriculture, is that next stage in reform in terms of making sure that all animals – cats and dogs and their furry friends – are kept safe in our state.

This bill is delivering on our commitment to implement the recommendations of the Taskforce On Rehoming Pets. This taskforce was established to investigate and recommend ways in which we could improve and further support the rehoming of cats and dogs in Victoria. The amendments in this bill deliver on five of these recommendations and will establish a regulatory framework for pet rehoming organisations in Victoria. The framework will introduce a voluntary benefits-based authorisation scheme for these services, and this scheme will achieve two key things. Firstly, it will create specific benefits for registered services, which will reduce the financial burden and enhance rehoming opportunities for animals that these organisations assist. This bill will also add a requirement for a pet rehoming information register to be kept and maintained by the secretary. This will ensure that there is a record of registrations for pet rehoming organisations that are granted, renewed or cancelled.

It will also ensure that there are certain requirements that registered organisations must meet. These will include the reporting of the locations under the care of these services and may include things like mandatory pre-adoption activities, such as desexing and vaccination, or the reporting of animal fate data. This will provide a consistency of requirements across all pet rehoming services and mean that we have a clear picture of where these animals are and how they are being rehomed.

The bill will also repeal the current voluntary foster care registration scheme, which has had a very low uptake since introduction, and replace it with the pet rehoming authorisation scheme. This acknowledges the sector identified a need to recognise organisations that are rehoming cats and dogs and not just the individual foster carers. Foster carers play a huge role in looking after animals while they are awaiting transition to their forever homes, and this valuable role will always continue. But these changes will remove some of the admin that is currently required of volunteers and also recognise the critical role that pet rehoming organisations play.

This bill will also add some further clarity to the powers of entry for authorised officers to determine compliance with the Domestic Animals Act 1994. The bill will clarify that authorised officers can enter a residential backyard, but it will exclude any building or vehicle used as a residence. Current arrangements have led to some uncertainty about the phrase ‘premises not occupied as a place of residence’, and this amendment provides clarification that backyards are indeed accessible without a warrant for the purpose of seizing a dangerous dog. This bill will also amend the Domestic Animals Act to clarify that a specific class of dog entitled to reduced registration fee can be prescribed in the regulations.

In March 2021 the Minister for Agriculture established the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets to investigate and provide recommendations to government on how to improve pet rehoming pathways in Victoria. In December of that year the taskforce provided its final report and recommendations to the minister. This Taskforce on Rehoming Pets was convened specifically to investigate and provide recommendations on how to improve pet welfare, in particular to improve pet rehoming pathways and survival rates. The taskforce has considered what systems can be implemented for successful rehoming of cats and dogs with no medical conditions or behavioural traits, such as anxiety; how to improve the transparency in the movement of animals between shelters, pounds, community foster care networks and rescue groups; and how to establish a regulatory framework for rescue groups to further professionalise the service. Importantly, the taskforce also considered rehoming opportunities for animals used in medical research and teaching. These are important recommendations, and I am so pleased to be standing here today making a contribution on this bill and to see that the government is acting on these recommendations.

Like many in this place, this bill is one that is close to my heart. Anyone who knows me well knows that my heart has been totally captivated by my best friend, my dog Blue. Blue is a kelpie collie who I adopted from the Geelong Animal Welfare Society (GAWS) in 2022. He was 3½. Blue loves the beach, walks, hugs, treats and playing with other dogs. We are regulars at the dog park, and I think he has more friends than me. A shout-out to Marli, Cricket, Lou Lou, Delilah, Ziggy, Ziggy number 2, Tilly, Flora and all of the dogs that we play with across Geelong. Many of these dogs are adopted too and have beautiful stories of being rehomed with their forever families.

During sitting weeks Blue stays with my parents, fondly known as his grandpawrents, and right now I reckon he is lurking around the kitchen hoping for a snack to fall into his mouth while my dad makes lunch. He loves staying with them at the holiday house. Blue also loves visiting the office and spending time with his aunties and uncles, my wonderful electorate office staff, who spoil him with plenty of pats and lunch leftovers. He loves going from bin to bin just to check if something might have fallen in there after everyone has finished their lunch for the day. But most of all he loves being by my side no matter what I am doing. I firmly believe that Blue has given me far more than I will ever give him. He is my constant companion, and the unconditional love he provides me is second to none. On top of that, he makes sure that I get my 10,000 steps in a day as he makes sure we get outdoors and have a play no matter the weather.

It is thanks to the Geelong Animal Welfare Society that I get to have this incredible connection with Blue. The team there are amazing, and they work tirelessly each and every day helping more and more animals across our region, offering animal management services, a vet clinic and an animal shelter. I note that they desexed and vaccinated Blue, making sure that he was ready for his forever home when I had the pleasure of picking him up.

Just recently the team at GAWS were faced with a distressing animal welfare case when 67 dogs were unexpectedly surrendered to them after living in unthinkable conditions. GAWS were able to step in and care for these animals on their journey, to improve their health and so they live a better life. They often care for animals until they can be reunited with their owners or rehomed, like Blue was, into their new forever homes. The Geelong Animal Welfare Society provided a written submission to the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets and were one of a wide range of industry and community stakeholders, including foster care networks and rescue groups, shelters and pound operators, vets and vet staff, councils, animal welfare stakeholders and the general public, and I thank them for their submission and their contribution to this important work.

I also thank them for the work they do across Geelong and our wider community. Rehabilitating dogs is not easy, and I cannot imagine how hard it would be to unexpectedly receive 67 dogs with all kinds of medical conditions, all kinds of health conditions and broken hearts. Rehabilitation takes hard work and dedication. In Blue's case it was months before he could fully trust me. It was not easy for either of us. It took a lot of hard work, but it was absolutely worth it. Now, having had many pets, growing up with dogs and cats, I would only ever adopt. We adopted our first family cat, Tom. He was born in an alley about 20 years ago now; he has, sadly, since passed away. And my sister and her partner have recently adopted a beautiful cat called Finny, which is short for Muffins. They decided that Finny was a more appropriate name, and they renamed him. Finny is a remarkable cat, just this little fella. He had made the journey from Werribee, where he was originally microchipped, to the Mornington vet practice where my sister's partner works. That is remarkable resilience on Finny's part, and we love having Finny as part of the family. He has brought so much joy to my sister and her partner, the exact same joy that Blue has brought to me.

Our government is committed to animal welfare. We have backed up this commitment in the recent state budget by committing over \$16 million over two years towards safeguarding Victoria's agricultural sector and supporting animal welfare. With the time I have left, once again, I would like to thank the animal welfare service organisations like the Geelong Animal Welfare Society and Geelong Animal Rescue, who do so much important work in our community. A special shout-out to the RSPCA. They do amazing work across the state but more recently have been running desexing and health clinics in Norlane at the Norlane Community Centre, helping many families who have wonderful pets that they love and who might not have otherwise been able to afford the services. That is commendable work. This is an important piece of legislation. I am so pleased to make a contribution, and I commend the bill to the house.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (12:48): I rise to make a contribution on the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. This bill is hopefully the culmination – although not everyone is happy with it – of probably 15 to 20 years of progress over these particular issues and is particularly here to address changes to the Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Act 2017. The bill at the time, in 2016, came out of very heated debates around the issue of domestic animals at that particular time and particularly a campaign run by Deb Tranter called Oscar's Law about a dog called Oscar that had been in a pet farm and, quite unjustifiably, had been treated very, very poorly. So there was a lot of politics that went behind the two pieces of legislation at that particular time.

If you look at the Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Bill, which was introduced back then in 2016, it was actually introduced by the now Premier, who was Minister for Public Transport at the time. The reason it was introduced by the now Premier was that the Minister for Agriculture was in the upper house. That bill was very politically motivated – to solve a campaign that had been run leading up to and during the 2014 election. After that legislation was introduced – because in the opinion of a lot of people it was rushed through and did not necessarily have good consultation – there was an upper house inquiry set up to look at that particular piece of legislation, and that upper house inquiry had some significant findings. It has taken a long time – since that report back in October 2016 to now – for these changes to actually come forward. That report on the inquiry

of the upper house Economy and Infrastructure Committee found that of great concern to the committee were the issues raised in the hearings and in the correspondence about the seeming lack of general consultation on the bill.

Yes, there was a political imperative for the government of the day to have legislation to meet the commitments they had made through the 2014 election. But I am not sure, if you believe those that submitted to the upper house inquiry, that they actually went out and talked to the particular stakeholders that are necessary to talk to on whatever legislation it is. In this case, a lot of domestic animal issues are managed by local government, and there was a concern at the time expressed by the Municipal Association of Victoria that they were not properly consulted on this bill. I hope that has now been corrected with the current bill that we have before the house.

I do not envy the minister with this legislation or for having this responsibility as part of the portfolio, but domestic animal issues and rehoming and managing them are at the intersection of people who care a lot about animals and are very, very well intentioned but do not necessarily have the capability to run an organisation to rehome animals and do not necessarily have the financial wherewithal to pay for the cost of desexing and the management of animals as they try to rehome them. It is an issue of how the government of the day and we as legislators make legislation that best helps those who have the best intentions to look after and rehome animals but make sure there is some accountability so that things are done properly. The main recommendation from that upper house inquiry was that the government actually withdraw the bill and go back and redraft a new bill, which is in some ways what we have got before us today. This is actually correcting some of the issues that came out of that particular bill.

Some of the recommendations by that upper house inquiry were, as I said, that the bill should be withdrawn and we should immediately establish a stakeholder working group of industry, municipalities and community representatives to consult on the drafting of a new bill; and the state government should provide additional funding to local government to make sure there is enough money there to enforce current legislation, because as I said, local government is at the intersection of these particular issues. We see from our local government annual reports, which we read as local members, that the cost of running pounds and the cost of running compliance are quite significant for local government, even with the fees they collect from the registration of dogs and cats. As most members in this house would know, the issue is not with the dogs and cats that are registered, the issue is with the dogs and cats that are not registered, particularly with cats and the breeding of feral cats and the problems they cause in society.

This bill does not necessarily make everyone happy. I have had a long email from Ruth Glanville in my electorate, who does do animal rescue, and she is quite concerned that this does not help her particular organisation. She believes the rescue sector has been denied assistance to regulate themselves, although it gives groups like Dogs Victoria and profit-making bodies more power. She talks about the issue I raised before about the challenges for organisations who do not have the financial wherewithal to run. She believes it is unclear if these rescue groups do not join the voluntary organisation scheme what rights they will retain under section 84Y agreements with pounds to take un-desexed and microchipped dogs and cats, or if they are not in the voluntary organisation scheme whether they will be able to hold adoption days to try and make sure there is a home found for those particular animals and have the organisation's name on a microchip recorded rather than the individual's. Again, these are very, very well-intentioned individuals, but they do not necessarily want the liability of having these issues to manage themselves. Her comment was that it is terribly concerning for her what is in this particular bill. She asked me to make sure that I brought her views to the house and put that forward. She just does not believe that their small group will be able to achieve more under this legislation than under the previous legislation.

The fact is that there were a number of animal rescue groups in the Echuca region, but now it is down to this one particular group that is there because there are just not enough people that are prepared to

work through the processes of being registered, doing all the compliance and paying the costs of doing that. As I said, they are very well-intentioned people who want to see the best for pets.

I noticed that a lot of people have used the opportunity when speaking on this bill in the house to talk about their particular animals. Listening to the debate, one of the things that I think is really commendable is that a lot of people now are taking rescue dogs or rescue cats. The changes in that puppy farm legislation of 2015 mean that the cost of buying a bred dog now is not insignificant. So a lot of people cannot afford to go and buy a particular dog, but they can go to a rescue shelter and actually take a rescue dog.

I think it is commendable that people have changed their philosophy about how they actually get their pet dogs, because one of the challenges that was identified through this whole process from 2010 through to 2015 was that with pet shops selling pups come Christmas time or come someone's birthday – the little pup in the window of a pet shop looks absolutely beautiful; you would love it to death – people would buy a pet for their children for Christmas or buy a pet for a child for their particular birthday. But that dog grows up, and when you buy a dog or when you take a dog, you take it for life. That was why there was such an issue with rehoming dogs and dogs being abandoned. Three or four months after Christmas, when those dogs had started to grow up, when they were probably, with the exuberance that pups have, a nuisance around the house, they were being abandoned or farmed out. I think one of the changes about having people make a deliberate choice to go to a dog breeder to buy the particular dog they want or to go and get a rescue dog takes away that impulse buying when they see a gorgeous little puppy in the window of a pet shop and think they want it but do not realise that they have a responsibility for the rest of the life of that dog. Sometimes that takes hard work, and you have got to make sure you look after it well, which a lot of people are not prepared for.

We will not be opposing this particular legislation, but I would like it noted that I raised Ruth's concerns about this particular legislation, as her local member.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (12:58): It is a great pleasure to rise to speak in favour of this Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. It is disappointing that I will not have a lot of time to speak on the bill. The amendments that this bill details have really arisen from recommendations from the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets, which reported in December 2021 after quite a lot of extensive consultation with animal welfare groups, rescue shelters and rehoming organisations. While it is acknowledged that there has been some concern, I think a lot of those concerns will hopefully be addressed in the regulations, because this bill is the framework around the dog and cat rehoming industry. Underpinning that will be a whole lot of other regulations to implement the program.

In Thomastown I have seen an increase in the number of residents wandering around the streets with pets – walking their dogs and looking after their cats. The Allan Labor government has funded many off-leash dog parks in the electorate now, and I can see that they are so popular with people – families, couples – going there to give their dogs a run and running around throwing the ball.

The rehoming industry has really developed. Originally it was just shelters and the pounds where lost, missing or abandoned dogs were kept, but now of course we have a whole lot of other organisations that do great work in supporting the rehoming of animals, particularly cats and dogs. They are bringing them in, they are looking after them, they are caring for them and then of course looking for good homes for these animals that have often been treated so terribly. This legislation is about acknowledging that great work that is being done in this area and acknowledging that we do need legislation to regulate it, because it has developed in a bit of an ad hoc way, even though of course everybody is extremely caring and well-meaning in the industry. The legislative framework that we are looking at here –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe): Order! We will now suspend the house for lunch.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.*Members***Minister for Health****Minister for Transport Infrastructure***Absence*

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

*Questions without notice and ministers statements***Community safety**

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. Yesterday I asked the Premier about the horrifying carjacking in Doreen, where two four-year-olds were dumped on the side of the road. The Premier said her government had ‘already acted’. Given carjackings have surged by 36 per cent, does the Premier accept her actions have failed Victorians?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): In addressing this question yesterday, I indicated my distress and support for the family who experienced what was a horrific criminal act against their family. In terms of the question that was asked of me by the Leader of the Opposition, I stand by my answer yesterday and once again reaffirm that we will continue to listen to victims of crime and continue to support the work of Victoria Police.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): Yesterday I asked the Premier about an incident where a 13-year-old attempted to carjack a family’s car in Ashburton while their toddler was in the back seat. The Premier said her government had made the changes so that ‘community safety comes first in all bail-making decisions’. Given this dangerous offender was out on bail for the third time, will the Premier admit community safety does not come first under her government?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): I again reiterate my thoughts for the family in Ashburton who had that awful experience. I again remind the Leader of the Opposition that this Parliament has passed tougher bail laws that require community safety to come first in all bail-making decisions, so I reaffirm and again stand by the answer I gave to this question yesterday.

Ministers statements: power saving bonus

Lily D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:05): I am very pleased to update the house on how the Allan Labor government’s power saving bonus is making a real difference to Victorians who need it the most. Over 94,000 Victorians have already applied for the \$100 power saving bonus in just over two weeks. The member for Wendouree will be pleased to hear that more than 1700 Victorians in her electorate have applied for the power saving bonus funding so far. Not far behind is the member for Lara, where more than 1600 Victorians with a concession card have applied, and just over 1600 from Bellarine are benefiting as well. The Allan Labor government is delivering for all Victorians. That is exactly why the member for Shepparton will be excited to learn that the Allan Labor government is already delivering help to 1932 Victorian households in that electorate alone. And we cannot forget, of course, the member for Croydon, who knows how important a strong Labor government is to his electorate – a statement of fact, come over, Hodgie, for sure it is not too late – where more than 1800 Victorians have already applied for that bonus. This fifth round of the power saving bonus is providing real cost-of-living relief just in time for those winter energy bills that are about to hit the email and the letterboxes, and it is providing that support to those who need it the most.

We do not just lose our temper as a government or turn on our own when things get tough. What we do is get on with providing practical help, because that is what Labor governments do. And I remind everyone, if you have not jumped on the Victorian Energy Compare website, to apply for that power saving bonus. You can also get the best deals available to you to save money on your energy bills, because that money is better in your pocket than in the energy companies', and only a Labor government helps Victorians with doing just that.

Community safety

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): My question is to the Premier. Data from the Insurance Council of Australia shows that Victoria is the nation's car crime capital, with motor vehicle theft claims up by 59 per cent in just one year – the largest annual increase on record – while every other mainland state saw thefts fall. Can the Premier explain why Victoria is the car theft capital of Australia?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): The data that the Leader of the Opposition refers to is exactly why, after listening to victims of crime and looking at the challenging circumstances we have toughened the bail laws. We have strengthened the bail laws, we have provided Victoria Police with additional powers and we will continue to support the work of Victoria Police.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): Claims surged 70 per cent in Melbourne, with 10,000 thefts costing \$183 million. Does the Premier accept that Victorians are paying higher premiums because motor vehicle theft is out of control under her government?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): In answering the question raised by the Leader of the Opposition, I refer to my answer to the substantive question, which is why we have acted as a government to strengthen the bail laws and give Victoria Police more powers. In regard to the insurance company settings, they are done on a national basis, and I would refer him to that.

Ministers statements: housing

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:09): Sometimes the biggest housing opportunity is right behind you in your own backyard. Today I joined the Premier to announce how the Allan Labor government is literally saying –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will not tolerate this kind of interjection while the minister is on her feet. We have talked a lot about respect this week. The minister, without assistance.

Sonya KILKENNY: Today I joined the Premier to announce how the Labor government is literally saying 'Yes in my backyard'. We are making it easier for Victorians to subdivide their block and sell off part of it, build a second home or replace an existing home with two new homes. Under new rules announced today subdivision applications will be fast-tracked through the VicSmart system, with decisions in just 10 days. That is a fraction of the time it currently takes and almost as fast as the Liberals divide after a bad poll. Speeding up subdivisions will help families unlock the value of their land while creating the space we need for more homes – homes that fit the neighbourhood, more townhouses and duplexes, affordable homes for young families and first home buyers.

It builds on yesterday's announcement. We have opened consultation on the draft maps for 25 of our train and tram zone activity centres, another way we are delivering more homes in the places people want to live, including in Brighton, close to the beach, where you can go for a cruise without going to Queensland. The choice is clear: Labor is unlocking homes for Victorians; the Liberals just lock them up. Victorians deserve better than a divided Liberal Party. They deserve a government that takes bold, practical action to build the homes our state needs, because the status quo just does not cut it, and neither do Brad Battin and the Liberal Party.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition and Premier! Do not reflect on the Chair again, Leader of the Opposition.

Community safety

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:11): My question is to the Premier. A 14-year-old girl accused of a home invasion in Mildura was released on bail last week despite having been cautioned by police 14 times already. The magistrate granted bail despite agreeing that police concerns that she would offend again were ‘entirely well-founded’. The Premier says her government has made changes so that ‘community safety comes first in all bail-making decisions’. How was community safety put first in this case?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:12): In answering the member for Mildura’s question, I reiterate what I have said in previous answers: that this Parliament has passed tougher bail laws that have made it absolutely clear to all bail decision makers across the justice system that community safety must come first. Indeed, following that, I know that the Attorney has directly raised this requirement from the new legislation with the courts, and I will ask the Attorney to reiterate that position with the courts once again.

Members interjecting.

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

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:13): Yesterday in Mildura a young boy accused of a home invasion, stealing a female victim’s car and driving it at 140 kilometres an hour was also bailed. This was despite police warning of the real risk he may end up killing someone and the magistrate acknowledging it was a tragedy waiting to happen. The magistrate also stated:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

There aren’t really any bail conditions that can adequately protect the community, I’m afraid to say.

Premier, why not?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): In answering the member for Mildura’s supplementary question, I will restate what I said in the answer to the substantive question about this Parliament’s and our government’s expectation that all bail decision makers respect the legislation that has gone through the Parliament and that community safety comes first in all bail decisions. Can I also just say, though – and the member for Mildura represents a great regional city, a diverse regional city – that we understand there are also particular circumstances the courts need to take into consideration and, given the member for Mildura has not provided the full facts of the case, we should respect that.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. The magistrate said that there are no bail conditions that can protect the community. She is debating the question. I would ask you to ask her to come back to it, please.

The SPEAKER: A point of order is not an opportunity to debate the answer that is being given. The Premier was being relevant. The Premier was not debating the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I think, given the member for Mildura has not furnished the house with all the details that the magistrate had before them, I will not engage in reckless commentary like the Leader of the Opposition.

Ministers statements: major events

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:15): When we rise tonight, we will be back in 33 days, and in that 33 days Victorians can go to many more than 33 events. Just to name a few: *French Impressionism* at the NGV; Lego Star Wars at Melbourne Museum; *MJ the Musical*; the

Rising festival; Kevin Hart at Rod Laver Arena; NRL qualifying finals this Friday in Melbourne; 25 AFLW season games, including Essendon and St Kilda in the member for Essendon's electorate this Sunday; a EuroLeague versus NBL series match at John Cain Arena; four regular season NBL games at John Cain Arena; the AFL Footy Festival, with four days of fun and free activities; the AFL Grand Final; the Ballarat International Foto Biennale in the member for Wendouree's electorate; the Bells Beach Longboard Classic in the member for Bellarine's electorate; the NBA x NBL Melbourne series at Rod Laver, with four big nights of games; Monster Jam at AAMI Park; and Chopped. Speaker, I reckon you would be interested in this. Chopped is a hot rod show in Carisbrook. We have got the Australian Diamonds international against South Africa in Bendigo, in your electorate, Speaker, and ROAM Geelong. And I have just touched the surface.

While those on that side, the Liberal Party, play politics with the grand prix and while they talk down Victoria, on this side we carefully curate the best major events calendar. God forbid they on that side ever get their hands on government and the major events calendar; it would be about the size of Launceston.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bulleen, you are warned.

Housing

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:17): My question is for the Premier. In 2019 Cohealth in Collingwood asked for assistance from the government to repair and upgrade their crumbling community health centre and build 50 co-located community homes at their Collingwood site. They were asking for a government contribution of \$25 million for a project that would benefit the broader community in both a health and housing crisis. Every year since, that project has been put on the government's radar at budget time, but the government has consistently turned its back on funding this shovel-ready project. Why hasn't the government taken this opportunity to upgrade the health centre and provide 50 new, ideally located community homes in Collingwood?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): In acknowledging the member for Richmond's question and how in the past she has not supported public and social affordable housing in her electorate, I will say –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, you are warned.

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier knows that question time is not an opportunity to attack other members, and I would ask you to bring her back to the question.

Ben Carroll: On the point of order, Speaker, the Premier has only been on her feet for 14 seconds, and she was going directly to the question on community homes and just pointing out the member's local record when it comes to supporting community housing.

The SPEAKER: I remind the Premier not to attack the opposition, and I ask the Premier to continue to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Those of us on this side of the house are proud to partner with those providing community housing outcomes, because you do not only get the housing outcome, you get the wraparound supports that can make such an important difference in keeping Victorians and their families in that safe, secure housing environment. In regard to the matter that the member for Richmond raised, I will refer that to the minister for housing. But once again, the member for Richmond raised something and mentioned 2019. I remind the member for Richmond that in 2021 as a member of the Yarra council she voted down social and affordable housing projects.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:20): The current situation at Cohealth is so bad – and I have seen it for myself with my own eyes – that there are waterfalls inside the corridors when it rains. They have to cancel appointments when it rains. A new report by Infrastructure Victoria tells us why: community health organisations receive just 0.3 per cent of the \$2 billion the Victorian government spends on health infrastructure annually. The community health centre supports our communities, it takes the pressure off our hospital systems and, if it was properly funded, it would save Victoria’s public healthcare system hundreds of millions of dollars in the long run. Will the Premier respond to Infrastructure Victoria’s call and increase community health’s share of Victoria’s health infrastructure budget?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:21): Just last week I had the opportunity to visit a great community health centre, Eastern community health, and see firsthand how they are delivering, thanks to government funding and support, a great program that is targeting and providing telehealth and online support to women right around Victoria for their sexual and reproductive health needs. That is just one example of many I could give to the member for Richmond about how we are proud to back our community health providers, because they are such an important part of our health system. I am proud – we are going back a way – that it was Gough Whitlam in the 1970s, a Labor government, that started the community health sector, and it has been Labor governments that have continued to invest in community health. They provide great local care in local communities, and I am proud to support them and the great work they do.

Ministers statements: Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:22): Community is at the heart of our emergency services. It is where Victorians of different backgrounds, genders and faiths all come together with respect and dedication to help keep our community safe. Often this dedication is handed down through generations. While I was at Woodend CFA with the member for Macedon to celebrate their brand new tanker, a call came through and off went generations of the same family to protect and serve their community. The member for Ripon and I recently checked out Avoca CFA’s new tanker and heard how the former captain has proudly passed on the leadership baton to his son.

Our emergency services all share a deep sense of connection and service, and this government will always be on their side by making sure they have the tools and resources needed to carry out their vital work. That is why we have doubled our annual investment in our emergency services. It is why we have expanded the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF) so emergency services can continue to be supported to respond to emergencies increasing in intensity and frequency. As a CFA volunteer, the member for Werribee knows how vital these investments are, with foundations now poured for the brand new Wyndham Vale CFA station. The member for Footscray knows firsthand the devastation of floods and is now looking forward to the building of the new Footscray SES unit. And the member for the Bellarine knows how the volunteer emergency services equipment program, which we have now doubled, has bolstered essential equipment and resources at the Ocean Grove Surf Life Saving Club.

Emergency services and their communities deserve to know their government has their back. Those opposite have said they would scrap the ESVF, with no plan on how to fund the services that help keep us safe. They cannot be trusted to ensure our emergency services have the funding they need. Instead their focus is to replicate the division in their own party room across our communities through sowing misinformation and division.

Community safety

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:24): My question is to the Premier. This week the Premier has failed to answer the following questions on crime: why Victoria has become the retail crime capital of Australia; whether she agrees with senior police that penalties for violent youth are too weak; why her government cut funding to a successful youth diversion program with an 87 per

cent success rate; and what the youth crime figure is, a figure she admitted to knowing but refused to give. Why won't the Premier directly answer these questions?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): I absolutely reject the Leader of the Opposition's question, because he is wrong. He is continuing to peddle mistruths and misinformation. Or we could refer him to *Hansard*. He may want to have a look at the *Hansard* for this week and see where I have answered all of these questions. In answering those questions, I have gone to how the actions that we have taken as a government have strengthened and toughened the bail laws, which is making a difference. The number of people on remand has gone up by 26 per cent. Victoria Police today have stronger knife search powers, and as a result of that work they are seizing thousands and thousands of dangerous weapons, getting those weapons off our streets. It is supported by the work of Australia's first machete ban, which has not only seen these dangerous weapons being handed in; we have also seen them successfully removed from retail settings. We have passed legislation to provide Victoria Police with additional powers to crack down on criminal organisations. We are also working on further reforms and laws to strengthen police powers and to provide greater protection for retail workers and greater support for police, who are dealing with the number one law and order issue in our state, which is of course violence against women in the home. We are going to be bringing stronger support for Victoria Police in the issuing of family violence intervention orders into this place. The Leader of the Opposition likes to quote crime statistics, but you never hear him quoting them for the number one law and order issue in this state, which is violence against women and children in their home.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is absolutely misleading the house. It is quite disorderly. I ask you to ask her to desist from doing so.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Attorney-General just reminded me of a couple of additional things we have done this year: bringing about electronic monitoring and of course bringing into the Parliament legislation on post-and-boast laws. We also have more laws that will be coming to the Parliament to give Victoria Police additional powers to deal with violent and extreme behaviour around protests, noting of course that Victoria Police just yesterday spoke to the additional powers that they have to designate areas around the state to deal with people who are intending to use the cloak of protest to engage in violent and extreme behaviour.

In answering the Leader of the Opposition's question, I have outlined the answers to the questions I have given to him over the course of this week. And in answering this question, I also remind the Leader of the Opposition of some other things I have said this week, rejecting his reckless political pointscoring behaviour. When it comes to supporting the work of Victoria Police, we stand with Victoria Police and will continue to support the work they do.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Deputy Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Nationals to cease having conversations across the table.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:29): Does the Premier accept there is a crime crisis in Victoria?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Nepean! I can stare you down if you want.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:29): I am going to quote something the Attorney-General said to the Leader of the Opposition on Tuesday: ‘Where have you been?’ Where have you been over the past year? Where have you been?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Minister for Consumer Affairs! The Premier will come to order.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, I was speaking to the victims who are the victims of crime here in Victoria, those that have been stabbed, those that have had their hands cut off, those that have lost family members. There is a whole world of victims that the Premier is ignoring continuously when she fails to answer questions on the crime crisis here in Victoria.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: I say that because either the Leader of the Opposition is wanting to continue to engage in the reckless political behaviour we have seen time and again this year from the Leader of the Opposition or he can choose to support the work of Victoria Police, like we have done. It is from listening to victims of crime and working with Victoria Police that we have brought to this Parliament a range of stronger legislative mechanisms that have given additional powers to Victoria Police.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition! Minister for Consumer Affairs, this is your last warning – and the member for Sunbury.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, the question the Leader of the Opposition asked was very succinct and the Premier should not introduce matters extraneous to the question. I would put to you that she is completely avoiding the question put to her by the Leader of the Opposition, and I ask you to bring her back to the question.

Ben Carroll: On the point of order, Speaker, the Premier has been entirely relevant to the question. It is not the Premier’s fault that they keep lobbing Dorothy Dixers. That is their fault; they write the questions.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is a standing order and a rule that to speak twice on a point of order you need to seek leave. On the point of order, I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question. I do ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: It is making those points and it is acknowledging, as I said earlier this year, that we know there is more to do. We are doing it. We are strengthening the powers of Victoria Police and will continue to support the work of Victoria Police.

Ministers statements: working from home

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:32): For plenty of Victorian families Monday mornings after a nice weekend can sometimes feel pretty tough as you are running around the house getting yourself ready for work, getting the kids to school, making sure they have got their schoolbag, their lunch box and their shoes on. This is what many families are experiencing. They can feel like they are living in that Bangles song – ‘It’s just another manic Monday’ – as they are trying to get out the door. They might dread the daily commute. I have mentioned the school run. But for some, like the Liberal Party state director, you might just dread those around you. But we get it that Mondays can be tough, and that is why we are making working from home a right, because it works for productivity, for families and for the economy – more money in household pockets, more time spent with your family and more time to do that school run or maybe be closer to that school when your kid gets sick.

For many parents, particularly for women, it can be the difference between keeping a job or having to give up that job.

Since we have opened consultation on our plan to provide support for working from home, over 20,000 workers and employers have had their say. I am sure for those of us on this side of the house it comes as no surprise that top postcodes of suburbs who have responded are those like Point Cook, Truganina, Roxburgh Park, Wyndham Vale, Sandhurst, which is in the member for Carrum's electorate, and of course Berwick. Many people in Berwick want to have their say on working from home. We know some want to take it away. There might be some who support working from home on a Monday in their head office, like the Liberal Party does, and those in here are trying to take that opportunity away from Victoria. It tells you all you need to know: one rule for some but not for others. Well, we stand with working people. We are on the side of working families, and that is why we are going to protect their right to work from home.

Constituency questions

Brighton electorate

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:35): (1299) My question is to the Premier, and I ask: why is the Premier ignoring Bayside and the broader Melbourne community who do not support her plan to wreck our suburbs? The Premier has announced her plan to wreck Melbourne's suburbs, rip away property rights and designate 60 locations 'mega suburbs'. The state Labor government's plan includes creating an 8-kilometre-long development zone from Brighton to Sandringham. Labor wants to turn Bayside into the Gold Coast. That zone will allow towers up to 16 storeys high to be built in Bayside, with six-storey developments across residential streets. Almost 7000 Bayside residents have signed a petition opposing Labor's attack. These plans are to enable the Premier's goal of growing Melbourne to the size of London by 2050, which will see Melbourne's population grow from 5 million to 9 million people. Labor has not asked Victorians if they want to see our capital city almost double in size, just like Labor has not asked Victorians if they want mega suburbs. Labor has no mandate. The Premier, who lives 150 kilometres away, has no mandate.

Narre Warren North electorate

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (14:36): (1300) My question is to the Minister for Health. How many people in Narre Warren North have accessed the community pharmacy program since it became permanent following the successful pilot? Primary care is the backbone of Victoria's health system, and in Narre Warren North it is something my community relies on every single day. Too many locals tell me they are waiting for a GP appointment or struggling with the cost of care. That is why this program is such a breakthrough. It makes Victoria the first state in Australia to offer these services free of charge. Now pharmacists can provide treatment for 22 everyday health conditions – not just UTIs or contraceptive resupply but also type 2 diabetes, asthma, ear infections and so much more. For families in my electorate, this makes care faster, cheaper and closer to home.

Murray Plains electorate

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:37): (1301) My question is to the Minister for Environment, and it is on behalf of constituents who farm around the Koorangie marshes, north-west of Kerang. These farmers have been spending significant amounts of money baiting and destroying warrens to control rabbits on their side of the fence between themselves and Parks Victoria but keep getting reinfested by rabbits migrating out of state-controlled land, undoing all the good and very expensive work they have done. It is just as bad with foxes. These same farmers are also spending heaps of cash baiting to control foxes but are constantly being reinfested the same way, from the feral animal nursery next door on Parks Vic land. I ask the minister: when will Parks Vic carry out their next rabbit and fox control program in Koorangie marshes and stop the spread of rabbits and foxes onto neighbouring farmland?

Northcote electorate

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (14:38): (1302) My question is to the Minister for Health. How is the new Victorian virtual women's health clinic supporting women and girls in the Northcote electorate? The Allan Labor government is transforming women's health, and this virtual clinic is part of huge suite of new services we are opening to make sure that wherever you are, you can access free expert advice, treatment and care. Run by Each and led by specialist nurses and GPs, the clinic is all about safe, affirming and accessible care. It is free and confidential. You can consult over the phone or by video about a whole range of conditions, including endometriosis, pelvic pain, menstrual health, cervical screening, menopause, breast health and abortion. For women in regional and remote areas as well as those in Northcote, it gives a huge amount of flexibility and complements the expansive network of face-to-face women's health clinics we are opening across the state, because women's health matters. I am proud to be part of a Labor government investing in the services women and girls need and deserve.

Mornington electorate

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (14:39): (1303) My question is to the Minister for Environment. Will the minister outline plans to address severe coastal erosion in my electorate and across the Mornington Peninsula, particularly at locations like Mount Martha Beach North? This once iconic beach is vanishing, with the footings of many beach boxes now underwater, as shown on the *Age's* front page this week. Experts warn it could be unrecognisable or gone entirely by 2040 without urgent action. Erosion has been accelerated by human intervention, including the 2008 Labor government's dredging of the heads, rock placement, climate change and storms. Mount Martha North is a textbook example of how interrupting natural sand movement worsens erosion. Current changes and rock walls built to protect cliffs on the Esplanade have narrowed the foreshore and stripped sand offshore. Government reports confirm this. This is not just about beach boxes; it is about safety, amenity and the environment. That is why I established the coastal erosion working group. I yet again call on the government and the minister to urgently invest in solutions.

Glen Waverley electorate

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (14:40): (1304) My question is directed to the Premier. My question is: how will the Allan Labor government's plan to make work fairer and more flexible benefit families in the district of Glen Waverley, particularly those balancing work and caring responsibilities? Flexible work, including working from home, is critical. It supports women with children, carers and people with disability to participate in the workforce. Working from home is not just about saving time on long commutes; it also eases cost-of-living pressures – families save on fuel, parking, transport fares, takeaway lunches and even work clothes. I have even seen more spending in the cafes around the area of Glen Waverley. These savings make a real difference at a time when household budgets are under strain. We are currently seeking feedback from the community and industry. My constituents would like to know how they will benefit from this arrangement once it is enshrined in law. I thank the Premier in advance for her response.

Narracan electorate

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (14:41): (1305) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. My community would like to know: when will the repairs be made to the damaged wire rope barriers between the Pakenham bypass and the Bunyip River? Significant sections of these barriers have been damaged over the last 12 months, and unfortunately these are not getting fixed quick enough. Common sense would tell most people, especially around the Gumbuya park area, which is a black spot area, that if one vehicle has already run off the road and damaged that wire rope barrier, then there is a fair chance another one will happen. The last thing I would like to see in my community is a fatality just because of the lack of maintenance on wire rope barriers. So I would urge the minister to address this as quickly as she can.

Bellarine electorate

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (14:42): (1306) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport. Minister, can you advise how many families in the Bellarine have benefited from the Get Active Kids voucher program to date? Registrations are now open for sporting clubs and organisations to become Get Active Kids active providers ahead of round 9 of the program. This initiative is incredibly valuable. Not only does it mean easing the financial burden on eligible families by helping to cover their registration fees, uniforms and equipment, but it also supports local sporting clubs to boost their memberships and their participation. These increased memberships enable clubs to offer more opportunities for local kids to get active and involved. I am pleased to see that the recent state budget includes funding to continue to provide this program for another two years. I look forward to a response so I can share this information with families and clubs across the Bellarine ahead of this upcoming round.

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:43): (1307) My question is to the Minister for Police. Minister, when will the government ensure our police are properly resourced and supported to not only provide for their own safety on the job but help bring under control the current violent crime crisis? Following the past two weeks, in which Victoria Police has honoured and mourned two of its finest who made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty, Rowville electorate residents are seriously concerned about the ongoing chronic under-resourcing of Victoria Police, which sees the number of frontline police currently down by around 2000, and want to know what measures are being taken to support our police and increase frontline services. As a former police minister, on behalf of my Rowville electorate constituents I wish to extend our deepest sympathy and heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of the two slain police officers. Their tragic deaths in the line of duty on 26 August are a profound loss to the Victorian community they so bravely served.

Pakenham electorate

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (14:44): (1308) My question is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure. Could the minister provide an update on the progress of construction works at the new Pakenham community hospital? Many of my constituents have spoken to me about how important the Pakenham community hospital will be for our community, bringing a vast range of vital health services to our area, including urgent care, chemotherapy, public dental, dialysis, diagnostics like pathology and imaging, and allied health. The new Pakenham community hospital will be an absolute game changer for our community, reducing waiting times and allowing people in Pakenham to access high-quality health services closer to home. I look forward to the minister's answer regarding the progress of this build.

Rulings from the Chair**Member conduct**

The SPEAKER (14:45): This morning the member for Kew raised a point of order regarding comments made across the chamber by the member for Werribee. I would ask the member for Werribee to apologise.

John Lister: I apologise.

The SPEAKER: This morning the member for Warrandyte raised a point of order regarding comments made by the Minister for Police. I would ask the Minister for Police to apologise.

Anthony Carbines: I apologise.

The SPEAKER: I remind all members that it is extremely disruptive to the chamber to interject from their chair or another member's chair, loiter in front of the mace, lean over the benches to argue without the call or otherwise disrupt proceedings. All members should treat each other with respect.

This conduct will not be tolerated by the Chair. Again, I remind all members that it is a basic requirement to treat each other with respect. Inappropriate, offensive or threatening language and behaviour will not be tolerated by the Chair under any circumstance.

Bills

Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:46): I rise to make some comments on the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. It is great to see that we have the member for Brighton – who is with me – because I know he is also a great lover of animals and is a great supporter of many of our domestic cats, our dogs and certainly more broadly just animals and the great bit of therapy that they provide to others. I think, particularly with this, a lot of our colleagues have spoken about how important our domestic animals are to our families and many of those that work in our communities and support that.

I wanted to particularly begin by giving a shout-out to a number of those that work in our community, and particularly to Pet Medical Crisis and Jennifer Hunt. Pet Medical Crisis is really what this bill is all about. It was founded by Jennifer in 2010, and the trigger was a personal experience when she rescued a border collie, Jed, who had ruptured multiple spinal discs. He did this chasing seagulls. It led to vet bills of up to \$30,000. In many situations, this would be a bill that a lot of people could not afford, and Jennifer could not afford it either – I think at the time she was renovating a kitchen and doing stuff at the home. She put all of that aside to ensure that she could pay the medical bills for the dog. So she did that and then, ultimately, that motivated her to set up a charity.

Particularly for elderly people or lonely people, where a dog or a cat is that bit of company, there comes a time when the animal gets sick and the bills are something that that individual cannot afford. That is where Pet Medical Crisis steps in and finds money, raises money, to help ensure that the animal gets the treatment that they deserve. Due to the work that they have been doing – and I have got to tell you it is hard for them because they are dealing with some really serious costs – rather than having to see, unfortunately, animals being put down, these animals are saved, thanks to Pet Medical Crisis.

We awarded Jennifer Hunt and her organisation a Caulfield Volunteer Award in 2021 for the great work that she and her organisation does. Congratulations to her. But I do say at this particular time, Jennifer and Pet Medical Crisis have sought support from the government, and I will use this opportunity to again ask the government to consider supporting organisations like Pet Medical Crisis, because it is not just about the animal, as important as they are, but it is about those that actually own the animal and what that does for those in isolation or for those that are dealing with a whole lot of other mental health issues. That animal can make a huge difference to many people's lives.

While I am on that, Kitty Rescue Squad was founded by Krizia Garrido Castro. Krizia, a South American, came to Melbourne, Victoria, to start a new life. She met a number of other South Americans and said, 'What are we going to do while we are here? We're not just going to come and just do the bare minimum. We're going to actually set up a charity and we're going to contribute to Victoria,' and that is what they have done.

What they do is they rescue cats and they take them and they find them a home. And literally they are doing all kinds of other jobs just to run the charity. They run a cleaning business and are working, cleaning, during the day. Another one of Krizia's support members of the organisation works in finance. They have come to Victoria and found jobs and then after hours are running the organisation. It is amazing, what they do – truly amazing. This group of Latin American women committed to helping stray and feral cats in our local area and fostering them and giving them a life and dealing with all their health issues along the way. In recognition, we gave her a volunteer award in 2023, and also

I had the great privilege, by coincidence, to be on the stage when Krizia became an Australian citizen. It almost brought tears to my eyes that here was somebody that has come to Victoria and made Australia her home, is doing this charity work and cleaning houses during the daytime and is now an Australian citizen.

When anybody wants to argue about immigration and about bringing people to Victoria, I just think about people like Krizia, because they have left somewhere else, they have come here and they are contributing like there is no tomorrow. They are working, they are contributing to Victoria and they are helping others. That is the kind of immigration that works in Victoria. That is why Victoria and Australia are better because of it, because we attract people to come here and make Australia their home. That is why I am a big supporter of having immigration – and I say the right immigration, because there are people that do not do what Krizia does and quite frankly try to disrupt, bring hate and bring violence. There is no place for them, and there should be laws that actually send them right back to where they come from. But for those that want to make Australia their home and live by the laws and contribute, bring it on. Thank you to Krizia and to others.

Just quickly, there are a number of vets in my area: Caulfield Veterinary Hospital, Greencross Vets in Caulfield South, the Cat Doctors in Caulfield South, Elsternwick Veterinary Clinic, Glenhuntly Road Veterinary Clinic and the Melbourne equine veterinary clinic in Caulfield East. They are really important because we have with racing an important part in terms of the veterinary piece of the equine industry, and they do a fantastic job as well.

There are a number of things in terms of ensuring that we replace the voluntary community foster care with a new pet rehoming authorisation scheme. We know the initial scheme did not work. We know the government is trying to improve this. We need to ensure that those that want to foster animals can do it in the best possible manner. We should always be looking to improve it, but at the same time we have got to make sure that we do not make it harder for those that want to do the right thing. Reduce red tape – absolutely we should be doing that. A lot of these people I mentioned, Krizia with Kitty Rescue Squad and Pet Medical Crisis, are doing it literally hand to mouth. They do not have additional money. So we need to cut red tape, which is so important for these organisations.

Trisha Taylor, the founder and president of Victorian Dog Rescue, I met with Peter Walsh back in Elsternwick in 2010 when I was first elected. She was running the organisation probably way before then and has been ever since. She is such a strong advocate for the rescue sector. Trisha flagged that Animal Welfare Victoria has stated that section 84 does not give voluntary organisations like hers the right to take undesexed and unmicrochipped dogs, and the interpretation will greatly impact her work. This is really important, because what she is doing is stopping animals from being euthanised and giving them a home. It is a very, very small organisation but an important one. She finds them a home. She does it all off her own bat, and we need to ensure that her work is supported. So no, this is not happening here. The government has been a bit lazy and has not dealt with that. We have been promised that this will be looked at in a second tranche. We will advocate to ensure that Trisha and her work and the work of the Victorian Dog Rescue is supported. And I will continue to be raising this important issue and standing up for those pet lovers and standing up for those animal welfare groups that do an important job – a really, really important job. We should be doing this because, as I say, it is not just about the animal; it is about the person that goes with it. For every animal there is a family, and with every family there is a lot of love and a lot of support. And what that does, particularly during a really tough time, which many Victorians are having, there is nothing better than coming home to your dog, to your cat or to your animal and giving them a big hug.

I want to finish by giving a big shout-out to our dog Jackson. We love him to death. Unfortunately, my wife, I think, loves Jackson more than all of us, her kids and everything, because Jackson gets spoilt rotten. I never thought that I would ever allow a dog to be sleeping at the foot of my bed, but in the last few years Jackson has found his new place, and that is in bed with us. We love you, Jackson. He is a clobberdog, a true Aussie dog. We love you, Jackson, and we love all those pets and animals that provide so much love and joy to every family out there in Victoria.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (14:56): I am very happy to stand here today and speak in favour of the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. This legislation creates a brand new regulatory framework for pet rehoming organisations in Victoria, and within this framework organisations will receive specific benefits and exemptions while requiring entities to be registered as a charity. This legislation also amends the Domestic Animals (DA) Act 1994 to clarify that a specific class of dog entitled to a reduced registration fee can be prescribed in regulations. This legislation also will clarify powers of entry for authorised officers to enter premises, excluding any building or vehicle used as a residence, in order to determine compliance with the Domestic Animals Act.

Through this bill the Victorian government is honouring its commitment to acting on the recommendations of the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets. The bill implements five of those recommendations by creating a new regulatory framework for pet rehoming organisations under the Domestic Animals Act 1994. This framework introduces a voluntary authorisation scheme for PROs while also repealing the outdated foster carer registration scheme. The FCRS focuses on regulating individual carers rather than the organisations responsible for the broader rehoming process. It has seen limited uptake, and during consultation the sector strongly supported a shift towards regulating PROs instead. Under the new scheme organisations that opt in will gain specific advantages to assist with their rehoming work. These benefits will put authorised PROs on a more equal footing with pounds and shelters when it comes to rehoming cats and dogs, consistent with the taskforce's advice. Importantly, participation remains voluntary. PROs that choose not to enter the scheme can continue to operate as they always have, but without access to the additional benefits.

The bill is the product of extensive consultation with the rehoming sector and related organisations across Victoria. To support the framework, new regulations will be developed to provide the necessary detail. The amendments to the DA act will not take effect for 14 months, giving time for the regulations to be drafted, and during this period, both the rehoming sector and the wider Victorian community will be invited to provide their input. The bill also clarifies powers of entry for authorised officers to enter premises, as I mentioned, excluding any building or vehicle used as a residence in order to determine compliance with the Domestic Animals Act 1994.

This government has a strong record when it comes to tackling animal cruelty and supporting animal welfare organisations. The 2025–26 state budget provides \$16.7 million over two years towards safeguarding the future of Victoria's agricultural sector and supporting animal welfare. This includes significant funding for RSPCA Victoria, which is in addition to the existing \$2.3 million the organisation receives each year from government. This substantial increase in funding will support RSPCA Victoria to continue to deliver critical animal welfare regulatory services while also transitioning to a two-up model. Animal Welfare Victoria is working with RSPCA Victoria to reflect this additional funding in a new memorandum of understanding between RSPCA Victoria and the state.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the outstanding work of the RSPCA here in Victoria. For decades the RSPCA has been on the frontline of animal welfare, rescuing, caring for and rehoming thousands of animals each year. Their inspectors play a pivotal role in investigating cases of cruelty and neglect, often working under very difficult and distressing circumstances to ensure animals are protected and those responsible are held to account. Beyond enforcement, the RSPCA also provides education, outreach and advocacy, helping communities to better understand responsible pet ownership and the importance of animal welfare. Their shelters and foster networks give countless animals a second chance at life, and their dedicated staff and volunteers embody compassion, professionalism and care. The Victorian government is proud to work in partnership with the RSPCA to improve standards and outcomes for animals across our state. Whether it is in enforcement, education or rehoming, the RSPCA continues to make an enormous difference, and on behalf of this Parliament, I want to thank them for their tireless commitment and tireless work that they do.

The Allan Labor government has a proud record of standing up for animal welfare, and this bill builds on that legacy. Over the past decade our reforms have transformed Victoria into a national leader in the protection and treatment of animals. We have banned cruel puppy farms and introduced the strictest breeding regulations in the country, ending the days of animals being treated as nothing more than commodities. We made it an offence to sell a pet without a valid microchip and source number from the pet exchange register, ensuring traceability and accountability in the sale of companion animals. We removed the outdated requirement for greyhounds to be muzzled in public, an important reform that acknowledged these dogs for the gentle companions they are rather than the stereotypes of the past. We delivered Victoria's first *Animal Welfare Action Plan*, which for the very first time in our state recognised animals as sentient beings capable of feeling and deserving of respect. We strengthened the rights of Victorians by giving renters the ability to keep a pet, reflecting the fact that pets are not just animals but family members in so many homes across our state. We reformed the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, bringing together leading experts to ensure government receives the best possible advice when it comes to improving welfare standards and shaping policy. Victoria was also the first state to require mandatory reporting of animal fate data for cats and dogs in pounds and shelters, delivering greater transparency, accountability and ultimately better outcomes for rehoming. We launched the targeted cat desexing program, making it easier for councils and communities to manage cat populations humanely and effectively. This work is now being expanded through the development of a comprehensive statewide cat management strategy to guide best practice management across Victoria for the next decade.

These reforms show a clear and consistent record. When it comes to animal welfare, the Allan Labor government does not just talk about change, we deliver it. In 2017 it was a Labor government that finally outlawed cruel puppy farms in this state. We stood up for the welfare of animals and put an end to the industrial-scale breeding of dogs in appalling conditions. And what did the opposition do? They opposed it. They argued that the laws had no scientific basis. They argued that shutting down puppy farms would simply drive breeding underground. While Labor acted to ban high-volume puppy farms and close the loophole that allowed pet shops to funnel puppies from those breeders, the Liberal–National coalition voted against it. They had every opportunity to join with us in saying that cruelty has no place in Victoria, but they chose to turn their backs.

Now, before I finish, I believe many in this house have put on the record whether they are a cat or a dog person. I must admit –

Paul Edbrooke: Be careful.

Eden FOSTER: I know. I am a dog person, but I do love cats too.

I would also like to reflect on the incredible bond we share with our pets. It is a connection that brings joy, laughter and sometimes a little bit of chaos – much like a certain family of Heelers we all know and love, and for those who have kids, I think you might know what show I am talking about. This bill, in many ways, is our dance mode for a more responsible pet community. We are not just moving to the beat of new regulations; we are dancing for the welfare of every dog and cat in Victoria. We want to ensure that every furry friend, whether they are a Bluey, full of energy, or more laid-back Bingo, finds their forever home. Some may look at the provisions for rehoming and see a bit of a keepy uppy challenge with all the new rules to follow. But let us be honest, it is a game we must win. We cannot have a shadowlands of neglected animals or a magic xylophone of unvetted sales. This bill is about making sure that the journey from a shelter to a loving home is as smooth and joyful as a sleepover with your best friend. This government are not just legislating, we are creating a world where every pet gets their happy takeaway: a life filled with love, care and family. This bill ensures that whether they are a grannies enthusiast or a unicorse devotee, every pet has a chance to live their best life.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:06): After the member for Mulgrave's contribution referring to the family of heelers that we all know and love, I think if a balloon was let loose in this place, every

member would jump to their feet to play a game of keepy uppy – a challenge that would be an interesting one, no doubt. I am more than happy to make a contribution to the debate on the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Fostering and rehoming pets is something I have a great deal of experience in. I am an animal person, first and foremost, and I think when people say, ‘Oh, I’m not an animal person’, it is a very good indicator that we will not be friends. I am a dog person. We currently have two dogs. We have two great shepherds, German shepherds – they are great shepherds – Flash and Bolt, that we have had for a long time. Our last dog, Ripper, actually came to us through this scheme several years ago, when I was a councillor. Given the geographic area of the great north-west of the state, sometimes getting pets from pounds to registered foster carers can be a challenge because of the great distances that need to be travelled. So when a call comes in saying, ‘There’s a couple of dogs in the Robinvale pound that need to go to Bendigo. Would you do it?’, how can you say no when you are an animal person? On one particular occasion the breed of dog was mistaken to be a greyhound. The greyhound group wanted this dog that was in the pound, so I of course got the call to deliver the dog to Bendigo, along with a golden retriever who was wonderful and full of personality but would not sit still. The dog that was mistaken to be a greyhound was brindle – she looked a bit like Santa’s Little Helper from *The Simpsons* – would not get into the back of the car I had at the time, which I think was a Mitsubishi Outlander, and would only get into the front seat. Between Robinvale and probably Swan Hill that dog, which I later named Ripper, did not take its eyes off me. So without prior approval from the man of the house, I decided that I was not going to deliver this dog, I was going to adopt it. I did, and I had that dog for quite some time, although she was a jumper. It turns out she was not a greyhound at all; she was just really malnourished and really skinny. So I did all the right things after I adopted her, had her chipped and DNA tested in fact to find out exactly what she was, and she was actually a mix of Irish wolfhound, staghound, Maltese terrier – believe it or not – and Great Dane. She was an odd mix but a beautiful dog.

Unfortunately, like I said, she was a jumper. At one stage – and I love to tell stories in this place – living out on the farm, she jumped out of the backyard and went missing. And of course my son – then he was three or four I think – was absolutely devastated, because we know that kids really get attached to their pets; they are part of our family.

We did everything we could to find her. We are on 3500 acres. If you cannot find her on the farm, then all bets are off really. It turned out that three months after I got a call, because of the microchip, which leads to being a responsible pet owner, that she was found in front of the council offices but had been shot through the jaw – it was pretty awful. She had had her bottom jaw shot off. Of course I went and collected her, took her to the vet and fed her through a tube for weeks and weeks until she made a full recovery. Then she jumped the fence again, never to be seen again. Unfortunately, I did not have pet insurance. She was a beautiful, beautiful dog. The importance of microchips – because these pets sometimes make it home and they sometimes do not.

Now we do have two German shepherds that are members of the family. I know if anything ever happened to them, both children – we have got two boys – would be completely devastated, absolutely, as would I and my husband. He often brings up what we will do when these dogs are no longer with us, and it is something I am not willing to discuss, because I do not want to think about it.

But getting back to the bill, this bill is before us today to fix the scheme that was put in place back in 2016 – the voluntary foster carer registration scheme, which was predictably, some will say, underutilised. At the time, foster carers, the Municipal Association of Victoria and others failed to recognise the alarm, and the uptake of the scheme was pitiful. I think it was just 50 foster carers across the whole state, and that left thousands of volunteers locked out of receiving support and recognition for what they do. Like I said when recalling my involvement with foster caring and transporting dogs, sometimes, particularly in regional areas, it is a big job, because there are big k’s to be travelled.

Volunteers will do that whether or not they have ticked the box, filled in the form and whatnot, just because they love animals – it is as simple as that. This bill will scrap that broken system and replace it with a pet rehoming authorisation scheme. Under the new arrangements rehoming organisations can apply for authorisation for up to three years, reporting data to councils and the state, and in return access some grants and limited exemptions from council pet registration fees.

While we are on council pet registration fees, if you have got dogs, they are not cheap. Our German shepherds have not been desexed, because they are beautiful dogs. We have bred the father twice – and I think his son. We also have the first pup from the first litter, and he has had a couple of litters as well. We have not desexed them, but that adds quite a lot of extra cost to registering pets. Exemption from council pet registration fees is a really positive thing for volunteers.

The bill also clarifies that authorised officers can enter backyards, for instance, to seize a dangerous dog. Those that do go in to seize dangerous dogs are braver than I, because, even though our dogs are not dangerous, if you were to come to our backyard and see two big German shepherds barking at you the way they do – mind you, if they know you, they will lick you to death – it would be a pretty confronting sight. Of course there is the safeguard of a warrant being required, obviously, to enter someone's home or caravan et cetera.

It also fixes an anomaly around hunting dogs and reduced registration fees. Hunting dogs are something that I also have a fair bit of experience with, given the amount of hunters up in the great north-west. Those dogs are predominantly used for hunting pigs, which is dangerous in and of itself, but that is what they are bred to do, and they do it very well. The owners of those dogs, again, treat those animals like they are part of the family. It is devastating when accidents inevitably happen with all of our pets.

In Mildura we know how critical volunteer rehoming groups are. We actually have SARG, the Sunraysia Animal Rehoming Group, which is volunteer-led. They do a wonderful job. You see them at all sorts of events and markets with doggy showbags and cat showbags. They sell them for \$10 or \$20 each, I think, and every time we do see the stalls my boys insist on buying a bag for the dogs, because it is not Christmas or Easter unless the dogs get presents too, which is very nice. But SARG make that very easy to accommodate, and they do a wonderful job in really caring for animals, finding homes for them and going through all that. So hopefully they can benefit from the amendments that are now being made with this bill.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (15:16): I rise today to speak in support of the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. I am very pleased to speak about this today on R U OK? Day, a good reminder to check in with each other not just today but every day. Even when they are struggling, many people are great at looking like they are getting on with life and going okay, but this often hides the turmoil underneath. Taking the time to check in with one another and showing that you care can literally mean the difference between life and death. Pets also play a really important role in protecting mental health. They help address the growing problem of isolation and loneliness, and they get people out for a walk and give people purpose. But most importantly, they give comfort, companionship and unconditional love.

I love coming home to my two rescue dogs. Our 14-year-old Lily does not care what we say and does her own thing at all times. She deliberately does not go slow when it is time to go outside but loves a walk, loves a cuddle when she is in the mood and loves nothing more than lying too close to an open fire in the backyard. And we have Jack. Rescued through Working Dog Rescue, Jack loves going for a run with Joe more than anything else, and unlike Lily, he tries really hard to be a very good boy – but does not always succeed. He loves a cuddle at all times, but he is not so keen on cooking himself next to a fire or lying in the full sun on a 30-degree day, like Lily. For the record, I am an all living things person. I love my dogs, but I grew up with cats. Joe is allergic to cats, so we cannot have cats anymore, but we had ducks, lizards, birds, rabbits – we even had a ferret at one stage. So I do love all animals. We did not have the ferret and the rabbit at the same time, you will be glad to know.

It was a joy to see the kids at Jacana School for Autism interact with the wonderful therapy dog Victor and his dedicated handler Mini when the Deputy Premier and I visited to announce a \$1.7 million increase for animal-assisted wellbeing and engagement programs in Victorian schools. These programs are based on research and help students feel calm, safe and able to engage in learning. I understand Victor also helps improve attendance. Having a therapy animal at school helps kids feel like they belong, which improves how they learn and connect with others. It was clear just how much the current program helps children build confidence, try new things and regulate emotions, and our extra funding will mean they can expand this program. I thank principal Corinne Pupillo, assistant principal Daniel Moloney and all the dedicated staff for their commitment to this important program.

I recently caught up with my good friend Kieran Hough, who spoke warmly about the extraordinary results that the dogs-in-prisons programs are having across Australia, achieving extraordinary results in rehabilitation and giving people pride, purpose and the companionship of one who does not judge. In speaking on this bill, I take the opportunity to thank all of the volunteers across Victoria who give up their time, and often their sleep, to rescue and rehome or, in the case of wildlife, rehabilitate and release our precious animals.

I was absolutely heartbroken to hear of the recent tragic death of two beautiful Nepalese Australian nurses who were hit on the Hume Highway while tending to an injured kangaroo. Amanda O'Sullivan, who worked with both Khadka and Suwal, said the pair would have done anything to help the injured animal. She said:

... it's just unfortunate that it wasn't a safe place to do so, and their true kindness was fatal ...

Her memories of working alongside Suwal in aged care remain vivid:

Her soul was so, so beautiful ... I hope she finds peace and kindness on the other side of Earth just like she showed peace and kindness Earth-side ...

The Alfred hospital, where Khadka worked, made a statement about the tragic loss of the beloved nurse and much-loved colleague:

Sarala was a dedicated, highly skilled nurse, who went above and beyond to care for each patient with warmth, compassion and kindness ...

I briefly spoke about this tragedy during the Indra Jatra festival, celebrated for the first time in Australia, which I attended with my parliamentary colleagues the member for Sunbury, the member for Melton and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and I have been there a number of times with my neighbour, the member for Greenvale Iwan Walters.

I am not surprised these women stopped to help an injured kangaroo. We are so lucky to have so many Nepalese nurses and healthcare workers in Victoria. They helped us get through COVID and were by the side of my father and my family when he departed. They are so caring, compassionate, hardworking and respectful, and I will be forever grateful for all our Nepalese community has contributed to Victoria, which is why I am absolutely heartbroken to hear of the people who have lost their lives in Nepal this week. My sincerest condolences go to their friends and families, and my thoughts and love are with the entire Nepalese community at this time, both here in Australia and overseas. As secretary of the Parliamentary Friends of Nepal I pass on the thoughts and condolences of everyone in the Parliament to the Nepalese community at this time.

I have been working with Megan Bridger-Darling from the member for Melton's office and Rachel Payne from the upper house towards starting up a parliamentary friends of animal rescue to promote the good work of all Victorian organisations and volunteers who do this important work. Today I want to give a shout-out to the many good people involved in animal rescue across the electorate of Broadmeadows, including Simon Harris from Oak Park, who has been involved in dog rescue for over 20 years, and Jens Buche, who runs Alley Katz Australia and is a passionate advocate for animal welfare. I spoke to Jens earlier today. He had had very little sleep, caring for some recently rescued

cats. His organisation has been struggling with the cost of registration and the burden of red tape, and this bill is designed to address exactly those concerns.

This bill had its origins in the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets, which our government established to investigate and recommend ways we could improve and further support the rehoming of dogs and cats in Victoria. Our bill demonstrates the Labor government's commitment to implementing all 17 recommendations that the taskforce made in its final report and introduces a voluntary authorisation scheme for pet rehoming organisations in Victoria through amendments to the Domestic Animals Act 1994. It also repeals current provisions and the voluntary foster care registration scheme, which was not well taken up and regulated the individual carer rather than the organisation. Organisations that choose to participate in the scheme will receive specific benefits to support rehoming, similar to what pounds and shelters currently have and in line with the taskforce recommendations – benefits like a 12-month exemption on paying council registrations for foster cats and dogs awaiting rehoming, which will make a huge difference; limited access to the declared dogs register to help ensure aggressive dogs are not rehomed; and being able to hold adoption days in prescribed pet shops to support the housing of more animals and to support the organisation as well. Organisations can choose not to participate in the new scheme and will continue to be able to rehome pets as they have always done.

The bill has been informed by extensive consultation with the sector, including 54 pet rehoming organisations, 292 foster carers, 26 pounds and shelters, 54 local government areas and four animal welfare groups. I take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in the rehoming pets working group and all those who have contributed their advice and input to date. Following the legislation, regulations will be developed with input from the pet rehoming sector.

The Allan Labor government remains committed to animal welfare, and this is yet another way we are looking after our precious companions. Labor's other reforms have included banning cruel puppy farms; making it an offence to sell a pet without a valid microchip; removing the need for greyhounds to be muzzled in public; producing Victoria's first *Animal Welfare Action Plan*, which recognises that animals are sentient; giving renters the right to keep a pet; reforming the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to ensure government receives expert advice; and becoming the first state to introduce mandatory reporting of animal fate data for dogs and cats in shelters and pounds. We have also increased funding to the RSPCA, and under our Labor government the Lost Dogs' Home in Campbellfield also received a grant to improve its facilities and give pets there a better life. There are so many wonderful programs, organisations and volunteers in this state, and I thank them and commend this bill to the house.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (15:24): I rise to make a contribution to the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. It has been fun hearing everyone talk about their pets. It is probably a bit of a surprise, but I am actually petrified of dogs. I have always been scared of dogs.

Jade Benham interjected.

Kim O'KEEFFE: The member for Mildura said, 'That's not a surprise.' My family are very aware of it. I do like to walk in the mornings, and I pick my routes. But in saying that, we have always had a family dog. We had Kirk, who was my mum's dog, and our dog, who was Kirk's son and was named Dougie. So we had Kirk Douglas in the family, which was fun.

Jade Benham: Small dogs?

Kim O'KEEFFE: Yes, little Jack Russells. They were fine. We had Dougie as part of our family for 17 years. The girls grew up with their dog; they are part of your family. I think people that do not have pets or are not 'pet people' – even though I am frightened of dogs, I do love family pets. I love them in the house and at home just for the company they bring. I think when you have children it teaches them to also care for something other than themselves, particularly when they get to be

teenagers. I just think it is such a beautiful environment, to have a pet. For me, walking the dog – I miss our little Dougie. I used to walk him every morning and just have that routine and that little bit of support and connection. My daughter has two dogs. I do not have any grandchildren yet, but I have little grandbaby pets. We have got Maxi and Betty, and they are Maltese-Shih tzus, so they are they are quite fun. I am not scared of those dogs, but if I am on the street, I am very nervous if I see a dog coming.

Getting back to the bill, it has been great to hear people's stories. I have a couple of elderly people that I visit that also have pets. I have a friend, and without her little dog sitting there, I am sure she would be quite lonely. I think that comfort is a factor. I think this bill is important when we think about that. We need to make sure that pets are always really cared for and that they are placed in the right care, where they are loved and nurtured. This is a bill for an act to amend the Domestic Animals Act 1994 to provide for an authorisation scheme for pet rehoming organisations to assist those organisations to rehome cats and dogs; to further provide for councils to be informed about animals in foster care in their municipality; to provide for the collection of information about the outcome of efforts to rehome dogs and cats; and to clarify the powers of authorised officers in relation to entering premises for certain purposes. The government provides that the forced commencement date is in more than 12 months in order to allow for a transitional period and for stakeholders in the industry to apply for inclusion in the proposed new scheme the bill presents and for the development of regulations to support the new framework the bill proposes.

Back in 2016, which has been raised today, under the then Andrews government, the Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Bill 2016 was introduced to Parliament. It included amendments to enable voluntary registration of community foster carers for dogs and cats through their local council. At the time, concerns were raised by community foster carers, the Municipal Association of Victoria and the wider community that such a voluntary registration system had not been based on consultation with the relevant stakeholders and would create an excessive administrative burden not only on community foster carers but also councils. Following this bill back in 2016, an inquiry was established to examine these concerns raised and other issues relating to the impact of the bill. When the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee in the other place tabled its final report, it recommended to the government at the time that the bill be withdrawn and a stakeholder group be established to consult on the drafting of a new bill. The amendments made through this bill before the house may not have been required, perhaps, if the findings and recommendations of the committee had been adopted by the government more than nine years ago.

This bill largely follows the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets, which tabled its final report to the government in December 2021, during the last Parliament. It was established to investigate and provide recommendations to the government on how to improve pet welfare, particularly pet rehoming pathways and survival rates. As we all know in this place, pet rescue, rehoming and foster care groups provide valuable and essential animal care, rehabilitation and rehoming service. I want to thank them for the amazing work that they do. They offer an important service in efforts to reduce the number of dogs and cats in the state's shelter and pound system effectively. Many of these groups are run by volunteers, and we do not want to restrict their ability to continue their great work. There have been some concerns raised, and I will get to those in a minute.

It is also a go-to place for many people who want to have a special pet who may need extra care. I have a brother; he and his wife do not have children, and over the years they have always got their dogs from a rescue centre. Our family always say that that dog has won the dog lottery because they literally get so looked after and are so loved and cared for. The last one they had, little Lolly, was a Chihuahua. She had trauma due to being abused and had massive trust issues. What they did with that little dog was astounding, providing her with the love and care that every pet deserves. She did recently pass away, and they are still getting over her loss, but I know that they are definitely going to go to another service for a rescue dog. All pets, as I said, deserve a safe space and to be protected and cared for.

The Victorian pet census, which was held in July 2023, found that cat owners were more likely to get their cats from a rehoming organisation, around 28 per cent, or an animal shelter, 22 per cent, with the main reason for choosing them to help save the animals. For dogs, fewer were obtained from a rehoming organisation, as low as 17 per cent, or from an animal shelter, 6 per cent.

The taskforce's final report included a total of 17 recommendations to the government, and since this time the government has committed to implementing all 17. But what we are debating here today delivers on five recommendations, mainly the establishment of an authorisation scheme for pet rehoming organisations to assist their services in rehoming our dogs and cats. This new framework the bill proposes will be voluntary, not mandatory, for such organisations to apply to the secretary to be authorised. As we have seen in the past, like the voluntary community foster care registration system, the uptake has been very low, and only a few councils have been offering registration to approximately 50 registered community fosterers. It has left thousands of community foster carers right across the state being unable to access discounted pet registration fees. As such, authorisation under this bill will be granted to organisations subject to certain conditions imposed by the secretary and prescribed in regulations, which must remain in place for no longer than three years. An organisation can apply to renew its authorisation after this time.

As mentioned, this new scheme will be voluntary for organisations, with benefits to be offered to incentivise their participation. If an organisation or group does not wish to become an authorised organisation, they will still be able to operate, but they will not be able to access the benefits that are provided to those who are authorised. The bill provides for the state government to undertake the administrative, regulatory and compliance functions for the new scheme. Regulations pending the bill's passage will set out the additional requirements that authorised organisations must meet, such as reporting the location of animals under their care, mandatory preadoption activities like desexing and vaccination and reporting of animal data to the government. These requirements are important, because not only will they improve overall animal welfare outcomes for cats and dogs in the sector, but they will also enable such organisations to demonstrate the highest standards of animal management and care.

One of the concerns raised by the industry stakeholders during the taskforce's inquiry of work was possible barriers to regulation. As noted in the taskforce's final report, whilst there was support for regulation, there were many potential barriers to implementing the regulation. Groups shared with the taskforce that they are concerned about the administrative and resource burden a new regulatory framework will place on them, as well as any increases to regulatory requirements that will reduce their capacity and resources to care for animals.

It was also noted that across the sector existing regulatory frameworks are not fit for purpose. Whilst this new authorisation scheme that the bill proposes I am sure, given its voluntary nature, will be welcomed across the sector for not burdening it by this additional regulatory framework being proposed, there is still some work to be done. It gives organisations and groups the option, as we said, for participating or not.

The bill also sees the repeal of the current voluntary foster care registration scheme from the Domestic Animals Act as the government provides there has been a low uptake of the scheme since its introduction back in 2017. Instead the new authorisation scheme will seek to centralise animal foster carer activities under authorised and regulated rehoming organisations where they are an authorised pet rehoming organisation or an animal shelter or pound. Foster carers will continue to play an important role in the dog and cat rehoming process, but the amendments the bill proposes will seek to alleviate the regulatory and administrative burden that volunteer foster carers face and recognise the role pet rehoming organisations play in their communities. There is no doubt that the current community foster carer registration system does not work, and the opportunity to register as a community foster carer is appreciated by the sector, we just need to get it right.

In my final minute I would just like to read a concern I got from Jeanette, who actually writes on behalf of the Gumtree Greys board and Victoria's domestic animal rescue and rehoming sector with some of her concerns in regard to this bill, which she did request that I would perhaps look at and raise. There are some relevant concerns there:

Mandatory council notifications within 7 business days for each foster placement, change of address, or adoption could mean **3–9+ notifications per dog ...**

which could lead to anything up to \$600 in fines if they do not follow the right processes.

Linking government funding to compliance while removing the reduced fee will drive smaller volunteer groups out of existence, while large organisations with paid staff will benefit.

That was one of her major concerns. So whilst we are not opposing the bill, we do have some concerns with the bill.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (15:34): I too am pleased to rise today to speak on the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. From the outset, I would like to thank the Minister for Agriculture and her team for their efforts in bringing this important piece of legislation to the house.

I do note all the wonderful stories we have had of our furry family friends, and I would like to just note that I am a dog person. I am not big fan of cats as I am allergic to them. However, there are some cats that I am truly a big fan of, and they are the Geelong Cats. They were magnificent last weekend. We currently do not have a dog. We lost our little furry friend back on 21 February this year after 15 long years of wonderful times with Oscar. We buried him under a cherry blossom tree in the garden. and just today we have got the first blossoms on that tree.

Anyway, this bill continues the work of the Victorian government to strengthen animal welfare, improve regulation and support the many volunteers and organisations across our state who dedicate their time to rehoming cats and dogs. The legislation is the product of years of careful policy work, engagement with stakeholders and the recommendations of the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets. It reflects a deliberate and considered effort to implement recommendations 7 through to 11 of the taskforce by introducing a regulatory framework that properly recognises and supports the pet rehoming sector. The origins of the bill lie in the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets, which reported to government in 2021 after extensive consultation with the sector. That taskforce sets out 17 recommendations, and this bill will deliver on recommendations 7 through to 11, which call for a clear regulatory framework for the pet rehoming sector. The bill is therefore a direct continuation of the government's commitment to implement the taskforce findings in full and to give rehoming organisations the recognition and support they deserve.

The legislation establishes the pet rehoming organisation authorisation scheme. This voluntary scheme will allow eligible rehoming organisations to apply to be formally authorised by the state. Authorisation will bring with it benefits designed to reduce administrative burdens, improve opportunities for rehoming and ensure strong welfare standards. The scheme will also provide clarity for councils and the wider community about which organisations meet the standards expected under the Domestic Animals Act 1994. Eligibility to apply will be open to organisations that hold an ABN and are registered as charities with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. These criteria are important because they ensure accountability and transparency. Once authorised, organisations will hold that authorisation for up to three years before renewal is required. During that time they will operate under clear conditions set by the secretary of the department and underpinned by regulations that will be developed in consultation with the sector. Participation in the scheme will be entirely voluntary. Organisations may continue to operate outside the scheme if they wish, but those that join will access significant benefits. Authorised organisations will be able to hold adoption days in partnership with shelters, pounds and prescribed pet shops, creating more opportunities to rehome animals. And obviously on these adoption days, maybe I will have to get down there and get a new member of our family. My daughter is absolutely obsessed with dogs. She has about 200 stuffed toy

animal dogs in her room, and so she is putting the pressure on us to get a new member of the family – not yet, not this weekend.

The bill will also make important amendments to improve information sharing and transparency. Authorised organisations will be required to notify local council within seven business days when animals enter foster care, when they move locations or when they are rehomed. They will also be required to report outcome data – sometimes known as fate data – to the state government. This information will be collected in a new pet rehoming information register maintained by the department.

I do want to just mention a couple of the wonderful local organisations in my area. Locally in the Glen Waverley district we see the dedication of our community groups and volunteers who live out these values every day. Organisations such as the Tails of the Forgotten Paws AU, which has rehomed cats across Glen Waverley; Nigel's Animal Rescue, which services our area; Wildlife Victoria, which provides 24-hour emergency response for injured native animals; and the Friends of Bushy Park Wetlands, which safeguards local habitats, all deserve recognition.

Their work demonstrates the strength of community involvement in animal welfare, and this bill is designed to support and complement these efforts.

In conclusion, the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025 represents a significant and timely reform. It creates a modern framework that supports rehoming organisations, it improves welfare outcomes for cats and dogs and it gives councils and government the tools they need to regulate effectively. It acknowledges the extraordinary contribution of volunteers and organisations across Victoria, while ensuring that animal welfare remains at the heart of our laws. It builds on past reforms, and it delivers on recommendations of the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets. I commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (15:41): The time is moving on throughout the day, and to be able to get up and talk on the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025 is wonderful on a Thursday. Members have got up and spoken in the chamber today about the importance of pets right throughout our community. I note the member for Frankston, who is heading out, and his love for the hawk, as do the member for Sandringham and I. The Hawks will be prevalent tomorrow night, I think, as we are over in South Australia taking on the Crows, so we will see what happens there.

People that follow the AFL know there are a lot of teams that have animals as their mascots. Of course, as I said, we have the mighty Hawks, and we have got the Crows. We got the Magpies, the Eagles over in Western Australia, the Bulldogs – member for Footscray – the Lions, the Kangaroos, the Tigers

Members interjecting.

Martin CAMERON: There we go, the Cats. The Cats are –

Members interjecting.

Martin CAMERON: No, the Dockers – we do not want an anchor around someone's neck at all over there. So we can see the importance of pets right throughout. Even though they do not know that they are helping us, we know that they do.

In a former life, in my job as a plumber, I got to engage in people's homes where I was fixing up plumbing issues for them. Sometimes I would go into elderly people's homes, and the only companion that they had would be a cat or dog or a bird sitting in a cage. That particular pet was their companion; it was more than just a dog or a cat. I think I heard earlier one of the other members saying that sometimes the person will pass away before the actual pet, and this is why these laws that we are passing here today are needed – so that we know the dogs, cats and other pets in this particular space

are being rehomed responsibly. Also, in my role I used to go into schools, and therapy dogs were another big part of schools. Children that otherwise were a little bit unruly during the day – once they got that therapy dog in the room, the change that would come over that child was unbelievable. Even this week we had the Spring Racing Carnival launch here in Parliament, and we had horses on the grounds. Every single week we have only got to walk out of our rooms and offices around here to actually see our therapy dogs in here as well, so it is fantastic that we can do that.

I am a definite dog lover. I like cats, but I never actually had a cat at all in my time growing up. I have had friends and family members who have had them. I am lucky at the moment that I have a dog called Stormy. Stormy has been on my journey through Parliament. A big shout-out to Damian and the crew from Puppies Downunder in Morwell. I went there for a visit to see how his business worked, and I walked in without a dog and walked away with a dog.

It was a great surprise to my family when I showed up that evening back at home and had purchased Stormy, who has completely taken over our life, as pets do. As I pointed out, these pets play a huge role, especially in aged care facilities.

Another issue that we talk about a lot in here and that is often forgotten is the homelessness issue that we have at the moment. A major concern with trying to get people into housing is the fact that they have pets on the streets with them. Most of those pets would be of the canine variety. You can ask a person that is homeless, if they are lucky enough to have a house come up – if at that house they cannot have their pet with them, they will not go in. If it is emergency housing or something like that, the love that they have for their pet will actually make them say, 'No, I would rather sleep on the street and sleep rough.' So a concern or an issue going forward which we may have to at some stage work out is not only emergency housing for our homeless people but also emergency housing for their pets. As I said before, in the Latrobe Valley, as everywhere, we do have a homelessness issue, and a lot of the time they will not go into a home because of their pets and not wanting to leave their pets. So that is something for us to think about as a Parliament moving forward.

This bill coming through gives some clarity about what the rules and regulations are going to be when we are rehoming pets and also gives some guidelines for councils and so forth. I know of a Saturday morning in Traralgon, when I am out going for a walk, we have a club run by Dave and Cath Roberts, and they have greyhound dogs which they rehome. I know the member for Gippsland East has a menagerie of pets up where he lives, and he is a little bit like Dr Doolittle, I think. He thinks he can talk to the animals and often does, and I think sometimes he would rather spend more time talking with them than other people that may be giving him grief around the place.

As I said before, in bringing these amendments through we do have to make sure that we are doing the right thing. There are those rogue people out there that want to do the wrong thing, unfortunately, and we need to make sure that we are doing the right thing.

The main purpose of the bill is to provide authorisation schemes for pet rehoming organisations to assist those organisations to actually rehome much-beloved dogs and cats and to further provide for councils to be informed about animals in foster care in their municipal districts. People are doing this work. It is volunteer work and it is unpaid work, but it is work that they really do want to do because of their love for our four-legged friends as we find the need to make sure that our pets and other people's pets are safe. I know we did have a big influx when we went through COVID; a lot of people were buying domestic pets. But as we came out of COVID there was a big push and a big need for a lot of pets to be rehomed. So we need to make sure that we have got all our rules and regulations in place for them to be able to do that.

As I finish up on these domestic animal amendments, it is timely to just go over again the importance of being able to connect with an animal.

I know we are talking about cats and dogs here, but there have been other members in this chamber that have been talking about other pets and their journey of having a pet actually live with them for

10, 15 years. When those pets do pass it is heartbreaking. It is sometimes exactly the same feeling that you do get when you lose a family member, because no matter how you are feeling – if you are happy, if you are sad, if you are stressed – our wonderful pets put all that aside and just treat us warmly and with unconditional love.

In the last 10 seconds that I have – I started by talking about the mighty Hawks.

Brad Rowsell interjected.

Martin CAMERON: As the member for Sandringham notes, we will go over and win this weekend.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (15:51): I am so very pleased to be able to join all these wonderful, wonderful contributions on the importance of the Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025. This does speak very much to our values as Victorians. It has been a really delightful way to finish the week to hear about the Broadmeadows animals, to hear about the animals of Mildura, to hear about – was it a ferret? – all sorts of other wonderful creatures, all creatures great and small.

Of course it needs to be known very clearly that when it comes to decisions about whether somebody is a cat person or a dog person, I have no doubts. I am very clearly a bit tribal, and it is dogs all the way for our family. It has to be dogs all the way because we have a birdwatcher in the family, and of course the dogs and the other family members are joined in their love of birds – of setting them or watching them or whatever else needs to happen to make sure that we are looking at them and loving everything about the beautiful environment we live in.

This bill speaks to our values, as I said, and belief that our community is stronger when we look after the most vulnerable, and we acknowledge that the vulnerable extends to the animals in our care – to the cats and the dogs who depend entirely on us for their safety and wellbeing. Of course I will be talking about Orlagh and Finn at some point during this contribution.

I do want to also make sure that I recognise that in my electorate of Cranbourne, as in so many other parts of the state, we have an extraordinary number of registered animals. We have somewhere in the realm of 8500 registered animals. So my community is well aware of the importance of compassion, responsibility and respect for the animals who bring so much happiness to our lives. I see it at the dog park. I see it as I am up and down doorknocking in all the wonderful greetings I receive from the pooches of Cranbourne.

Across Victoria, and particularly in Cranbourne, volunteers and staff members in rehoming organisations, shelters and foster networks work day and night to give cats and dogs a second chance. An incredible example of this is of course the Lost Dogs' Home. I know anyone who has had the opportunity to visit the Lost Dogs' Home will be aware of the role that they play in Cranbourne, in the context of the Cranbourne Lost Dogs' home, but also in North Melbourne. The home is the largest open-intake animal shelter in Victoria and provides care to more than 18,000 animals a year, and that is from its sites across both North Melbourne and Cranbourne. Of course I am going to take the opportunity to recognise the home. I was visiting the Lost Dogs' Home only a few weeks ago. It is hard to knock back any opportunity to go and see the extraordinary work that they do there. They do have a leading role in animal welfare, and of course they have actually been instrumental in five of the recommendations that are included in this bill through the rehoming pets working group.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Pauline RICHARDS: I am going to take up the interjection from the member for Frankston and say I did not take a pet home, but I did enjoy a little bit of time having a pooch. In fact I had a nice bit of time with a kitten, which was unusual for me, but it was something that was maybe good for both of us.

The home partners with 51 rescue organisations and maintains a large and active foster care network. In light of the fact that the role of rescue organisations is a key focus of this bill today, I am going to take the opportunity to thank the Lost Dogs' Home for all of the work that they do and their efforts in this field and acknowledge their rescue partners, the foster carers and the many volunteers that support their work.

I am going to particularly make mention of the work of Malcolm Roberts-Palmer, Gillian Victor, Amanda Smith and Jess Wilde. When I did have the pleasure of visiting the Lost Dogs' Home, as I said, just recently, it was to congratulate them on the funding that they have received as part of the animal welfare grants. They do fantastic work, and this bill very much honours this work.

I am going to just take us on a journey of the importance of Irish setters. There are people who are part of the setter faction, and the setter faction includes people who are supporters of and lovers of Irish, English and Gordon setters. Davydd Griffiths, who is known by many of us on this side of the chamber, is part of the English setter faction, and he has certainly with his dogs Pixie and Lionel been able to care for and love his pooches. Unfortunately, he has lost them both, and I know that has been a source of great sadness. On Irish setters, I am going to thank Eireannmáda, and particularly Greg Browne, for the way that he has worked so diligently to support our Irish setters in Victoria and indeed across Australia. He is a person who cares greatly about animal welfare and also makes sure that our beautiful breed is very well cared for. All of the opportunities he has to show dogs and to educate people about the importance of these extraordinary animals are to be commended.

In this context particularly I want to acknowledge that Orlagh and Finn ought to be a source of great pride. If Orlagh and Finn are watching now, I will say, 'Get off the couch, and whatever it is that you're chewing, Orlagh, can you please return it to the washing basket?' Last time, of course, Orlagh ended up at the Cranbourne South vets, and so it is an opportunity for me to thank the Cranbourne South vets for the role they play in caring for our animals.

We also have Meow and Friends, which is a local vet surgery that does extraordinary work as a community vet and particularly has aspirations about making sure that our community more broadly cares for their animals in a way that takes account of people's capacity to be able to care for their animals. I am also going to acknowledge and thank everyone at Lyndhurst Lodge. This is a family-owned haven for our pooches. They are just the most wonderful people, and I am grateful every day for the way that they care for so many of the animals in our area. And finally, of course, we have Ash and the team at Green Meadows. Cranbourne is very well served by a community of people who care for their pooches and their animals, their cats and dogs.

This bill, though, I do want to acknowledge, addresses recommendations 7 to 11 of the final report from the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets – these recommendations call for a regulatory framework for the pet rehoming sector – and it does ensure consistency, transparency and accountability. For too long, we know, people have worked long hours in some of our community vets. This is not glamorous work. It is often done after hours with little thanks and sometimes at personal cost. People open their homes to frightened or abandoned animals, and oftentimes they sit up through the night bottle-feeding kittens or calming a traumatised dog. They do it because they believe every animal deserves a chance at a safe and loving home. This does honour the organisations like the Lost Dogs' Home, who have been at the forefront of animal welfare for decades, and it is often with limited resources.

On those very short contributions, I am going to thank the Minister for Agriculture for the work of bringing this legislation to us. I am very much conscious of how important it is that our hardworking officials in the department do the work that is necessary to keep people where they need to be. This is important legislation, and I am very much looking forward to the way that we bring this to fruition. I am very much looking forward to continuing our conversations with the community.

This is wonderful work that is done across the Victorian community. As we go further – and I notice more and more pet lovers are walking into the chamber – I know that we will always be conscious that

our animals are sentient beings. This is wonderful legislation. I commend the bill to the house and wish it a speedy passage.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (16:00): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day

Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Bill 2025

Council's agreement

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant) (16:00): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Bill 2025 without amendment.

Business of the house

Standing and sessional orders

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (16:01): I move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow the following arrangements to apply on Tuesday 14 October 2025:

- (1) at the break of business immediately after statements by members, the Chair will direct the Clerk to ring the bells for 1 minute to call members to the chamber;
- (2) once the bells have finished ringing, the Chair will invite Wamba Wamba, Yorta Yorta, Dhudhuroa and Dja Dja Wurrung woman Ngarra Murray, elected co-chair of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, and Gunditjmara man Rueben Berg, elected co-chair of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, to attend on the floor of the house;
- (3) the visitors may carry into the house possum skin cloaks, wooden message sticks, wooden digging sticks and other objects or artefacts approved by the Speaker;
- (4) the Chair will invite Co-Chair Murray and Co-Chair Berg to address the house in English and Aboriginal languages to explain what the treaty process means to them, their families and Victorian Aboriginal communities and how it may support reconciliation to benefit all Victorians;
- (5) during the addresses, one of the visitors will read out the names of members of the First Peoples' Assembly:
 - (a) the names of the members of the First Peoples' Assembly must be provided to the Speaker at least one day in advance;
 - (b) after their name is read out, each member of the First Peoples' Assembly may attend on the floor of the house, entering via the door closest to the bar of the house, walking directly through the chamber and exiting via the door behind the Chair;
 - (c) members of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria may carry with them possum skin cloaks, wooden message sticks and wooden digging sticks, and other objects or artefacts approved by the Speaker, and they may clap their objects or artefacts as they walk through the chamber;
- (6) at the conclusion of the addresses, the visitors will leave the floor of the house; and
- (7) the house will immediately proceed with government business.

This will be a significant day for us here in the chamber to be able to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land and the role that has been played in caring for land and country and culture over 60,000 years as we debate the treaty legislation.

Motion agreed to.

Orders of the day

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (16:04): I move:

That the consideration of government business, order of the day 7, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Motions**Budget 2025–26****Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:**

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

Jess WILSON (Kew) (16:04): It is a delight to rise again on the budget, which was handed down 114 days ago today. As I spoke last night on the motion, I spoke about the fact that since the budget was handed down 113 days ago this government has seen \$26.4 million added each and every day to the net debt in this state. Each and every day since that budget was handed down on 20 May, \$26.4 million of debt has been added to the pockets of Victorians in this state. And what does that mean? That means that each and every day Victorians have been paying \$20.8 million in interest repayments. In my limited time remaining this afternoon on this motion, it is going to be difficult to sum up the 11 years – the 11 budgets – of financial mismanagement and incompetence by the Allan Labor government, which at the end of the day are costing Victorians the vital services that they need and deserve from their government.

The fact that each and every day we have seen \$26.4 million added to net debt – meaning that Victorians are paying \$20.8 million in interest on that debt each day and meaning that since the budget some \$2.4 billion has been paid in interest repayments alone – highlights the fact that this government cannot manage money and Victorians are paying the price. What are the consequences of this debt, though? What does it mean for the Victorians who are trying to access vital government services? It means that Victoria has the highest taxes in the country – the highest property taxes in the country. Is there any wonder we are not building enough homes in this state when we have the highest property taxes? Under this government, at the same time they announced their so-called housing strategy, which they are failing to meet, what did they do – announce a raft of new taxes on the property sector. It simply does not make sense.

And what are our small businesses are going through under this government? Taxes hitting them left, right and centre – but mostly just from the left, under this government. We have got property taxes and land tax hitting our small businesses. We have got the fire services levy hitting our small businesses. We have got payroll tax increases. We have got WorkCover premiums rising, rising, rising. Why – because this government has mismanaged the budget, and we have seen time and time again blowouts on every project this governments costs. Every single project that this government touches blows out in time and in money – \$50 billion worth of blowouts on major projects. Is it any wonder that Victorians are paying record taxes?

Despite the fact Victorians are paying record taxes, we are seeing service delivery fall: schools – \$2.4 billion in cuts to schools and police cuts at a time we are seeing crime rates skyrocket and people afraid in their homes. We are seeing cuts to family violence protection. This is a government that does not have its priorities right, that has mismanaged the budget for a decade and that is failing to deliver for Victorians.

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (16:09): Like my colleagues, I am delighted to speak on this budget and the work that this budget creates. We have been able to deliver on our investments because we are a responsible government and a government that puts communities first. This is another state Labor

government that delivers on fairness, that supports community and that recognises the challenges that are being experienced by many households.

Some of the highlights for me – as you could imagine, I want to talk about my own community and the great things that we are doing there. We have got a new scoreboard for Research Park, supporting the Research Junior Football Club and the Research Eltham Collegians Cricket Club. These are terrific clubs with a great history. When it comes to the RJFC, I should know – my parents are life members and I was once a boundary umpire. Having modern scoreboards will continue the great work that has been done over the last few years to support and strengthen Research clubs, such as works to the oval and particularly the pavilion extension and improvements that we have invested in along with Nillumbik Shire Council.

These beautiful clubrooms, including a great social area with some of the best views around, are very important to a small community like Research, a community I grew up in, which needs local gathering places – they need a bit of a hub – which is exactly what this pavilion delivers.

With your indulgence, I want to congratulate the under-12 girls from Research for their premiership win, and the under-15 boys. And I want to give a shout-out to Bailey for playing his 100th game during the grand final last weekend. Congratulations also to Research under-18 girls on their grand final game against Yarrambat. While they were not winners on the day, they have had a fantastic season, only losing one game – and of course, some grudging congratulations to Yarrambat. I am sure the member is very happy to see her team win. And heartfelt congratulations to my niece Lilly, who plays for Yarrambat and who was awarded best on ground.

I also want to recognise the fantastic season of the Lower Plenty Bears women's senior team in taking out the grand final, with Research junior footy club being an important feeder team. Lower Plenty is stronger thanks to this involvement, and as somebody who was not allowed to play footy at Research because I was a girl, many years ago, the success of girls and women's teams at this club is especially meaningful for me.

This budget also delivered funding for a master plan to redevelop the clubrooms at Diamond Creek Football Netball Club and the Diamond Creek Cricket Club. This is important funding which will help the clubs work with Nillumbik Shire Council, with myself, with their very passionate local councillor Peter Perkins and with federal member Rob Mitchell to understand the best way we can improve these facilities. I thank past president Shaun Fitzpatrick for his advocacy as well as Maria Jory, the club's secretary, who does an absolute power of work. I look forward to working with the new president, Daniel Baird, as we progress on this project.

This weekend sees a lot of finals action, as I am sure it does in your own community, Acting Speaker Lambert, and I have got something for you on that. We are starting with the Diamond Creek under-19s, in the preliminary finals against Eltham, and I do wish both teams well. I want to offer my congratulations to the Creekers under-17 netball team, who had a solid grand final victory against Ivanhoe. Hopefully this victory bodes well for the weekend with Diamond Creek against Macleod on their grand final meet-up, and I may indeed have to have a bit of a wager with the member for Ivanhoe as Macleod is his favourite team. Best of luck to Creekers' two netball teams contesting two grand final games on Friday night – go Creekers – and congratulations to Diamond Creek Junior Football Club's under-13 team and under-11 team, both becoming premiers, and to the under-17s for becoming runners-up this season.

These investments in community sport are just two examples of the many investments this government has made in my local community. It includes the huge extension to the Diamond Valley Sports and Fitness Centre, allowing for even more basketball to be played, including wheelchair basketball; the new netball and tennis courts at Eltham High, their redeveloped oval and new pavilion; the changeroom upgrades for Eltham Junior Football Club at Susan Street – and congratulations to Eltham's under-16s on their grand final win. It includes the refurbishment, extension and new away

rooms for Eltham football and netball clubs and Eltham Cricket Club. I wish the Eltham reserves the best of luck this weekend in their preliminary final game against West Preston Lakeside – go Panthers! I know that you will be supporting the opposition, Acting Speaker Lambert, but I reckon my team will be stronger. But I digress.

There is also the extension to the rooms at Lower Plenty and the about-to-begin refurbishment of the rooms at Montmorency Football Netball Club and Montmorency Cricket Club. This is not to mention our investment in cricket nets and an improved oval for these clubs. And of course, I now have the opportunity to congratulate Monty's under-16 girls on their grand final win. Congratulations to their under-11 division 4 boys, under-11 division 1 boys and under-15 boys on their premiership, with an extra shout-out to the under-15s and their coaching team on their trifecta of grand final wins over the last three years. And of course, there are the new tennis courts we have supported at Eltham, Diamond Creek and Research; new lights at Wattle Glen Tennis Club, which I opened up only last week; and the new amazing playgrounds at Eltham North and Diamond Creek. The list goes on and I will run out of time, so I have more to talk about.

Diamond Creek Primary is a fantastic local school with a passionate and dedicated teaching staff, including principal Jacqui Abrahams, and it was great news in this year's budget that funding will be delivered to replace ageing toilet facilities for students. In addition to the new decking that is going in and some recent maintenance works, we are continuing to invest in this school, building on so many projects in my community that have benefited local schools, whether it is the new competition-grade gym for Greenhills Primary, the new classrooms and gym for St Helena Secondary, as well as delivering on my election commitment from the first time I ran for Eltham in 2014 for new netball courts and soccer pitch at St Helena's.

Whether it is the beautiful rebuild of Montmorency Secondary College and their new state-of-the-art three-court basketball stadium; the new science building that is currently underway at Eltham High School, which was funded in last year's budget; the new oval and play areas at Sherbourne Primary; the additional classrooms provided to Lower Plenty, as well as inclusive playground grants; the rebuild of Montmorency South Primary; the recently completed new build at Montmorency Primary; the upgrades to toilets for children at Eltham North Primary and the funding recently announced for new staff toilets; the rebuild at Research Primary; the new science building for Diamond Valley College; or the new facilities for Diamond Creek East Primary – and I have not even mentioned the investments in our local kinders – there is a lot. I know I have forgotten some, but it is a long list to keep track of and I do have to keep an eye on the time because of course I want to talk about the significant investment that has occurred in my own portfolios that I represent.

We do know and we do accept that emergencies and natural disasters are continuing in frequency and in severity. We only have to look at last summer to see that truth. The State Control Centre was activated for a total of 203 days over summer, and 2248 warnings were issued to the Victorian community on the VicEmergency app. I would just like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all of those communities who were affected by fire, as well as storms, over the last year. The people who form our emergency services are incredible, and we are very, very grateful to them. They all come together to help keep Victorians safe. Recently I was in the Grampians, and it was fantastic to see the hard work that has been underway to restore the beautiful landscape that you see in the Grampians and the infrastructure that supports the visitor experience. This absolutely will help to further strengthen that local economy.

We know we must ensure our emergency services have the resources they need to keep supporting the protection of life and property. It is why we have doubled annual funding in emergency services since coming to government and more than doubled the funding invested in emergency services compared to those opposite when they were last in government. It is why this budget continues to strengthen our investment in emergency services, because we know that we must make sure our emergency services have the resources they need to keep protecting life and property. In this year's budget there is nearly \$2 billion invested in our emergency services. This means more stations and more trucks on the road

helping to support everybody in our emergency services to do what they need to do. The people in our emergency services matter, and this includes our nearly 4000 FRV firefighters, 5000 VICSES volunteers and 30,000 active CFA volunteers, with 4261 new volunteers applying for the CFA in the last 12 months. This is why we continue to invest in safe and modern facilities, so all of the people who are involved in emergency service responses have the resources they need to keep protecting the communities they serve, including our volunteers.

The member for Footscray knows better than most what a purpose-built unit means locally. It is why this year's budget delivers more than \$14.5 million for a new VICSES unit for Footscray. This unit is one of the busiest in Melbourne's west, with over 500 call-outs a year. Whether for the 2022 Maribyrnong River flood or the 2018 West Footscray factory fire, Footscray VICSES volunteers have always stepped up to serve their community, and they absolutely have the support of their local member, who does so much to advocate for them. The 5000-square-metre site will be home to a brand new five motor bay unit, providing plenty of space for volunteers, improving response times and ensuring vehicles are ready as soon as they are needed. It will be chalk and cheese to the environment that they are currently in – one that is dusty, one that is cramped and one that really does not help them reach the full excellent potential that we know that they are capable of. Dedicated training areas, modern office spaces and wellbeing and communications rooms will give volunteers a space to build their skills and enable better coordination and operational planning for emergencies. This investment will provide volunteers with the tools, spaces and infrastructure they need to train effectively, respond quickly and recover safely, and it builds on our record of upgrading and constructing SES units across the state, from Knox to Fawkner to Rochester.

Through these investments, we are making sure VICSES is better prepared to respond to future emergencies, whether they are floods, storms or road crash rescues.

But we do not stop there. We are also investing in CFA stations. We are delivering a new satellite station in Wendouree, another one in Hampton Park and two emergency service hubs in Rochester and Heathcote, where CFA and SES will work together for their communities. These are strong and resilient communities. They have dealt with floods, storms and fires, and this is one way we are supporting them and the emergency services they rely on. I had the recent pleasure of meeting with CFA, SES and community members when visiting Rochester, and I want to thank them for their time and generosity and for how well they are working together as a community as they rebuild their community. The latest budget is also delivering additional funding to complete CFA stations in Hoddles Creek, Winnindoo and Yarram, Dartmoor, Leitchville, Kinglake West and Raywood. We know that volunteers cannot do this work without strong backing and support, and that is why this government's investments are so important.

We know we have to keep Victorians safe in emergencies and our work continues in building up the capabilities of our emergency services. So we are looking after our volunteers and we are looking after everyone in our emergency services so that they have the appliances they need to keep communities safe. This builds on our investments through previous budgets, through grant programs such as the volunteer emergency services equipment program and base funding, and ensures our emergency services have a strong forward outlook of new appliances. I have been out across the state and seen firsthand these new vehicles as they come on line. I have been to Beaufort and seen their new heavy tanker; to Nar Nar Goon, where I have seen a new rescue vehicle there; and to Pakenham to officially hand over the keys to their new breathing apparatus support vehicle. I was recently with the member for Macedon to hand over their new medium tanker and rehabilitation unit for Woodend CFA. These are important investments for communities across Australia, and this is why this budget is delivering \$110 million to kickstart a rolling replacement program for vital appliances that support FRV, VICSES and CFA. This budget is also delivering \$6.8 million to build the capacity of and strengthen marine search and rescue with two new vessels and the training and operations they need to help protect people on Victoria's waterways. And these vessels are fantastic. I recently explored the \$2.2 million Queenscliff *Rescue 203* vessel with the member for Bellarine and local volunteers.

We know that cybersecurity threats are a real risk to our emergency services response, and we are investing \$17.5 million to strengthen cybersecurity to better protect Fire Rescue Victoria's information management system from potential threats.

But building capability also means a lot of work in the background that people do not always see. So we have got \$24.7 million to back Triple Zero Victoria so that they can increase their capacity and continue to meet demand. I recently joined the member for Glen Waverley at TZV's Tally Ho State Emergency Communications Centre to thank those who had seen 30 years of service. This is an incredible workforce with an amazing skill set, helping thousands of Victorians weekly navigate what could be the worst day of a person's life. They are calm; they are an amazing, supportive voice on the other end of the line when you call 000. They are critical to the role of our emergency responses, and I thank them for their work.

We are also grateful to our State Control Centre, and I acknowledge the vital role that the emergency management commissioner, Tim Wiebusch, and the State Control Centre play in protecting Victorian communities and the people who make that work happen. The SCC is staffed by an incredibly dedicated team who provide around-the-clock support for emergency incidents. It brings together a wide range of emergency service agencies alongside dedicated public service surge staff, and all work seamlessly as a team. A key function of the SCC is that it provides 24/7 coverage for situational monitoring and reporting, and public information and warnings.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (16:24): I am pleased to finally get to speak to the budget. The state budget highlights the reality and disadvantage that regional communities face due to this government's financial mismanagement. It has simply become so hard for so many just to make ends meet, and this government has a lot to answer for. Victorian families are facing really tough times, all because Labor does not have a plan to tackle the cost-of-living crisis or pay down the record debt that will make life harder for generations to come. Labor have put this state in exorbitant debt, forecast to reach \$194 billion by 2028–29, and interest payments are expected to hit more than \$26 million per day. Stretch that out, and that is \$1.2 million per hour, which is simply astounding. Put this into perspective. In one day this could pay for 128 ambulances, two breast care centres and 2715 elective surgeries and fix many of our roads, or in one day we could pay the yearly salary of 315 nurses, 510 police recruits or 305 paramedics – and the list goes on.

A few hours of debt at \$1.2 million an hour would fund the state government's share of \$5 million towards the development of the Shepparton sports and events centre. It is astounding that my community has been waiting for this for decades for this run-down stadium that was built back in 1972, yet not funded from the state government share. When you think about the astounding interest on the state's debt and what we could be doing with that money, there are many other run-down sporting facilities across my electorate calling out for investment. It is appalling. Just to give you an example of what we are having to deal with at the Shepparton Sports Stadium: noncompliance with disability access standards, noncompliance with basketball major tournament requirements, noncompliance with major sporting codes such as netball and badminton, insufficient parking. This lack of investment means that we are missing out on major sporting events and has a significant loss of economic benefit to the region.

Shepparton is the fifth-largest regional city in the state with significant growth and acts as a major population service centre for the wider Goulburn Valley region, covering a population of approximately 250,000 people. We need investment into our region. GV Health is the only regional hospital in the state that does not have an integrated cancer centre with radiotherapy. Patients have to travel long distances, and families have to fund the costs of travel and accommodation to support their loved ones during the most challenging of times.

This government has lost complete control of its spending and complete control of its debt, and it is Victorians who are paying the price. The government just keeps adding more taxes and expecting families' previous budgets to stretch further, putting households under extreme financial pressure. We

are seeing billions in cost blowouts – money that should be spent on housing, hospitals, roads, schools and much-needed infrastructure in our communities. We are seeing citycentric spending, ignoring the needs of regional communities. Twenty-five per cent of Victorians live in regional and rural Victoria, yet only around 13 per cent of the budget is spent in the regions. Regional development funding has been cut by \$51.1 million, and agricultural funding has been cut by \$77.6 million. We are not getting funding for critical infrastructure and services.

I have been calling for a bus review for my electorate. You would think that this is a small ask, yet this has been denied for my community. Infrastructure Victoria put Shepparton first on their list of towns in need of a bus review. It has been 16 years since we have had a review, and during that time we have seen significant growth, including new housing developments which will have no connection to bus transport services. The Greater Shepparton City Council have it as a priority project. We have small surrounding towns with limited or no bus services. People need to access public transport, and bus services play a critical role in getting people to where they need to go. It is astounding that this government are turning their back on this much-needed service. It is having such a detrimental impact on my communities. The bus companies are also frustrated, because they can see the critical need and demand, and they deserve to have the opportunity to expand their businesses.

Then we look at the extraordinary waste of \$600 million it cost to cancel the Commonwealth Games – \$600 million of hardworking taxpayers money, just gone – which could have gone towards important community projects, many of which I have mentioned. This is public money getting thrown away due to the financial mismanagement of this government. The economic opportunity that would have been invested into the regions is also now lost. It was an embarrassing debacle, not only for our state but nationally and internationally. You do not have a significant announcement like the Commonwealth Games and then cancel and pay for another country to host it.

The short-stay tax is having a significant impact on regional tourism and visitation. Regional Victoria depends on tourism and major events, which make a significant financial contribution. Our state is being forced to pay the highest taxes in the nation, with less money to spend where we need it most. Victorians have been hit with more than 63 new or increased taxes, with the recent addition of the emergency services tax. The people of Victoria have had enough of the relentless ongoing taxes. We have seen the outcry on the emergency services tax, where we had a convoy of farmers on their tractors – some of my local farmers – and the CFA bringing their fire trucks to Spring Street. It is disgusting that hardworking farmers and our amazing CFA volunteers have to go to that level to have their voices heard, pleading for the government to listen to what they are doing to families and regional communities. This tax is ripping millions out of regional communities that are already struggling. Shepparton district landholders are expected to contribute over \$4.7 million more under the new levy compared to the previous system, placing a heavier burden on local households and businesses. The local council has projected that approximately 50 per cent more revenue will now be collected from ratepayers.

My office has been inundated, with many people struggling to pay their bills and to put food on the table. My hope from this previous budget was that we could help those doing it tough, but that has not happened, and things just keep getting harder. Cost-of-living and financial stress have got to a level that is overwhelming, and the level of hardship continues to grow. How does this government expect people to manage with increased power bills, rental increases, increased grocery bills and increased taxes? What we are seeing are many people who have not struggled in the past struggling now.

I had a mother just this last week say to me that she is not able to pay her children's sporting fees and in fact her budget is now in deficit. She is basically minus \$17 a week when it comes to paying her bills and meeting her expenses. Another woman, a part-time single working mother who I met with recently, said that her rent had gone up and she could no longer meet the cost. She was distressed and clearly not able to find more affordable or available housing. We are seeing a growing number of working families joining for the first time the queues of hungry Victorians relying on food donations. Food relief agencies are stretched to the limits, constantly putting calls out for more support.

When it comes to housing, the budget has failed to address housing in regional Victoria. We are going backwards fast in my electorate when it comes to housing, and those reaching out for housing support have significantly increased in number. We are in a housing crisis. In my electorate we have over 2000 people on the waiting list for public housing, with half of those classified as priority applicants. We have one of the highest rates of homelessness across the state. It is a daily struggle for people trying to find housing. There is a significant shortage of rental properties. If you do find an available rental property, there are probably 50 other people in line, and then you have to be able to afford it. We have people living in cars, sleeping rough or couch surfing. This government is turning its back on housing in regional Victoria and, as I said, we are in a housing crisis.

Just recently I heard from Celia Adams, the CEO of Beyond Housing, Shepparton, at a homeless forum that was held with a number of local stakeholders during Homelessness Week. We discussed the significant housing and rental stress in the Shepparton electorate. Celia said it is distressful for her staff to inform clients that their only option today is to be provided a tent or blankets. It is hard to fathom that that is actually happening in our country. We have to do so much better. Housing has to be a priority, and everyone deserves to have a roof over their head and a place to call home.

Labor has introduced more than 30 new or increased property taxes. We are paying the highest property taxes in the nation, which is leading to higher property prices and higher rents and is driving critical investment in new supplies interstate. The unexpected land tax has had a significant impact and has been completely detrimental to the rental market. Property owners who have planned for their future are now finding themselves in a position where they must either pass on the cost to the tenant of the rental property or sell the property. This has had a significant impact on the rental market at a time when we have people finding it hard to find a home. We need more rental properties, not a declining number. We must focus on supply that includes regional Victoria. Victorians are struggling to pay Labor's highest-in-the-nation property taxes on time. Many tax bills are now more than 12 months overdue. This should be no surprise when so many Victorians are under extreme financial pressure. The headlines of 'Tax to the max' are very accurate.

When it comes to crime – and it is good to have the Minister for Police at the table – our police are under-resourced and underfunded. I recently met with the superintendent of the Shepparton police station, and he said that the station does not have enough police on the ground and that 75 per cent of police time is taken up with family violence, not allowing the police to get to other crime matters. He has urgently called for a dedicated family violence response team, which would require six extra police and two extra sergeants. I have asked the Minister for Police, who is at the table, to assist my local police station, who deserve to have the resources and funding they need so that they can do their job and protect the community to the capacity that they need to. A total of 2346 family violence order breaches were recorded to the year ending December 2024, equating to one breach every nearly 3 hours, which represents one of the highest breach rates in Victoria. These figures speak for themselves. I urge the minister to address this critical matter by supporting my police and providing the resources that they need to serve the community and to keep our community safe.

We have had a 20 per cent increase in crime and an increase in the incidence of burglary, car theft and retail theft, and we know that crime is escalating across the state. People are feeling unsafe. They are feeling unsafe in their homes. Businesses are experiencing ongoing break-ins, with many perpetrators reoffending. Just today I had the owner of Talisman, a menswear store in Mooroopna, send me some footage of some burglars trying to break into his business, banging bikes against his window and trying to smash the door.

This is not the first time. He has had many attempts and many break-ins to his business. It is very frustrating when we see reoffending, and it just goes to show that there is so much more we need to be doing to really help support, because what will happen is businesses will close. They will get sick of being broken into; they will get sick of having to replace windows. Their insurances will go up.

There has been more than \$50 million cut from the police budget, and youth crime prevention funding in Victoria has dropped substantially. In the 2024–25 financial year only \$12.9 million was allocated to such programs, a dramatic 40 per cent reduction compared to the previous year. This decline has directly affected multiple organisations, including the Youth Junction. Without renewed or increased funding, the Youth Junction will be forced to shut down key programs, reducing critical support for at-risk youth. Blake Edwards, the CEO of Youth Junction, emphasised that their programs are highly effective: 87 per cent of participants do not reoffend, and they operate at a remarkably low cost of \$11 per day. It is astounding that funding is being cut at a time when youth crime is at an all-time high. It is astounding when you see the recent rollout of \$13 million on 45 machete bins, which will not address the rising crime at a time when police stations are in such desperate need of funding support, as I have mentioned. The community are confused at that cost when people across the chamber are calling out, and we would like to know the full costing breakdown of that. It is astounding.

I have just got a few more minutes, and I cannot go without discussing roads. When it comes to roads, where do we start? We still have significant roads that need repairs in my electorate. My office is inundated with complaints about the unsafe and appalling condition of our roads. Whilst the government spruiks that it is investing in our roads, it is clearly not going far enough. We still have many crumbling and unsafe roads filled with potholes. There is still a lot of catch-up and more investment needed in my region. Twenty-five per cent of the state's trucks are registered in the Greater Shepparton region, and this enormous amount of transport movement needs safe and fit-for-purpose roads and infrastructure. We have local trucking companies having to pay thousands of dollars per week on repairs to their damaged vehicles caused by the appalling condition of the roads, and many drivers are experiencing damage to their cars. Victorians do not feel safe driving on our roads, and this government needs to prioritise roads and invest more money into roads and road safety.

Finally, moving into business in Victoria, in 2024 more than 129,000 businesses closed in Victoria, an average of 350 businesses a day. Victoria's growth rate of new businesses was the lowest in the nation. Victoria has the reputation of being the most expensive state to do business. Surely this government has to acknowledge these alarming figures and see the damage being done to the state by losing so many businesses.

In my last minute I want to just acknowledge a couple of really hardworking people in our community that are particularly helping people that are doing it tough. Azem from People Supporting People and his amazing volunteers every single day help provide food and food relief for people, particularly people sleeping rough. He has a shower and a toilet behind his restaurant, and he is an incredible person who works tirelessly to help those that do not have anyone else in their lives to do that. On a Saturday morning often I get out the front of the barbecue at Kmart with Azem just to see the people coming to him, often homeless people getting their sausage, and also seeing the connection that he has with those people. Often it is those connections that can make the biggest difference – trying to get conversations in regard to getting them back on Centrelink, getting them back on Medicare, getting their birth certificates. These types of people are just quiet achievers that do incredible work and that make a significant difference, and the Labor government could learn a lot from people like Azem. Victoria is doing it really tough and regional Victorians are doing it really tough, and this government are letting Victorians down.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (16:39): We are focused on what matters most, and the Ivanhoe electorate is always at the top of my list. I am very pleased to update the house in the budget reply and the take-note motion on some of the elements that have been welcomed in the Ivanhoe electorate – some local projects. In particular the James Reserve change room upgrades out there in Heidelberg Heights, quarter of a million dollars – that is a really fantastic project. The James Reserve, particularly with the round ball game, gets a lot of use, but of course the change room facilities are, well, antiquated, quaint – certainly not fit for purpose. I want to acknowledge some of the work of the former member for Lara the Honourable John Erin around the female-friendly change rooms program that was started

by our government. That has seen upgrades to so many sporting facilities and made them more accessible for young girls and for women.

The work that we will do at the James Reserve with the change room upgrades and that quarter of a million dollars is going to make those facilities far more accessible for our sporting people out there at James Reserve. I am really pleased with that project, and I want to thank the clubs out there and also Banyule City Council for the work they have done in pitching that request to me. We have been able to secure funding for it.

The Ivanhoe Park Croquet Club – a quarter of a million dollars. The Ivanhoe Park Croquet Club has over 100 years of amazing history at Ivanhoe Park. I know it well because Ivanhoe running group is just over the back. That quarter of a million dollars for Ivanhoe Park Croquet Club will go a long way. They have got some great facilities there, but they have some pretty big plans for what the next hundred years will look like. I am looking forward to getting back down there with some additional funding from Banyule City Council, which is really going to transform Ivanhoe Park. We have already got the lighting in that we contributed to Ivanhoe Park for the football clubs and the cricket club. We have upgraded the change rooms and the clubrooms there in some joint work between Banyule council and our government. We have made other investments now at the Ivanhoe Park Croquet Club, so that precinct is coming together. Banyule council also have plans to do some netball courts up there, which is going to be really significant, and it is just a really great activation and recreational space.

A further one that is really important – I want to thank my good friend the member for Dandenong, the Honourable Gab Williams, for the work she has been able to lead around safer, more accessible stations and at Ivanhoe train station. There has been a lot of advocacy from a vision-impaired constituent of mine, Lilly Cascun, who gets the train regularly from Ivanhoe station. Of course without tactile tiles and surfaces – indicators – it was very challenging for vision-impaired people at Ivanhoe station. I also acknowledge some of the work from Mr McGowan in the upper house, who worked with me to make sure we could continue to advocate to get that work done. We are out there with the Minister for Transport Infrastructure to make sure that commitment to delivering those tactile surface indicators at Ivanhoe station gets done. What I was particularly pleased with in the budget was that there is additional funding so we can add Heidelberg station to that work. That is really significant, because Heidelberg station of course is right there at the heart of the Austin Hospital and also the Mercy Hospital for Women and Warringal Private Hospital. So to make sure we have got the tactile ground surface indicators at Heidelberg station, where we have a lot of people using the health service facilities off the back of the station, is really critical. We have seen the benefit of this work through Lilly's advocacy both as a school student and then as a university student, and we are about to deliver that at Ivanhoe. But to do that at Heidelberg as part of this budget is really significant, and I am looking forward to that work.

The other ones I do want to just make a little bit of a mention of are a couple of other significant local projects that continue to be funded in this budget. There is a \$275 million project to expand the emergency department at the Austin Hospital. Last year's budget had \$23 million allocated, but in this year's budget there is \$64.2 million allocated to continue that work. \$275 million will be rolled through progressively as that work continues. Of course with the Austin Hospital emergency department, we are really looking to massively increase its capacity to treat more patients. The Austin Hospital of course: it was the Bracks Labor government that built two hospitals on one site, the new Austin Hospital and also the new Mercy Hospital for Women – two great hospitals on one site, built by previous Labor governments. This further investment to expand the emergency department at the Austin is really significant for those of us in the north-east. I know that with the investments that are happening at Warringal Private Hospital across the road and the work we have been able to do at the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre there is just a really significant medical precinct there in Heidelberg, and this significant investment at the emergency department is very welcome.

Also in the budget was the release of a further \$10.8 million for Heidelberg Primary School. It is a \$14.07 million project at Heidelberg Primary. There was a small amount of money in 2024–25, but we have got \$10.8 million released in this year's budget.

Go past Heidelberg Primary School, and there are cranes everywhere. There are a lot of chess pieces to move around, some temporary classrooms and the like. I appreciate the forbearance of parents, staff and students at Heidelberg Primary. But really we have rolled our way through many of the primary schools in the Ivanhoe electorate, with significant upgrades and transformations, and Heidelberg has been very patient. It has some challenges there with some historical buildings as well. But right there in the heart of Heidelberg there are over 600 students, and to provide some \$14.7 million for new classrooms and a school hall and other infrastructure is really significant. The \$10.8 million released in this year's budget continues to allow that project to proceed.

Streeton Primary School upgrade – it is on the border of my electorate and the honourable member for Bundoora's. \$498,000 was allocated to Streeton Primary School in this budget, mostly for some other classroom upgrades and works and renewal works that are needed there at Streeton Primary School. We are really pleased about that; they do a great job. Minister Brooks and I were there just recently because they also had some outdoor learning centre funding grants that we were able to open off the back of those grants from the North East Community Fund, and they have been able to build some new outdoor learning spaces for the students at Streeton Primary School. This nearly half-a-million-dollar upgrade in this budget will go a long way to continuing to invest in Streeton Primary. For those of us with long memories, it was known as Yallambie Primary School. It has a significant portion of students who have got commitments with family at Simpson Barracks, which is across the road. It provides great services to so many students in the community but also to many defence force families. I am really pleased that we have been able to fund a contribution there in this year's budget.

The other one that is worth noting is Melbourne Polytechnic in Heidelberg – the West Heidelberg TAFE campus, if you like. There was \$6.45 million released in this year's budget, but that is part of what is actually a \$24.9 million project. It is being matched of course by the federal government, so it is actually a \$50 million project for a significant upgrade at the West Heidelberg TAFE campus of Melbourne Polytechnic. That is around housing and construction that will be happening on the Bell Street–Waterdale Road corner of the TAFE campus. It is effectively a \$50 million project, half funded by the Labor government and half by the Albanese federal Labor government, and there was a further release of funding for that project as the construction will kick off over the back end of this year into next – very significant. It all just builds on the TAFE programs and investment in free TAFE programs that our government offers. I do remember when my electorate office was down there in the mall, the previous Liberal government sought to put parking fees on the car parks there at the TAFE campus. These are students coming from across Melbourne, often coming off worksites themselves to continue their studies at TAFE camps in West Heidelberg. I know that the previous Liberal government sought to put parking fees in at the TAFE campus, and we managed to fight that off. And not only that, but my colleague in Bundoora obviously got the Greensborough TAFE campus reopened. And in the West Heidelberg TAFE campus we are now seeing a big \$50 million investment from the state and federal Labor governments that will go a long way to not only securing its future as a TAFE campus but making sure that we are particularly prioritising construction workers, particularly with our commitments around more housing for Victorians.

On the broader statewide announcements in the budget, when you have six train stations in your electorate, depending on how you look at it, it can be handy come community engagement time at different points of the year, but free statewide public transport for seniors on weekends and free public transport for those under 18 goes a long way with the six train stations across my electorate, from Macleod right down there to Darebin station. We will be certainly promoting that work. It is very much welcomed by people in my electorate. They are big commuters across the Hurstbridge line, particularly through my electorate, and it is a great way to get around. We have got a great public transport system. We have already removed the boom gates at Rosanna and Lower Plenty Road and

built a new station. We are about to go out there for further public consultation on the removal of the boom gates at Macleod. That is another commitment that we made at the last election. That project will get underway later this year. It is a very significant project that will also allow us to link up some of the active transport pathways between Rosanna and Macleod and remove that other boom gate. That will be two gone in my electorate, leaving only one remaining, at Ivanhoe. We are delivering on what we promised to do. We have removed the one at Rosanna. We have committed to removing Macleod. The design works will be out later this year, and that is another exciting project that will be resourced in future budgets. The early works package is something we will be able to talk more about later this year.

The \$100 power saving bonus vouchers for concession card holders have already got big demand from people, particularly across West Heidelberg and other parts of my electorate, who are keen to access the power saving bonus vouchers. I continue to encourage them to visit my electorate office, where they can be supported to make sure they get the right paperwork in to make sure they can access the \$100 power saving bonus vouchers.

I also want to take the opportunity to flip back to a couple of broader projects that we are working on in my portfolio of responsibilities with both police and also with racing. Can I just say we are into the spring, and we had the Makybe Diva Stakes at Flemington on Saturday. My colleague at the table was representing the government in his neck of the woods at the Stow Memsie Stakes at Caulfield just a couple of weeks ago – a great day – and the Deputy Premier was flying the flag at Moonee Valley for the Moir just last week. I will resume some of my racing duties on course at headquarters on Saturday. I am looking forward to that. Can I just say, again, we had the Spring into Racing event for Friends of Racing. Many of our colleagues from across the house were there. When you have got a sport and an industry that employs 9000 people in regional Victoria and nearly 40,000, effectively, full-time jobs across the three codes in our state and that generates \$4.7 billion in economic activity, it is a very significant sport and industry that generates a lot of tourism, fills a lot of beds and a lot of accommodation and uses a lot of services across Victoria. We need to continue to support our racing clubs. A lot of them are made up of volunteers. When you branch out of Melbourne, they are volunteers that run these clubs and put on massive events. I do not know how they do it, but they do it so effectively and well.

The Major Racing Events Fund has \$15 million over three years. Of course our \$72 million Victorian Racing Industry Fund is about improving animal welfare and is about improving our training and racing facilities, and that works really successfully to help boost up the infrastructure and the safety but also many of the events that we are able to hold and put on at racetracks around the state. But also community facilities are used for lots of other activities through the year, so investing in those facilities means investing in local communities.

I also want to point out again that we have the largest police service in the country, and we were able to put some further investments of some \$4.5 billion into the budget again this year – an increase in the police budget. I point people to page 158 of budget paper 3, which makes it clear – very clear – in table 2.19 that the police budget has increased from \$4.49 billion to \$4.5 billion, for those who need to be reminded of the continued investment into the police budget, particularly when those opposite, when they were last in government, cut the police budget by \$100 million and funded no additional police.

With my colleague at the table, we also did a little work around the \$13 million for our machete amnesty and machete ban, which is rolling out very successfully across the state, where we have seen hundreds of these weapons returned to these bins by Victorians who are complying with the law, and those who do not want to comply face two years in prison and \$47,000 fines. We saw a record number of edged weapons seized in Victoria last year, 14,800, and we have seen in this year already 10,800. We will break that record again as a demonstration of the laws and the investments that we are making to keep people safe.

Again, I just want to thank the people of the Ivanhoe electorate. We have had some great wins in the budget this year. We continue to build and invest in our community, and I look forward to working with them.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (16:54): I am pleased that I have actually got up this year to talk on the budget.

Members interjecting.

Wayne FARNHAM: Yes, we got here eventually. There is obviously a lot of commentary around the budget. It was that long ago that it got delivered, and now I am speaking on it. But obviously in my community the biggest problem we have is the underfunding – or no funding and no delivery – of the West Gippsland hospital, which was a line item in the budget. The fact of the matter is that there is no uplift in the budget for the construction of that hospital. But before I actually beat the government up on that, which I will, I just want to say that thankfully I have actually had a meeting with the Treasurer today – just today – about my electorate and what needs to happen in my electorate. I will take the opportunity to thank the Treasurer for her time that she gave me today.

It was great to get the opportunity to talk to the Treasurer to give her a clear understanding of why this hospital is so important and why my community are so upset about no uplift in funding for the West Gippsland Hospital. That funding was committed by this government prior to the 2022 election – about a month before the election – in the backyard of someone's house in Warragul. There was no media. They did not even have a candidate at the time when they announced the hospital, and then they did not even re-endorse him for the supplementary election, so they had a lot of faith in that candidate. But they announced the hospital as a \$610 million to \$675 million commitment. They have decided to give it a range now because they have that many budget blowouts they actually cannot pin down a price, so they go for a range and that is fine. But the fact of the matter is it was promised to be started in 2023 – we are now 2025. Yes, I understand, well and truly more than anyone in this chamber, the works that are required to get a project of that size off the ground. I totally accept that. But I would have thought by 2024 we would have had at least the early works started on that project, but they have not started.

As I expressed to the Treasurer today, if you start the early works and if you release the \$50 million that is required for the early works – to bring up the sewer, to bring over the water and to bring up the fire service and those types of things – that will give my community at least some hope that this hospital will be delivered. It is not like Melton that has only just started, which was promised in 2018. It is not like the community hospitals that were delayed and delayed and delayed. This hospital, without a doubt, is of the highest need in Victoria. The problem we have now is that the West Gippsland Hospital is in such a state that it is costing millions just to keep it operational. Every time they have to do works there, they have to close theatres, and when they close theatres they are putting people's lives at risk – it is really that simple. If people cannot get operated on in a theatre because of a hospital that is in disrepair, then that is putting lives at risk. Everyone in this chamber and everyone in Victoria deserves quality health care on their front door – it is that simple.

I get so frustrated when I sit in this chamber and I hear it. It might be the Minister for Health. She will turn around and she will talk about Footscray, she will talk about Frankston and she will talk about every hospital that has been delivered for that side of the chamber, yet Narracan is getting five-eighths of stuff-all. What annoys me about the Minister for Health is she will not answer a question on when the hospital is going to start. She has shifted that responsibility sideways now to the Minister for Health Infrastructure. She will not answer a question on it, but jeez, I tell you what, when it is going to start she will be the first one there with a shovel. At least take some responsibility and answer the questions that have been asked about the hospital.

But I have moved on from that now, and I know the Minister for Health Infrastructure will sit down with me very soon and talk to me about the West Gippsland Hospital. We were meant to have a

meeting this week. That meeting has been deferred. I will give the minister the benefit of the doubt; I assume it was for very good reason. But this hospital cannot wait any longer. The government needs to get its act together, get the plans done, get the hospital priced and get it on the agenda to start construction as soon as possible. There is no more need for delay on this hospital. It is in the budget, but they need to uplift the budget, and that is what I talked to the Treasurer about today.

In conversation with the Treasurer today, I also managed to bring up many other points about my community and where the government has failed in funding for that community and how there has been no funding and no reflection of those needs in the current budget. So I am hoping that my conversation with the Treasurer has not fallen on deaf ears and that the Treasurer in the other place will get back to me very soon on the concerns that I have raised today. Obviously I will continue my contribution when I am allowed to speak again in the near or distant future.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

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

Assembly divided on question:

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

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

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Domestic Animals Amendment (Rehoming Cats and Dogs and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ros Spence:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Victoria Police

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (17:07): (1320) My adjournment is to the Premier. The action I seek is for the Premier to make a formal apology to Victoria Police members, especially those who have served for a short period of time. Yesterday the Premier said across the bench to me about my service as a police officer, ‘What would he know? He only served for two years,’ a comment that can only be described as ignorant. First, for the record, I served from 2001 to 2007, and I was proud of those years. Second, many police officers leave the job for reasons that the Premier may never understand.

The Premier has never known the pain of knocking on a door to tell a family they have lost a loved one. The Premier has never known the sinking feeling of walking into a garage for a welfare check and finding a person hanging from the rafters. The Premier has never known the feeling of helplessness when attending a car accident and seeing a person die when there is nothing you can do other than comfort them. The Premier has never felt the anxiety of sitting with parents in a hospital after their child has died of a vicious assault. The Premier has never known what it is like to attend a protest and have a water balloon thrown at you and to find out it is urine. The Premier has never known what it feels like to go to a domestic violence incident where the victim attacks you – the one you are there to protect. The Premier has never gone home with the blood of another person on her uniform. The Premier has never known the fear of having a knife pulled on you in the middle of a fight – and after all that, when you are walking down the street, only having some idiot call you a pig.

Premier, I have worn the badge with pride. The badge looks light until you wear it. Please, every day, criticise my politics and call out my decisions that you do not agree with, but please do not insult my time when I proudly wore the uniform to protect the communities I live in and protect the communities I worked in.

To all serving, past and future police, we thank you. If you wear a badge for a day or a year or go on to be a 50-year veteran, I and the Liberals and Nationals will be forever thankful for your service and respect you for the time that you have committed to protecting us.

Chinese Community Infrastructure Fund

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (17:10): (1321) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide the latest information on the Bright Moon Buddhist Temple upgrade supported through the government's Chinese Community Infrastructure Fund. I was delighted to join the minister at Bright Moon earlier this year to announce that the temple had received more than \$330,000 to upgrade its facility in spring. This is an amazing result for our community, with significant funding to support the reconstruction of the traditional Buddhist temple style wall and gate following the tragic fire that took place there in 2023.

I am very proud of the Allan Labor government's continuing support for Victoria's vibrant community and for this space that brings people together. Bright Moon's funding is part of the government's \$40 million Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund – our commitment to build, upgrade and renovate community infrastructure for multicultural and multifaith communities across Victoria. This commitment is particularly important considering recent events in Victoria. It is another opportunity for us to show that we stand with all Victorians from all of our multicultural communities and to remind everyone that whoever you are, whoever you love, whoever you pray to, you are welcome here in Victoria.

I am very grateful to have become a citizen of this great country and of this great state – a country that values democracy, human rights, diversity and freedom. Our country, and our state in particular, is one of the world's greatest multicultural success stories. We treasure and celebrate our diversity. It is essential to the success and vibrancy of our state, and I am constantly amazed by the contributions of our multicultural community to advance Victoria and Australia, not just in terms of cultural and traditions but also in the vital everyday contributions to the community and the skill of industry, academics and the like. We are so lucky and grateful to all that have chosen to make their home here in Victoria and to all contributions and experiences which enrich our country and our state. I thank the minister for her important work, and I am looking forward to her response.

Homelessness

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (17:12): (1322) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing and Building, and the action I seek is that the minister provides the number of public houses that are currently sitting empty in the Shepparton electorate. I have been made aware that there are many houses that are awaiting repairs or just sitting empty. Shepparton district is experiencing a housing crisis and has one of the highest rates of homelessness in regional Victoria. There are currently an alarming 2665 people that are on the public housing waiting list. Of those, 1477 are priority status fleeing family violence or have a disability or special needs. There are an estimated 436 individuals on any given night that are without a permanent home or a roof over their head. Of those 436 individuals, around 162 are aged 19 or younger, further highlighting the crisis of youth homelessness. It is devastating to see more and more people sleeping rough. We simply cannot have properties sitting empty when we have such a desperate need for housing. The goal for all of us should be to get as many people as we can into homes and to address the housing crisis. I look forward to the minister's response to this urgent matter.

Fishermans Bend redevelopment

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:13): (1323) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit Fishermans Bend to meet with local community members and businesses and discuss the transformation of this nationally significant precinct. I recently met with the minister to discuss the importance of ensuring livability as Fishermans Bend grows over the next 30 years. Already great progress has been made with the Victorian government's \$197.7 million investment, kickstarting the Fishermans Bend innovation precinct on the former General Motors Holden site. Stage 1, being delivered by Development Victoria, includes the remediation and installation of commercial infrastructure and services to create an investment-ready precinct. We are already seeing tangible outcomes, with

1500 new weekly bus services running between Fishermans Bend and the city. The government has also confirmed a preferred route for a future rail tunnel and station locations, which will further unlock the precinct. Fishermans Bend is Australia's largest urban renewal area, covering around 480 hectares, more than twice the size of the CBD. By 2050, it will be home to 80,000 residents and provide employment for up to 80,000 people. The transformation is guided by the *Fishermans Bend Framework*, ensuring parks, schools, roads, transport and community facilities are delivered to support growth. There is currently a \$7 billion pipeline of private sector property development in Fishermans Bend.

That includes over 15,000 new homes, 2700 of which are constructed and a further 1500 being built right now. This development pipeline also includes commercial floor space to accommodate 10,000 new additional permanent workers in addition to the 28,000 workers employed in the area now, 600 social and affordable housing homes and 2400 homes which will be available exclusively for renters. The majority of construction activity is occurring in the serviced Montague precinct, close to South Wharf and South Melbourne Central.

There is so much more to do, which is why I continue to fight hard for this growth area in my community. My constituents are eager to hear directly from the minister about her vision and goals for Fishermans Bend and to share with her their priorities for the years ahead. I look forward to welcoming the minister to Fishermans Bend to meet with our local community and businesses.

Road maintenance

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (17:15): (1324) I have a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety – it seems I have lots of matters for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety – and the action I seek tonight is to ensure that the rubbish that is continually dumped on roadsides, roads and highways is cleaned up. Far too often we see these piles of rubbish, which are sometimes dumped purposefully, sometimes dumped conveniently, just left on the sides of the roads. It is unsightly, and even worse, it blows away. It spreads after months and months, and it strangles our waterways, our creeks and our rivers. It is embarrassing for locals. We have international guests in many parts of my electorate who go and visit particular spots, just to see rubbish dumped everywhere.

I know that the government has cut particularly the roads budget and there is probably not a lot in the budget for it to draw on to conduct these activities, but it really does need to be done, because it has been left for so long, and the longer it is left, the worse it becomes. I get so many people continually coming to my office and talking about it. There are so many piles. Have a look where they are: the Melba Highway – there are multiple spots where there are piles; the Healesville-Koo Wee Rup Road – again, multiple spots; Goulburn Valley Highway; Donnybrook Road – I was there on the weekend, and on the entire length of Donnybrook Road rubbish is dumped; particular spots, probably Parks Victoria spots, at Yan Yean Reservoir; and Marysville-Woods Point Road, at the lookout there. There are so many spots where there are not rubbish bins, and there are other spots where this purposefully dumped rubbish is just left.

The Department of Transport and Planning can actually get on with it. When you send a letter to the minister, things miraculously get done. But this needs to be an ongoing effort to clean up our roadsides. It is bad enough that we have animal carcasses from roadkill everywhere, but now we have got rubbish as well littering the roadsides. The tip costs are so expensive. People tend to dump building materials, rubble and bags of rubbish or just unload a tip. I am sure, Speaker, you see it in your electorate as well. You will see piles of rubbish. Someone has backed up a trailer, boom, tipped it out, and there you go. The Yarra Valley farmland in Murrindindi and snowfields around Mansfield – people go to these spots, and they just do not want to see rubbish dumped.

I implore the minister to do the right thing for the environment and to make sure the Department of Transport and Planning actually gets on with the job and cleans up the mess, because there is just more and more, and I am sick of the complaints and having to look at it myself.

Football Victoria

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (17:18): (1325) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Community Sport, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the ongoing investments the Victorian Labor government has continued to make to support Football Victoria and our broader football community to foster grassroots amateur and professional football opportunities across the state. As the state Labor member for Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West but also as a lifetime local footballer myself, growing up playing as a goalkeeper for Brunswick Juventus, Essendon Royals, Bulleen Veneto Club, Heidelberg United and Victorian state youth teams, I am proud to support ongoing efforts to support the growth of the world game across Victoria.

Football, or soccer, continues to remain one of the most popular and fastest growing grassroots sports in Australia and Victoria, with over 400,000 participants across Victoria, 115,000 registered players across the state, a 43 per cent increase since 2022, and record ongoing growth for women and girls participation following the success of the Matildas. That is why we have continued to invest and support Football Victoria through new facilities, resources, programs and events for more people to get fit, healthy and active by playing football through our historic \$101 million investment to deliver the world-class Home of the Matildas at La Trobe University; the previous \$20 million World Game Facilities Fund; the ongoing rollout of female-friendly change rooms; and continued support to attract the biggest footballing talents across the world to play here in Victoria through the Socceroos, Matildas, Melbourne City, Melbourne Victory, our iconic National Premier Leagues and Victorian Premier League clubs and many others.

But of course with the record growth there remains more to do, as set out in Football Victoria's newly released facilities strategy for 2025–2035, which we released today in Parliament. Victoria's population is set to grow, with football participation also anticipated to grow by at least 22,500 more players in coming years.

This means we will need to do more to improve the current facility ratio of one pitch per 7000 people to meet the recommended one pitch per 5000 people. To facilitate this, Football Victoria is seeking support for projects across the state, including 80 new female-friendly change room projects; 70 enhanced playing pitch projects; 55 brighter, 100-lux lighting projects; the reintroduction of the World Game Facilities Fund; and new opportunities to maximise partnerships, especially with schools.

That is why, along with the member for Hawthorn, I am very proud to have co-founded the first-ever Parliamentary Friends of Football Victoria, which we launched today. It provides MPs with a forum to engage with Football Victoria to advance the promotion of, engagement with and outcomes for football and to work together to continue championing the game. I commend all those who attended and supported today's event, including the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister Dimopoulos; the Minister for Community Sport, Minister Spence; the Minister for Youth, Minister Suleyman, who is at the table; the Shadow Minister for Tourism, Sport, Events and Hospitality, who is at the table too; and the Socceroos and Matildas who attended, along with football stars Thomas Sørensen and Selin Kuralay, who was the first-ever female player to play in the all-boys Victorian team, which I played in with her to win a national championship quite a few years ago.

I commend the Football Victoria family: Dr Angela Williams, the chairperson; the entire board, including Yianni Zappas; Dan Birrell, the acting CEO; Lachlan Cole, Karen Pearce and many others; and many from my local clubs who attended, including Brunswick Juventus, Brunswick Zebras, Brunswick City, Pascoe Vale Football Club and Moreland City. I look forward to working with all parliamentarians to advance and champion the world game here in Parliament.

Country Fire Authority Warrandyte brigade

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (17:21): (1326) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek from the minister is that she upgrade the very out of date pumper at Warrandyte CFA. I would like to wish a happy 21st birthday to Warrandyte CFA's current

pumper, but we are not popping any champagne because the equipment that Warrandyte CFA has is woefully out of date. Warrandyte CFA's current pumper has served them well over the years, but this vehicle was the best option back in 2004, not in 2025. In a high bushfire risk community like Warrandyte, minutes matter, equipment matters and crew safety matters. A modern appliance would lift pumping performance, reliability, communications and interoperability on the ground. As reported, Victoria is gearing up for a hot and dry fire season, so we need the replacement pumper as soon as possible. Our volunteers have done their part for 21 years and beyond, and it is time that the government do theirs. The needs of Warrandyte CFA have been made clear to me by their outstanding captain Will Hodgson and the dedicated members who serve our community so selflessly.

I want to place on record my thanks and my recognition of recent milestones at the Warrandyte CFA, including for Caleb McMillan, Chris Tibb and Mark Wilson, with their 100 call-outs. Peter Noye and John Wright reached 200 call-outs. Scott McMillan reached 400 call-outs. Louise Naus reached 500 call-outs. Tony Leone reached 600 call-outs and recorded the most calls for the year, with 132 calls. Captain Will Hodgson himself reached 1700 call-outs; Aaron Dean, even with a new baby this year in their family, reached 1800 call-outs – really remarkable – and the legendary Shane Murphy reached 1800 call-outs as well. I also acknowledge significant years of service: Glenn Wright with 15 years, Chris Spring with 20 years and both Peter Handoll and Narelle Brown with 25 years. Last but not least, Colin Browne received the Australian Fire Service Medal, and Peter Noye was awarded Warrandyte CFA's Firefighter of the Year.

I thank all at the Warrandyte CFA for their exceptional service to our community. We are so grateful for the way that you selflessly serve the people of Warrandyte, the way that you selflessly serve our community. It is absolutely magnificent. Thank you to you and your families for everything that you give up – all of the hours in training, every time your family sends you out the door to maybe put you in danger's way just to be able to protect the lives of those here in Warrandyte but also beyond. We are so grateful, and I look forward to you receiving the much-needed upgrade of your pumper, which you deserve.

Broadmeadows train station

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (17:24): (1327) My adjournment is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for investigation into further activation of the Broadmeadows train station complex. I have spoken about the station in this chamber before, and one of the major challenges is the complex leasing and ownership arrangements of the station precinct and adjoining areas, including the various car parks with their different restrictions and conditions. Through my role as the chair of the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board, we set up a subcommittee of the board, the Broadmeadows station taskforce, which includes the owners of the commercial building Peter Wu; CEO of the owners corporation Greg Cook; building tenants; representatives from Hume council; Broadmeadows Central shopping centre; Penola college; Metro Trains; and the Department of Transport and Planning, including Alex Green and Justin Burney.

I thank all who attended for their continued participation and for working together to achieve our shared goal of improving cleanliness, amenity and safety of the area.

We recently received correspondence from Peter and Greg outlining some great news:

Peter and I met as the Owners Corporation for its Annual General Meeting today where it was resolved to budget for the following works to be completed in this Financial Year:

1. Upgrade the common areas lighting to improve the safety along all pedestrian passageways in particular the carpark area
2. Line Mark the reserved parking areas to improve allocated bays and shared usage by tenants
3. Increase the CCTV surveillance and improve the quality of coverage

At earlier meetings of the Broadmeadows Station Task Force, these improvements had been suggested for the safety and user experience for all visitors and tenants at the complex. The Owners Corporation have listened to these concerns and act accordingly.

Remaining works mentioned earlier in communication and at meetings of the task force included painting the complex, pressure cleaning/sealing the various walkways and we have added replacing the existing security carparking boom gate as an important addition to allow ease of entry and exit to the 80 parking bays used by tenants.

We look forward to continued participation and involvement regarding the necessary improvements to the Broadmeadows Station Complex.

Kindest regards,

Greg

The committee and local residents are very grateful for these commitments to improvement from the owners corporation, and we sincerely thank them for their action. I also thank Jeroam from Broadmeadows shopping centre for committing to address the dumped trolley issue, and I continue to follow up the resurfacing of the bus exchange road with relevant authorities. Positive activation of the station, particularly at night, could increase feelings of safety at the station. Activation ideas could include facilitating the use of land for food trucks to lease, night markets during Christmas and Ramadan, or the installation of a pleasant community area – perhaps through the recently announced state government Pick My Park program for activity centres. I thank the minister for visiting the station with me and I also thank local resident Gordon Reid for his continued advocacy.

Swinburne University of Technology

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (17:27): (1328) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Skills and TAFE, the Honourable Gayle Tierney in the other place. The action I seek is for the minister to actively support and provide crucial funding for Swinburne University of Technology's proposed health precinct in my electorate of Hawthorn, as well as for the university's wish to convert an idle building into student accommodation. Ably led by vice-chancellor and president Professor Pascale Quester, Swinburne University is a gleaming jewel in the Australian higher education sector, renowned globally for its innovation, technology and industry engagement. Its Hawthorn campus, nestled at the heart of a thriving educational, social and recreational corridor, with direct connections to public transport, local business and community services, is a pillar of the community.

Swinburne's bold vision for a new health precinct represents a major investment in the health and wellbeing of the people of Hawthorn and, more broadly, in the future of Victoria's, and indeed Australia's, health workforce, innovation and research capabilities. This precinct will also provide essential local access to services including mental health support, chronic disease management, ageing and family health, all within a purpose-built and collaborative setting. One of the most impressive aspects of this transformative project is its focus on interprofessional training and clinical placements for students in high-demand areas such as psychology, allied health and nursing. These are precisely the fields where workforce shortages are most acute, and Swinburne is answering the call to meet this challenge with the bold, proactive and trailblazing ambition that I personally have come to witness from this institution time and time again.

In addition to the health precinct, Swinburne is seeking to address the urgent need for affordable student housing by proposing to convert existing underused buildings adjacent to campus into student accommodation – a practical and sustainable solution that will support students, ease pressure on the local rental market and create a more vibrant, inclusive campus environment. These two important initiatives have the potential to deliver substantial benefits for the local community, the education and health sectors and the broader Victorian economy. Who can say no to driving innovation, to creating jobs, to improving access to essential services and to helping train the next generation of health professionals? I call on the minister to join forces with Swinburne University of Technology and to provide the support and funding required to meet these dual projects, and I stand ready to work constructively with the government and Swinburne to this end.

Cranbourne community hospital

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (17:30): (1329) My adjournment this evening is to the Premier, and the action I seek is that the Premier update me on the impact the Cranbourne community hospital will have on my electorate. Whether it is ophthalmology, dental or dialysis, there are so many ways that we are going to be able to serve our community, and of course I am going to take the opportunity to thank Monash Health for the work that they have done to bring this amazing hospital to fruition. So the clock is ticking, and I can tell you, with a bit of a drum roll, that 6 October is when the patients will be walking in the door, and we will have a great celebration on 11 October. These are exciting times for the community. This is a beautiful hospital. The Premier has already visited. She has seen firsthand the amazing facilities that we have in this new hospital. I am very much looking forward to the Premier's response.

Responses

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (17:31): The member for Berwick raised a matter for the attention of the Premier, and the action the member seeks is for the Premier to make an apology to Victoria Police members. The member for Clarinda raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to provide an update on the Bright Moon temple in his electorate in Springvale South. The member for Shepparton raised a matter for the Minister for Housing and Building, and the action the member seeks is to provide an update on the vacant public housing in the Shepparton electorate. The member for Albert Park raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to visit the Fishermans Bend precinct in her electorate. The member for Eildon raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to address the issue of rubbish along the roadside in the Eildon electorate and a campaign to clean up the electorate.

The member for Pascoe Vale raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Community Sport, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to provide an update on the support provided to Football Victoria and of course sporting opportunities across Victoria. The member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action the member seeks is an upgrade and some funding for the pumper at the Warrandyte CFA. The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action the member seeks is for funding opportunities at Swinburne University's proposed health precincts. The member for Cranbourne raised a matter for the attention of the Premier, and the action the member seeks is for the Premier to outline the impact that the Cranbourne community hospital will have on the member's local community. I will refer all matters raised to the relevant ministers.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, I just want to bring to your attention an outstanding adjournment matter that I have to the Minister for Environment, which was due on 29 August. I also had question on notice 2471 to the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence which was due in the middle of July. If they could be chased up, that would be marvellous.

The SPEAKER: Before we adjourn I would like to thank the clerks, the attendants and the parliamentary team for all of their support this week, as always. The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5:34 pm.