



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 3 February 2026

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Martin Cameron, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Wayne Farnham, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Paul Mercurio, Kim O’Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak and Iwan Walters

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

Brad Battin (from 27 December 2024 to 18 November 2025)

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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

David Southwick (from 28 January 2026)

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024 to 28 January 2026)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Anthony Carbines (from 15 April 2026)

Mary-Anne Thomas (to 15 April 2026)

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

Bridget Vallance (from 7 January 2025 to 13 October 2025)

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

Members of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lister, John ⁸	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel ¹	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Marsh, Anthony ⁹	Nepean	Lib
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Cheeseman, Darren ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pallas, Tim ¹⁰	Werribee	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Smith, Ryan ¹¹	Warrandyte	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	Ringwood	Ind	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Groth, Sam ⁵	Nepean	Lib	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Hibbins, Sam ^{6,7}	Prahran	Ind	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Werner, Nicole ¹²	Warrandyte	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Westaway, Rachel ¹³	Prahran	Lib
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
			Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Resigned 13 February 2026

⁶ Greens until 1 November 2024

⁷ Resigned 23 November 2024

⁸ Sworn in 4 March 2025

⁹ Sworn in 2 June 2026

¹⁰ Resigned 6 January 2025

¹¹ Resigned 7 July 2023

¹² Sworn in 3 October 2023

¹³ Sworn in 4 March 2025

Party abbreviations

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

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The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:04 pm, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Business of the house

Standing and sessional orders

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (12:05): I move:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended today to immediately allow:

- (1) The Premier to move a motion of condolence for the victims of the Bondi terror attack on 14 December 2025, and:
 - (a) the Premier, Leader of the Opposition, Deputy Premier, Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Victorian Greens to speak on the motion for up to 15 minutes each; and
 - (b) any other member to speak for up to 5 minutes each;
- (2) Immediately after the conclusion of the motion in (1), the Premier to move a motion of condolence for Victorian communities impacted by the recent and ongoing 2026 bushfires, and:
 - (a) the Premier, Leader of the Opposition, Leader of the Nationals and Leader of the Greens to speak on the motion for up to 15 minutes each; and
 - (b) any other member to speak for up to 5 minutes each;
- (3) At the conclusion of the motion set out in (2), unless otherwise ordered, the house to adjourn for 1 hour as a mark of respect to all those affected by both events;
- (4) When the house returns after the adjournment, the order of business to be:
 - (a) Question time and constituency questions
 - Formal business
 - Statements by members
 - Government business
 - Adjournment (7 pm); or
 - (b) in the event that the house is debating one of the motions under (1) or (2) or is adjourned as a mark of respect at 7 pm, the order of business after the adjournment under (3) to be:
 - Question time and constituency questions
 - Formal business
 - Statements by members
 - Government business
 - Adjournment.

Motion agreed to.

Condolences

Bondi Beach attack

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:07): I move:

That this house:

- (1) tenders Victoria's heartfelt condolences to the families and loved ones of the 15 innocent people murdered at Bondi Beach on 14 December 2025;
- (2) condemns the atrocity which stole their lives, an act of terrorism deliberately targeted at Australia's Jewish community gathering to celebrate the first night of Hanukkah;
- (3) unequivocally condemns the evil of antisemitism and vows stronger action to prevent extremism and keep our state safe, strong, proud and united;

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- (4) honours the courage, composure and quick action of all the police officers, first responders, healthcare workers and everyday people whose dedication and skill saved lives;
- (5) acknowledges the trauma of the men, women and children injured physically and psychologically, including those who witnessed the horror; and
- (6) affirms the fundamental right of every Jewish Victorian to live, work, worship and learn in peace and safety; to participate fully and freely in the civic life of our state; and to gather in community without fear or hindrance, proud of who they are, and proud of the profound contributions Jewish Victorians have made to the life and success of our state.

We move this motion today out of respect for those who were killed, for the people who loved them and for a community that has endured immense pain. We offer our condolences to every family grieving an irreplaceable loss, and we speak directly to Jewish Victorians, to those who felt grief, fear and heartbreak in the days since. This was an act of antisemitic terror. It was deliberate, it was targeted and it has shaken people across our state and across our entire country.

In the weeks after the attack I spent time with Victoria's Jewish community at memorials, meetings and Hanukkah events across Melbourne. Every place held its own quiet grief, but everywhere the feeling was the same. At a festival I attended, a story was shared that spoke to the heart of this tragedy. It was about Reuven Morrison, a Melbourne grandfather. A man who had fled the Soviet Union searching for safety. A man who chose Australia because he believed it was the safest place in the world for his family. A man who met his wife on Bondi Beach. A man who helped establish the Bondi Chabad community that gathered on the afternoon he was killed. Reuven was not someone who sought recognition. He was grounded in faith, family and community. When terror struck that night, he did not turn away. He confronted danger. He tried to protect others. His bravery was instinctive. It came from a lifetime of knowing what it meant to carry responsibility for the people around him. Reuven had already lived through persecution. He had rebuilt his life in a new country, and he believed utterly in the safety and goodness of Australia. I had the privilege of speaking with his family in the days after his murder. To lose him in this way is a heartbreak that is impossible to measure.

We know Reuven was not alone in his courage. His story is one of many from that day. People acted selflessly. They confronted danger to protect those around them, and their bravery stands as a powerful reminder of what we are and who we are as a nation. But as we honour that courage, we must also speak honestly about another emotion, because alongside grief there is anger – there is deep and understandable anger. We must acknowledge that without hesitation. How could there not be anger? A Holocaust survivor killed on a beach celebrating Hanukkah, parents and grandparents taken from their families, the beautiful young 10-year-old Matilda murdered while sharing a moment of joy with her sister, people who had survived the worst of the 20th century only to face deadly antisemitic hatred in 21st-century Australia – how could we not be angry? After a tragedy like this, anger is not necessarily a sign of division; it is a sign of love, because it stems from that simple belief that our country must be safe for one another.

It is our responsibility as leaders and as governments to prevent attacks like this whether they happen in Bondi or in Ripponlea. The truth is that governments have let you down. Your fears were real. The warnings were clear and we failed, and I want you to know how sorry I am. I also want you to know I share your anger and your resolve. We stand with Jewish Victorians always. We will defend your right to gather. We will defend your right to practise your faith without fear, and we will defend your right to live openly and proudly in this state. We will confront antisemitism wherever it appears: in schools, in universities, in workplaces, online, on our streets, everywhere. We do it first and foremost through the law: through tougher anti-vilification and hate speech protections, banning the signs and symbols of terror, limiting protests that prevent people from worshipping freely, and limiting protests after attacks like this one that we are mourning today. We do it through how government operates: requiring a social cohesion commitment when awarding grants, adopting the broadest definition of 'antisemitism' and implementing here in Victoria every one of the recommendations from the antisemitism envoy that relates to the responsibility of state governments. And above all, we do it by setting a strong moral example: speaking up and speaking out. This is a responsibility that belongs to

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all of us in this place: to lead with clarity. We cannot reverse what happened that evening. We can decide what we do today – for the people we lost, for the parents who shielded children, for the strangers who pulled others to safety, for the off-duty officers and those first responders that ran towards the fire and for the Jewish community who were targeted.

To the Jewish community of Victoria, I want to say this very clearly: Jews belong here. You have built places of worship, learning, culture and care that enrich our state. You have shaped this state's story. You have contributed to every part of Victorian life in such an enormous and influential way. In this moment of your grief and fear, you are not alone. Your Parliament stands with you; your government stands with you. So today we pause. We mourn the 15 innocent lives taken. We honour their bravery and the communities they helped build. May their memories be a blessing, and may this tragedy give us resolve to protect faith, to fight antisemitism and to reject hatred in all its forms and let the light prevail. I commend the motion to the house.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (12:15): 6:47 pm on 14 December 2025 is a time that will be forever stamped into our national memory, when phones lit up across the country with urgent alerts and frantic messages. I was in the car on the way to the Hanukkah celebration in Melbourne when the first reports came through. Initial updates spoke of a shooting in Bondi. Within minutes there were whispers that the shooting was at a Hanukkah gathering. For many of us the idea of a deliberate attack against the Jewish community in Australia was almost impossible to process. We refreshed our screens, called friends and searched for reliable information – anything to make sense of the scenes that were unfolding. But many in the Jewish community knew instantly what had happened: their worst fear had been realised. Many in the community had been warning that escalating antisemitism would culminate in a targeted and deadly act of violence against Australian Jews, against 15 innocent people exercising a freedom all Australians should have: to celebrate their faith without fear. Never let us forget those 15 innocent lives now lost to us: young Matilda, Rabbi Eli Schlanger, Dan Elkayam, Peter Meagher, Alexander Kleytman, Adam Smyth, Tania Tretiak, Boris and Sofia Gurman, Reuven Morrison, Rabbi Yaakov Levitan, Tibor Weitzen, Marika Pogany, Edith Brutman, Boris Tetleroyd.

I acknowledge the frustration and the anger of many in the Jewish community whose deeply held fears about a violent culmination of growing antisemitism have now been realised. Many have expressed their frustration that the thoughts and prayers of leaders have felt increasingly devoid of meaning as attacks against Jewish places of worship and businesses continued to unfold. As Jillian Segal, the nation's antisemitism envoy, said in the days following the Bondi attack:

I have to say that I've been holding my breath, fearing that something like this would happen, because it hasn't come without warning ...

The member for Caulfield, who has been fighting relentlessly for his community, has heard every single day that the Jewish community are sick and tired of their concerns being met with feigned pleasantries and assurances followed by inaction, and perhaps the most unpopular platitude many Jewish Victorians have told me they are sick of hearing is the claim that there is no place for antisemitism, because saying that has proved hollow. Antisemitism has been allowed to fester and to grow.

I had the privilege of visiting Sheina Gutnick, the daughter of the heroic Reuven Morrison, while she and her family were sitting shiva, the Jewish mourning period, at their home in Melbourne. With her permission, I wish to share her words about her father to the house:

There are not enough words to contain who he was.

But on the night of December 14th, the world met him, not through stories or speeches, but through raw, unfiltered footage on phones and television screens. They saw his courage in motion, a father standing up to terror, a Jew refusing to be silent, a man who ran toward danger and threw himself against it to protect others.

...

More voices come forward. Friends, strangers, survivors, all saying the same words: your father saved my life.

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When the first shots rang out and people dropped to the ground, my father lifted his head. He saw that no one was fighting back. And he stood.

He rose like a lion. He shouted at the terrorist, swore at him, challenged him. How dare you come here. How dare you come to our place, to our people.

There is one image that is burned into me. A still frame. My father, eye to eye with death. No fear. No hesitation. Only resolve.

He ran across the grass, drawing the gunman away from the crowd, toward the bridge.

A woman later told me that as she lay over her children ... certain it was her final moment, the gun was pointed at her. Then suddenly the terrorist turned. My father had distracted him. He had pulled him away.

Another family says he ran in front of them, placing himself between them and the bullets.

Then came the footage the world saw. My father, throwing a brick at an armed terrorist. Not out of recklessness, but out of instinct. Out of refusal to stand by.

More footage followed. My father grabbing the gun. He knew how to use one. He was ready to fight.

He was shot in the wrist.

Then another bullet.

And then another.

He collapsed to the ground.

My father once said that when we leave this world, we take nothing with us.

But he did.

Eleven bullets were found in his body.

A silent record of the final minutes of his life. Minutes filled with courage, with clarity, with selflessness.

Sheina is one of the most articulate people I have ever met. She shared heartfelt reflections about her dad, his love for Australia and his unwavering belief that you help and uplift everyone you can. She also shared with me her belief that Bondi happened because of systemic failures of leadership in stamping out antisemitism.

When I speak to leaders and members of the Jewish community, what they have told me is they do not want higher walls or tighter security. These things might be necessary in the short term, but we cannot put a ring fence around the Jewish community and expect the more fundamental poison of antisemitism to simply go away of its own accord. Antisemitism is an ancient hatred and remains a toxic, corrosive influence on modern societies the world over, and we must be honest with ourselves that antisemitism has become normalised in our country in recent years. It is perhaps an indictment that I feel the need to say the following: Jewish Australians are Australians. They deserve to be able to fully participate in the Australian way of life free from violence and persecution. Jewish mothers should not have to walk past armed guards to drop their kids off at school. Jewish families should not have to walk past armed guards to simply attend synagogue and pray. That is not an acceptable set of circumstances in Australia in 2026.

In the days after the Bondi attack I attended a local Christmas carols in the park with my family. I did not even for a moment stop to consider whether security would be a necessary precaution for that event. I go to mass on Christmas Day every year. Never once has it occurred to me that there would be a need for police presence at the church, but in the wake of terror at Bondi, it has never been clearer that if we do not stop the hate and put an end to the disease that is antisemitism, then nobody in this country can take for granted their safety to worship freely regardless of their religion. We must combat antisemitism as a root cause of this violence and ensure that it is eradicated from our national discourse and that it is never again allowed to take root in our community with such tragic and violent ends. The time for never again is now.

To our wonderful Victorian Jewish community: you enrich the culture of our state and have made, and continue to make, profound contributions to Victoria. This is my commitment to you: I will work every single day to make sure that you are able to live, work, worship and learn in peace and safety, that you can be proud and public about who you are and what you believe in, that you will thrive, not

just survive. And when you voice your concerns, my team will not dismiss them out of hand with hollow platitudes. As the senior rabbi at Caulfield synagogue Rabbi Daniel Rabin wrote following the Bondi massacre:

The choices we make now won't just shape the future of the Jewish community.

They'll shape the future of Australia.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (12:26): When we enter this place there are moments that transcend politics, moments that are bigger and more important because of what they represent. This is one of those moments. Hanukkah should be a joyous occasion for Jewish communities around the world. It is marked by lighting candles and singing songs. It is a celebration of Jewish resilience against oppression in ancient times, the triumph of light over darkness. But on a warm, balmy night on 14 December at Bondi Beach as families and friends gathered to celebrate, joyous sounds were shattered by gunfire. Around 1000 people were at Bondi celebrating Hanukkah. Fifteen would never go home, and some 40 were injured. Every single person there that night had their life changed forever. Our nation was changed forever. This was the worst terrorist attack on Australian soil. It was not random, it was targeted at Jewish people celebrating a Jewish festival. The stark reality of antisemitism and its deadly consequences was exposed for every Australian to see.

We are here to remember and honour the 15 victims and the survivors and to send strength and solidarity to every Australian of Jewish descent. We also pay tribute to the many who risked or gave their lives to protect others. Each of them is a hero in the truest sense – the first responders, the paramedics, the surf lifesavers, the police, the community service volunteers and the ordinary people who intervened. The world knows the story of Ahmed Al Ahmed, who wrestled a gun away from one of the attackers. His courage symbolises the best of Australian multiculturalism – a Muslim man born in Syria risking his life to save Jewish people. Ahmed was only in Bondi by chance. He was actually there looking for where he could get a good cup of coffee, and he was welcomed into the Hanukkah event by a rabbi. He ran towards danger for people he did not know but who he knew shared his humanity. He reminds us that this is not a fight between one religion and another but between extremism and tolerance, between hate and humanity. In the words of former Prime Minister of Israel Ehud Olmert, 'We must live together as brothers and sisters or perish together as fools.'

Another hero that day the nation has come to know is Reuven Morrison. Reuven came to Australia as a teenager seeking a safe refuge away from antisemitism. He lived in Victoria, but he was at Bondi to celebrate Hanukkah with his wife and his community. When the shooting started he did not cower; he ran towards danger, trying to stop the attackers. He hurled insults at them and threw bricks at them. His bravery gave precious time for others to run, to escape, to live. Reuven lost his own life, but his heroism saved so many more. When I met his wife Leah and their daughter at their home they spoke of a man who embodied the very best of our country, a man who supported his community, who fought for those less fortunate. When we think of 14 December, his name is one we should remember. The tragedy of his loss and that of all 15 victims lies not only in their deaths but in the precious time their loved ones have been robbed of together: celebrations, milestones. Every day taken from them is a tragedy.

Over the past two months I have spent a great deal of time with the Jewish community, and it is wonderful to have so many of them in the gallery today. I have heard their grief, their sorrow and their anger – that they had felt the rise of antisemitism in this country over the past two years and that they feared it would come to this. As leaders, we must all take responsibility. What happened at Bondi was a failure of our nation to keep Jewish people safe. An attack on Jewish Australians is an attack on every single Australian. We cannot change the past, but we can work to make sure that what happened at Bondi never happens again. No Australian should ever feel unsafe or unwelcome because of their faith, background or heritage. So to every Jewish Australian I say this: you deserve to feel welcome and you deserve to feel safe. You deserve physical safety and cultural safety. You deserve tolerance,

inclusion and equality. And that safety is unconditional. It has nothing to do with your opinions or your views. It is your inalienable right.

Our government, as the Premier said, has begun taking action to combat the hateful speech and extremism that contributed to the Bondi attack. We are working to keep dangerous weapons out of the hands of radicals and give police the powers they need to protect our community. Education is also critical. It is one of the most powerful tools we have to fight ignorance and hate. In the words of the great unifier Martin Luther King, 'Men hate each other because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don't know each other.' We must, as Martin Luther King called out, deepen our knowledge of each other to break down the walls and build understanding. That is a great goal of education and one we will continue to strive for. That is why in Victoria Holocaust education is now mandatory for secondary students and we have provided support to Jewish schools to strengthen their security. But we know there is more to do, and we will do it. We will not rest until every Jewish Australian feels safe and respected and knows that we will never turn a blind eye to antisemitism. We will always remember the 15 lives taken at Bondi. We will always remember the heroes and the survivors. We will support the Jewish community and all those affected as they rebuild their lives, and we will do everything in our power to ensure that what happened at Bondi never happens again.

To the people of Victoria I say this: the world may seem dark at the moment, but there is light in times like this. I remember the memorial that was held 30 days after the Bondi attack. I saw Victorians from every community, every postcode and every political persuasion standing arm in arm, as one, to honour the precious memories of the innocent lives lost. I once again heard Reuven's daughter Sheina reflect on her father and his life. What struck me was not just his bravery but the ongoing impact Reuven has had on those around him; I realised Reuven's legacy reached far beyond his actions at Bondi. It echoes in every person he listened to and supported, every kind word and every quiet act of empathy Reuven showed. The world may feel dark at the moment, but people like Reuven are the light. Now it is up to each of us to be that light as well.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:34): I rise on behalf of the Nationals to extend our condolences to the families and friends of the victims of the Bondi terror attack, to all that were impacted and particularly to the Australian and Victorian Jewish communities. 14 December 2025 has, sadly, become one of those times when we will all remember where we were. I was driving to Melbourne from home when I saw a message come up from my brother saying, 'I hope no-one is involved in the horrible events at Bondi.' Having family in Sydney, I immediately went to see what he was talking about and was horrified. The early indications that this was a deliberate attack on the Jewish community I, frankly, did not believe. I wanted to see more information, because this is not Australia, this is not our country and this is not who we are or what we want to be. But, sadly, it has come to this state.

My own understanding and knowledge of the Jewish community is relatively limited, and it is mostly informed by my good friend the member for Caulfield, who is a champion of his community. But on the day after the horrible event I joined him and the Leader of the Opposition and others at the Caulfield synagogue, and what I found there was a community in grief – a community connected in a spiritual, cultural way, quite incredibly, with their brothers and sisters in Sydney and, as the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition have said, a community that was angry, very angry. Probably what struck me, apart from the grief and anger from the individuals, was on two occasions on that day attending the Caulfield synagogue and seeing the numbers of police and security guards around that synagogue. Clearly it was a heightened situation the day after and the fact of the cabinet and many from the opposition being there increased the security risk, but as the Leader of the Opposition indicated, this is sadly something that the Jewish community have had to get used to: security around their events, security around their places of worship and security around their schools. Like the Leader of the Opposition, I cannot fathom how it would be to go about your daily business and have to be worried about an attack such as this at any given time.

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We remember the victims and the heroes, and the Deputy Premier has mentioned Ahmed Al Ahmed. There were many others, including Reuven Morrison, one of the victims. The others were Edith Brutman; Dan Elkayam; Boris and Sofia Gurman, who were killed at the start of the attack when they tried to prevent it from happening; Alexander Kleytman; Rabbi Yaakov Levitan; Peter Meagher; Marika Pogany; Rabbi Eli Schlanger, Adam Smyth, who was simply walking past with his wife when the attack occurred; Boris Tetleroyd; Tania Tretiak; Tibor Weitzen; and 10-year-old Matilda. I want to read out a little bit of the experience as relayed to the ABC by her father Michael Britvan:

We dropped to the floor. To be honest I thought that it's going to be over in a second. I thought there would be police or something ... but the shooting just kept happening.

Mr Britvan said he initially could not locate his daughter in the chaos of the attack.

I couldn't see Matilda straightaway and I was trying to stay down and trying to look.

...

she actually ran to where we were sitting because she got scared. There was chairs, like a row of chairs and when we fell, we fell on other side and I saw Matilda on the other side.

He called out to her repeatedly.

I was screaming, "Matilda, Matilda."

As he crawled around the chairs to reach her, he realised she had been injured.

... that's when I realised that she was hurt.

...

[I] was just trying to calm [Matilda] down, trying to tell her, "Please just wait, wait, wait, help will be coming soon" ... she just told me that she was hard to breathe.

Help did come from the many people that the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the Leader of the Opposition have mentioned, who came in the face of danger to assist, but sadly for Matilda and the other 14 victims it was too late and not enough. Matilda's mother Valentyna Poltavchenko said she hoped her daughter's death would have a broader impact:

I want her to be remembered like a light that will overcome darkness.

We all hope and we here in must work to ensure that the light does indeed overcome the darkness.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (12:39): I rise today to contribute to this most solemn motion of condolence. We grieve for the victims of the antisemitic terror attack at Bondi, we send our best wishes to those who were wounded physically and we also acknowledge the many people who witnessed the attack and will bear the psychological wounds for a very, very long time.

While this attack occurred in another state, it landed very, very heavily in my local community. I have lived in my Bentleigh electorate all of my life. Therefore I grew up alongside a very large Jewish community. As a local member of Parliament and before that as a local councillor in I think the most Jewish municipality in Australia, I have attended many Hanukkah events, usually held in a park: events with baby animal farms, face painting and jumping castles – events that are primarily for children. So when two terrorists open fire on such an event, it is truly something that is difficult to come to terms with. Australians' freedom to practise their faith, to gather in community and to raise their children in safety is fundamental to who we are. On 14 December that freedom was violently violated. Hanukkah is a festival of light. It is about resilience in the face of fear and hope in the face of darkness. It should have been an evening of songs, candles and children running around with sticky fingers and big smiles, and instead it became a scene of horror. To the Jewish community in Bentleigh and to Jewish communities right across Victoria and Australia I want to say this plainly: you should be able to live openly, proudly and safely as Jewish Australians. You should not have to look over your shoulder on the way to synagogue, and parents should not have to second-guess whether it is safe to take their children to a community celebration. No family should have to weigh their faith against their security.

Antisemitism is not an abstract idea. It is not just words; it is a poison that dehumanises people. It is the oldest form of hatred. What we saw at Bondi was a pure act of hatred: the targeting of Jews in public, in community, at what should have been a moment of joy. It was terrorism, it was antisemitic and we as a Parliament condemn it without qualification. The people who perpetrate acts of terror want division. They want Australians to retreat into anger and mistrust and blame and politics, and we must deny them that victory. The worst gun massacre since Port Arthur calls for national unity. That means standing shoulder to shoulder against antisemitism and against hatred in every form while remaining absolutely clear about the threat posed by violent extremism. It also means practical action, not just sympathy. That is why anti-vilification laws, anti-hate laws and everything that has been announced since then are so important.

My brother-in-law is Jewish. A few days after the terror attack in Bondi we gathered at their home for a joint Christmas and Hanukkah celebration, and we lit a Hanukkah in front of the Christmas tree. That joyous family occasion really was in stark contrast to and perhaps a reprieve from the tensions that we have experienced in Australia and globally over the last couple of years, which have been unprecedented in my lifetime. It is as though we have lost the ability to walk in each other's shoes, to acknowledge the impact that our words and actions have on other people. That is why in Victoria we will continue working closely with Jewish community organisations to do everything we can to tackle antisemitism and to keep our community safe.

To those mourning today: we stand with you. Your grief is not yours alone. To every Jewish Victorian listening, including those in my electorate of Bentleigh: you belong here. Your culture enriches our state, your faith is part of our story and your safety is not negotiable. May the memories of those lost be a blessing, may the injured heal and may we honour the victims, not only with words in this chamber but with an enduring commitment as leaders and as a community to confront antisemitism wherever it appears and to ensure that light always defeats darkness. I commend the motion to the house.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:43): 14 December 2025 will be known as one of the darkest days in Australia's history. After 7 October 2023 the Jewish community saw something that I think we have never seen before. We all knew antisemitism. We have all seen it and some of us have experienced it, but for the best part of it the game changed after 7 October 2023. We knew that this was going to happen; it was just a matter of when and where. To understand what the community has been through in that time and to watch people living in fear is just beyond belief. I acknowledge the member for Box Hill, who also has seen it. We have all seen it, but there is nothing more than actually living it. I say that we have to do something because it will happen again. To all those that have spoken, I thank you for that. I thank you, Premier, for your apology, but we need to recognise the evil that has come to our great Australia and the fact that 15 people are no longer with us. Many of those that are no longer with us were Russian-born immigrants that came to Australia to escape persecution, because Australia was the safe place. Australia is where they came. A Holocaust survivor chose Australia, the furthest place from the evil of the Holocaust, to come here and reside in safety. And what has happened? The Leader of the Opposition talks about walls behind which we now live.

When I first started this job, we would have celebrations down the main street. We would have Simhath Torah, the actual day on which 7 October happened. These are targeted attacks. These extremists choose when the Jewish community is celebrating at its best to try to bring darkness, to put hate over the light that we try to shine during these festivals. Simhath Torah, we would celebrate on the main streets. Hanukkah, which we used to do in Caulfield Park, is now at Caulfield Racecourse, because we can secure Caulfield Racecourse better than we can the park. The very fact that we had Ahmed who came to help during that time was because it was an open event. The Jewish community want to welcome people. The thing that our community is so much about is showing people and sharing the love. This is the multicultural Victoria that we know and that we love – we love the fact that we can learn from one another. But why is it that the Jewish community needs to hide behind walls? Why is it that way?

After what happened, as the Leader of the Opposition said, I was on my way to the Hanukkah event. It is probably one of the best times of the year, I have got to say, because we get up and we light the Hanukkah on the first day. It gets raised up on this big platform and we celebrate and sing and dance, and it is so joyful. Well, that crane was never lifted and that Hanukkah was never lit on the first day of Hanukkah – it was abandoned. It was abandoned at Caulfield Racecourse because we could not continue. Over the eight days where there was meant to be light and happiness and celebration of Hanukkah, it was hard to smile. It was impossible to smile. We lit the candles each and every day, but each one of those candles had a different meaning.

On the morning of the eighth day, I attended with Rabbi Sufrin and Rabbi Gorelik and a number of members of the Jewish community. Rabbi Sufrin leads the Russian Jewish community on Carlisle Street. We got on a plane to spend time with the Russian community, many of whom had lost their loved ones. Over a thousand people attended that event. Nearly half of those were from a Russian-speaking community. Many of those who were murdered were from the Russian-speaking community. We got on the plane and Rabbi Sufrin handed me a kippah, and he said, 'When you get to the religious events, wear one of ours' – it is very territorial; each shul has their own kippah – 'Wear the Carlisle Street one.' I got on the plane and I put the kippah on my head and I said, 'For the day, I'm going to walk in the shoes of an Orthodox Jew – on the plane, in Bondi, at the airport, everywhere – and understand what it is like.'

That moment we spent together visiting Rabbi Ulman, who was the leader of that community, whose son-in-law Rabbi Eli was murdered and who organised that event. We got there for the morning prayers. Rabbi Eli's son, who had lost his dad, was saying the prayers – a teenage boy, 14, saying the prayers. Rabbi Eli had five kids. The youngest was two months old and was in hospital with shrapnel. His wife was also injured. They are the light; they are the ones that organised this event. Rabbi Ulman had to bury four people on the Friday. Many of the 15 people were from his congregation, people he went on to bury, while at the same time losing his son-in-law, the rod from Chabad in Bondi.

People today have mentioned Reuven Morrison and Sheina Gutnick, who has been such an inspiration in telling the story of her dad. It is so important to talk about people that stood up against evil. He fought with a brick, took 11 bullets and kept fighting. Reuven Morrison came to Australia to escape persecution. He married Leah, and he fought to have that synagogue built. He fought to ensure that those that needed it would have it, and he would not put his name on the wall. He would just make sure that a community member, somebody that was suffering, would be supported through the community, because that is the kind of person that Reuven was.

The list goes on. When we visited the many families during the day in Bondi, we visited the family of Tibor Weitzen, a 78-year-old automotive engineer from the Soviet Union who died shielding others, including his wife Eva. We went to Tibor's family home, and Hanna and her husband Mishel were actually from my synagogue, Hamerkaz. They had lost their dad, and days on they could not recognise their father because of the damage that was done to him by those terrorists. He needed to be identified by the clothes that he was wearing. That is what those evil people did. One of his grandchildren was days from giving birth, and she has now given birth. That grandchild will never meet Tibor.

We finished the day by going to St Vincent's Hospital to visit family members. We had been to people's homes, we had been to Bondi, we had laid flowers, but then walking around the hospital I was not sure of that feeling of walking around a hospital when people were being operated on. As a member of Parliament I did not feel right being there. The rabbis there all of a sudden got a call that we needed to go up to the top floor because Ya'akov had just come out of an operation. Ya'akov is the son of Boris Tetleroyd, who died at 68 years of age. His son Ya'akov was shot and had just come out of an operation. Ya'akov had his shoulder blown apart, and he had just had an operation. He woke, and there were 10 or 11 of us standing at the door. The first thing that he said is, 'I need you all here to say prayers for my dad.' And I knew why we were there, because in the Jewish custom you need 10 men for a minyan, and we were there at that time to be able to say prayers for his dad. He put the

Bible in the hand that was literally blown apart. He held that Bible, those fingers moved and with such passion he said prayers for his father, who is no longer with us. That memory will stay with me forever.

We have to do better. The simple thing is we have to do better. We have spoken about stronger laws and the protests that go on every week. We have spoken about Holocaust education, which is so important. We have got kids that are going out there on the football field and calling kids 'dirty Jew' at the ages of seven, eight and nine. Why is that happening? Kids are not being educated. We are not doing the job that we need to do as leaders, and we have recognised that, but we have got to all come together and do something about that.

We have got Isaac Herzog coming here to pay respects. President Isaac Herzog is coming here as a figurehead. He is not in government. When he was in government he was in the Labor Party, fighting the current Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu – a very different set of views. Now he is a figurehead coming from Israel to pay respects to those that have lost loved ones and to the Jewish community, who are in mourning. And what is happening? People are arming up for another protest against him, saying, 'You're not welcome here.' Where would that happen with any other community? How can it be acceptable that a leader would do this and we have got protesters thinking that it is okay to protest a head of state coming here to pay their respects after the worst tragedy in Australia's history. It is the worst tragedy in Australia's history and the President of Israel is not welcome in Australia. I think that is a disgrace. We must stand against every protester that finds themselves on the streets. If we do not have move-on laws and whatever laws we need, let us get them and let us ensure that we are able to greet a head of state when we, the Jewish community, are in mourning. We must all stand together for that, and we will be ready to help in any way we can.

I say to everybody that there is work to be done. I know there are so many well-meaning people in here – and I have had it, Paul has had it: people have come up and wished their best for us during these times. Those that lost their loved ones in Sydney, in Bondi, are not just in New South Wales; we have all lost them in Australia. Every Jew in Australia is mourning right now, every one of us. For those that have been traumatised by this and those that were there that were injured mentally or physically, I say to you that we must do better and we will do better, and I will help whoever wants help. We have got to come together and ensure that happens, because if we do not, we are failing. What are we here for if not to ensure that all people are welcome and are encouraged to enjoy their traditions, their cultures and their faiths, and to do that in a free way and to do it in such a way that enriches Victoria, because that is who we are. We always talk about how great our multicultural state is. We have really lost our way in the last couple of years. It is time to get it back. It is time to take that back, and let us do it. Let us not leave one community out in the cold. Let us all walk together and ensure we can all make sure that that happens.

I just conclude by once again paying my respects to all 15 that have lost their lives: the 11 men, the three women and 10-year-old Matilda. We should really recognise the future of our community, a vibrant community, which will live strong and continue to contribute to this great state of Victoria. Zichronam livracha. May their memory be a blessing.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (12:58): Usually when I rise to talk on a condolence motion I have had a lot of time to think about it and write some words. I actually found this one very difficult. I have not put any words to paper. It will just be what comes from the heart in the moment.

I will just start with a reflection of that day. My family were not planning to go to the event in Caulfield. From a safety and security perspective, we do not like attending large community events. As we do on every Hanukkah – it was the first night of Hanukkah – we had just lit the first candle and we sat down to play a very traditional game of chance with the dreidel, or the spinning top. It is a game where I always lose. You have a pot of chocolate coins in the middle, and the aim is to secure the largest amount of the chocolate coins. Somehow the kids always win. The spinning top, or dreidel, that you use has four Hebrew letters, and they are an acronym for 'Nes gadol haya sham', which means 'A great miracle occurred there'. This refers to the miracle of Hanukkah that occurred in the old temple.

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The origins of the game are very interesting and very pertinent to how we see ourselves and in particular to what the member for Caulfield was saying in terms of how Orthodox, or religious, Jews see themselves today. It was developed as a way of keeping the Jewish traditions alive without demonstrating that you were Jewish to the outside world. So if somebody had come in to your home – and you think about those times in Europe or even going back to the Spanish Inquisition, when it was forbidden to be Jewish or to show any signs of Judaism – this was a way of keeping the culture and the tradition alive through a game that to most observers would just be a game but to the Jewish community could continue that sense of Judaism.

We finished the game, and normally we would not be going to watch television or tune into the news – it was a Sunday night – but thankfully the Big Bash had started, so we turned on the television to watch the cricket, and we saw the breaking news that there had been a shooting in Bondi. My first thoughts were not actually for the worst, as bad as that sounds. I actually felt that this was a general attack, perhaps in the moment, in a similar vein to Port Arthur, a horrific attack – that someone had chosen Bondi because of its iconic status as Australia's global location. If you are overseas, everybody knows of Bondi Beach. It had not really even occurred to me that this could be coinciding with a Hanukkah event. Obviously, as the time moved on, it was clear that this event had been planned and targeted deliberately at a Jewish event.

My heart really sank, and I thought of our family members, our friends who were up in Sydney at the time or who lived in Sydney. I thought of my cousin. I spoke to my cousin that evening. He lives in Coogee and has two young daughters, and they were going to go to the event. But as luck would have it, one of their children was being very uncooperative that day, so they decided that it was all too difficult and they chose not to go. I just think of how fate can intervene in circumstances such as that, where so many other people – all the 15 men and women, including Matilda obviously – made that fateful choice to turn up to an event, a community event, an event that is filled with celebration, filled with light. It is such a story of hope and resilience for the Jewish people, and for that event to be cut short and for those lives to be cut short in such a traumatic manner is just horrific. It is still horrific to think about.

Post 14 December I have reflected a lot on myself and on what I have done and what I could do more. What should I have been saying more in the last two years that could have made a difference? How could I have raised my voice to get my message and our message across in a stronger way? I would ask that of everyone in this place. All of us are leaders of our community. What more could we have done? What more can we do to make sure that this never, ever happens again, not just to the Jewish community but to any community?

The member for Caulfield referred to Holocaust survivors and, as I have mentioned before, my dad is a Holocaust survivor. Two days before Hanukkah we celebrated his 88th birthday. It is such a treasure that he is still around, healthy, that we can enjoy his company and that my children can enjoy the company of their grandfather. After the horrors that he bore witness to as a child, he came here. Australia has been such a safe and welcoming place for him, for our family and for so many other families who have come from the same situation, and to see what has happened in our community and what has happened in Australian society over the last two years has just been devastating. Words cannot really even do justice to what we are experiencing as a community and what we see our Australian society, which we love, has become. There is a lot more work to do. I will leave you with these words again and ask each and every one of you: what more could we have done? What more can we do?

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:07): Within moments the horrors of the shots fired in Bondi echoed around the country. Within minutes the terrorist attack and the dread of its impact left all good Australians drawing their breath. I am sure our country was left paralysed. Knowing of the Jewish Hanukkah celebration that evening, many knew instinctively that the attack was targeted and who the target was. Every one of the 15 victims deserved to live their full life, including beautiful 10-year-old

Matilda. Our world was better when Matilda and the other victims murdered that day were in it. May their memory be a blessing.

The terror of the attack has left us feeling shock, pain and grief. Those feelings have not subsided. The attack still hurts. It will never stop hurting. Our fellow Australians lost their lives at a celebration during summer on the beach. It could have been any of us on that beach, a place that could not have been more Australian. But Australia has been changing, and that day was a turning point. After that day our community has said strongly that, despite our country changing, we cannot accept a changed Australia where division becomes embedded, because division has grown roots and its roots are weeds of hate – hate that has been spreading on our streets through normalised incitement, protest agitated by rogue international countries and now violent murder.

As the horror of the Bondi attack became real and the depth of our countrywide grief ached in all of us, so too did we realise one truth: our leaders were warned that the growing hate in our community would lead to the horrors of Bondi. It has been wrong for our leaders to turn their backs on age-old values that underpin what we stand for as a country and what countries we have internationally stood with as friends. By tearing up these values, we have stood by. Our federal leaders bear responsibility for what is happening in our communities. Our leaders' actions have emboldened those who perpetuate the oldest hate in existence, and our state leaders also bear some responsibility. Our state leaders have looked the other way as social cohesion has broken down. Government silence has been deafening.

It is wrong to say that Bondi was a failure of our nation. It was a failure of our governments. Make no mistake, the breakdown in our social cohesion has been targeted at our Jewish neighbours. Chants of 'Gas the Jews'; nurses who claimed intent to kill Jewish patients; in Melbourne, a mob congregating in Caulfield streets; the Adass synagogue firebombing and the alleged offender being let out on bail; the East Melbourne synagogue firebombing; and on Christmas Day, only weeks ago, a rabbi's car being firebombed – these are just some of the incidents that are known. But hate towards the Jewish community has been deep, daily and has exposed a dark side to our country that good people had hoped did not exist. Antisemitism is one of the oldest hatreds in existence. It is a hatred that is generational, as we saw in Bondi, an inherited hate that is passed from father to son. What is so tragic about the recent attack is that our leaders have ignored warnings that tolerating prejudice would end in violence. Devastatingly, it has.

840 days ago we stood in this very spot following the darkest attack on the Jewish people since the Holocaust, the attack on 7 October. During that contribution I referred to the call written about the defenders of the ancient kingdom of Masada: never again. These words were also used by survivors of the concentration camps during the Holocaust. At each of the worst adversities faced by the Jewish people who have stood against a century-old hate, they have stood firm. At the core of the Jewish people is a unique resilience, and despite being victim to the worst events in human history, the Jewish people are also driven by tikkun olam, a driving commitment towards repairing the world. On their darkest day we must never forget that the Jewish community is always motivated to do good.

The hurt of Bondi is still with us. We will carry it in their name and in support of the values that define what is best about this country. We must not allow the hate that has been uncovered to spread or grow stronger in this country. Fifteen innocent Australians were lost in Bondi, 15 victims who should have lived their full lives. Our world and our country is lesser without them. May their memory be a blessing.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (13:12): I rise with solemn respect to commend very strongly the Premier's motion today. The abhorrent events of 14 December, represented in the deaths of 15 innocent people, was in many respects an attack on all Australians, on our values, on our democracy, on our liberal, multifaith, cosmopolitan society underpinned by mutual respect, decency and a commitment to the common good. Much more particularly though, it was an attack on Jewish Australians. It was an attack on Jews, on Judaism and on the inalienable rights of Jewish people to practise their faith, to live in peace and security and indeed to live. As Premier Minns said a week after

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those abhorrent events, it was a crime that was an attempt to marginalise and scatter, to intimidate and cause fear, with particularly pernicious timing on the first night of Hanukkah, which should have represented the enduring power of light. It was a hatred motivated by the faith and culture of others, an ancient hatred that sadly and very clearly endures. As Premier Minns at Bondi also said, ‘Jews have stood up to this intimidation for thousands of years.’ We cannot let them stand alone.

The importance of community safety is my priority – I have talked about it here before – and the first priority of any government. But Australia failed when 87-year-olds like Alex Kleytman, who survived the Shoah, were murdered in Bondi. As Premier Minns and Premier Allan have said, we grieve with humility for that failure, and collectively, both inside this place and across civil society, we have a responsibility to do everything and anything we can to stop it from happening again. Let us be clear, people in Bondi died because of an irrational hatred of Jews, simply on account of their faith and culture. We do not tolerate any form of racism. We must not tolerate antisemitism or allow it to fester in the shadows. Every Australian must have the right to express their faith. A failure to do that demeans us and diminishes our society. It dehumanises, it corrodes relationships and it undermines people’s sense of belonging and safety. It kills. On 14 December it killed Matilda, Edith Brutman, Dan Elkayam, Boris Gurman, Sofia Gurman, Alex Kleytman, Rabbi Yaakov Levitan, Peter Meagher, Reuven Morrison, Marika Pogany, Rabbi Eli Schlanger, Adam Smyth, Boris Tetleroyd, Tania Tretiak and Tibor Weitzen. Those people ranged in age from 10 to 87. They came from extraordinarily diverse backgrounds. They were Meals on Wheels volunteers. They were sportsmen and photographers. They were united, though, by their love of family and their love of faith, and they were expressing that.

I acknowledge the first responders, who showed extraordinary bravery in seeking to preserve life at Bondi; the trauma specialists in hospitals, which were overwhelmed, which the member for Caulfield talked about; the police, the paramedics and the lifesavers; and the victims who fought back. I acknowledge the response of so many across our community to those horrific events, and I thank the Premier for bringing together so many faith leaders, including many from my community, who were able to express their solidarity with Jews, with Jewish Australians and with the victims of that horrific event. I recognise Ahmed Al Ahmed, who has become a metaphor and a symbol of Australia at its best but is also a very real man, who just happened to be there and sought to do the right thing when confronted by hatred and violence. As the Deputy Premier said, it was an expression of humanity versus hatred.

What happened in Bondi has been very resonant beyond those sandy shores and also beyond the immediate Jewish community, which it has hit so hard. I represent a community in Melbourne’s north that does not have a large Jewish community, but it has been particularly resonant for many who have come to Australia with that promise of Australia that drew so many people who lost their lives at Bondi: a belief that this is a country where anybody can practise their faith freely. So for people from my community who have escaped persecution, hatred and a fear that manifests when they seek to practise their faith, these events hit home hard. They have shared that with me, emphasising that this is a national tragedy that requires a national response as well.

On a recent visit to the Melbourne Holocaust Museum, the day after Holocaust Remembrance Day, I saw too the security guards who are there, who are at the schools that Jewish children attend, and it emphasised to me the need for ongoing education to emphasise the consequences of unchecked hatred of Jewish people and indeed of people of any faith. Every Victorian must have that right to live in safety, in freedom, and to practise their faith to express their culture, history and identity. I remember the victims today, I stand in solidarity with them and I commend the Premier’s motion.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (13:18): Jews arrived in this country in the First Fleet. Since then Zelman Cowen, John Monash, Isaac Isaacs, Sidney Myer, Harry Seidler, Victor Smorgon – our Jewish community have been immense contributors to modern Australia. What we saw in Sydney was 15 members of the Jewish community – 15 Australians – murdered by radical Islamic terrorism. You cannot fix a problem if you do not acknowledge what it is. I went to my local synagogue, my local shul, the day after, and the emotions I got from people there and other people in the Jewish community

in my electorate since have been anger, despair and terror. For years – two years – this country was warned. That is what they have said to me and that is what I relay in this condolence motion today, the voices of the Jewish community in my electorate: this country was warned.

Melbourne is home, or was home, to the largest numbers of Holocaust survivors post World War II per capita, more than any other city in the world – not Vienna, not Berlin, not London. Outside of Israel, it was Melbourne where people came to find their safety and their security. Yet open disrespect to our Jewish community has been clear and obvious to all Australians for two years, even in this place. Post 7 October, on 10 November 2023, we saw what happened on the streets of Caulfield. Why did young men choose to come to the streets of Caulfield to cause mayhem straight after the massacre of Jews in Israel a month before? Nothing followed; the moment was forgotten. But were warned. What we saw on the Harbour Bridge were open displays of antisemitism and of hatred of our Jewish community in this country. We were warned as a country. We were warned when people assembled at the front of the Opera House and chanted ‘Death to Jews’ and authorities tried to tell us they were saying something else, and we knew they were not. As a country, we have been warned clearly. We were warned when every Friday night our city was allowed to be disrupted by protesters openly attacking our Jewish community, doxxing Jews – outing their addresses – vandalising their schools and burning down their places of worship in modern Australia. When artists, when universities and when the federal government recognised Palestine in the middle of all of this, we were warned as a country, and there are consequences for not acting on those warnings. These are the voices of my Jewish community in Doncaster, and I agree with them wholeheartedly.

Excuses were made when politicians could not even use the word ‘antisemitism’ without adding in ‘Islamophobia’. Well, I only saw one religion, one faith, being attacked every Friday night for the last two years. It was not Sikhism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism or Taoism. It was Judaism. We were warned. We have seen what is coming in all major cities in this country. There is the tolerance of hate by some hate preachers – not a single one deported. There is the funding of hate for some cultural centres who still receive government funding yet call Jews ‘bloodsuckers’. This continues today. There is the refusal to call it out when members of the Victorian Multicultural Commission retweet people who hate Jews. We have been warned. Governments were warned. When normalisation of demonisation is allowed, it manifests. I just say that no-one in my Jewish community wants condolences, thoughts and prayers. They want respect and to practise their faith like any other Australian. They want safety. I grieve for what has happened in Sydney. This is a lesson for our whole country, and it should never happen again.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (13:23): I rise today to offer my deepest condolences following the terrorist attack at Bondi Beach on 14 December 2025, an act of antisemitic violence that stole 15 innocent lives and shattered families, communities and our nation’s sense of safety. This house mourns those who were murdered simply because of who they were. We grieve with their loved ones, we acknowledge the trauma borne by the Jewish community and we affirm without qualification that antisemitism has no place in Victoria, nor anywhere in Australia.

In recent weeks I have stood alongside Victorians of all faiths and backgrounds at a number of memorial events, and I will reflect on two of them. The first was the Bondi Shloshim memorial service at St Kilda Hebrew Congregation, where the Jewish community gathered 30 days after the attack to mark loss through remembrance, prayer and reflection. The second was the Victorian state vigil at St Paul’s Cathedral, held as part of the National Day of Mourning, a powerful multifaith expression of unity, grief and resolve. At both events I witnessed sorrow, dignity and strength, but most of all I listened. At the Shloshim reflections were shared by Sheina Gutnick, daughter of Reuven Morrison, of blessed memory, and Perele Goldhirsch, sister of Rabbi Eli Schlanger, of blessed memory. Their words were not political. They were not rhetorical. They were profoundly human. Sheina Gutnick spoke of her father not as a statistic or a victim but as a man of warmth, faith and quiet generosity. She spoke of the ordinary moments that now feel extraordinary in their absence. In doing so, she reminded us that every life taken at Bondi was a universe of relationships, of memory, of love and of unrealised

future. Perele Goldhirsch spoke of her brother Rabbi Eli Schlanger as a moral compass within his community, a man whose life was devoted to teaching, compassion and service. Her reflection caused grief, yes, but also dignity and resolve. She spoke not with hatred but with an insistence on humanity in the face of cruelty. What struck me most was the incredible strength of these speakers. Neither speaker asked for vengeance. They asked for remembrance, for solidarity and for a refusal to allow hatred to define our response.

Those reflections stayed with me at the state vigil, where political and multifaith leaders stood together beneath the vaulted ceiling of St Paul's Cathedral. Candles were lit, names were remembered, silence was observed, including the national minute of silence at 7:01 pm, and landmark buildings across Victoria were illuminated in white as a symbol of light. That light matters. It matters because antisemitism does not exist in isolation; it thrives in silence, in indifference and in the normalisation of hate. When Jewish Australians are targeted, the social fabric of our entire society is weakened.

The message from both commemorations was clear: grief must not divide us, it must bind us together. Victorians were invited to come together across faiths to share meals, to light candles, to undertake acts of kindness – the 15 mitzvot for Bondi – and to affirm that our response to terror will be community, not fear. Today in this Parliament we have a responsibility to do the same: to honour the 15 lives lost, to stand unequivocally with the Jewish community, to reject antisemitism in all its forms, explicit and implicit, and to recommit ourselves to a Victoria where people of all backgrounds can live openly, safely and without fear.

In Jewish tradition memory is an act of justice. May the memories of Reuven Morrison, Rabbi Eli Schlanger and all those murdered at Bondi be a blessing. And may our actions here and beyond this chamber ensure that their lives are honoured not only in words but in the values we defend. I commend this condolence motion to the house.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (13:27): It was over a decade ago, in 2013, when I was in my early 20s, that I had the great opportunity to visit Israel for the first time. In this trip with my church we visited the holy sites, did tours with local historians, floated in the Dead Sea and stood sombrely at Masada. I remember it being Shabbat during the time we were in Jerusalem and marvelling that at the hotel the lift had been programmed to stop at every single level, because in Judaism it was and is a holy day.

What I will never forget in my lifetime is visiting the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, Yad Vashem, in Jerusalem. It is a museum that has been entrusted with Holocaust commemoration, documentation and education, remembering the 6 million Jews murdered by Nazis and their collaborators and honouring the righteous among the nations who risked their lives to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. What I saw in there will remain with me forever. There are images from in there that will be forever seared in my memory: the tiny little shoes on display of children lost to the Holocaust, the video footage of scenes too graphic to detail and the archives and displays, all a chilling reminder of what the worst of hate looks like in humanity. I remember leaving the centre weeping, grappling with how unbridled hatred for one's fellow man could culminate in humanity's darkest genocide. In part, that is the purpose of the centre: a reminder to the world that the Holocaust really did happen, that Jewish people really were massacred only because they were Jewish. And the centre reminds us that hate and evil left to fester is dark, dangerous, and unfathomably destructive. It has stayed with me for life.

The memories of the centre came back to me when I turned on the news on the 14 December 2025, and it was a horrific terrorist attack where 15 innocent Australians were murdered simply for being Jewish and for practising their faith in public. As the granddaughter of a World War II survivor myself, I never, ever thought this kind of hate would reach our shores. We remember them, every one of those 15 lives – some laid down to protect others, all lives cut too short.

We remember Alexander Kleytman, an 87-year-old Holocaust survivor himself, who moved to Australia to escape the atrocities of his past. The member for Caulfield, who is a pillar in his community, told me earlier today that what many Holocaust survivors did was look at a world map and look at where in the world they could go to escape the atrocities they had survived. They found Australia to be the furthest place they could go to escape and survive. I have since turned over in my mind what Alexander Kleytman might possibly have been thinking in those final moments, as a Holocaust survivor who successfully emigrated to Australia, made a life for himself here and whose daughter has since said that the happiest day of his life was when he received his Australian citizenship. Yet the hate found him here on our shores, and that hate took his life as he was shot protecting his wife from the gunmen. I have turned my mind to those final moments, when he might have thought, 'I thought I escaped this, but they found me here.' I think of young Matilda, 10 years old, with her whole life ahead of her. We remember her. We remember each and every one of the 15 innocent lives now lost to us forever – lost to their families and to the Jewish community. We will remember them. We will not forget them, and we will not forget.

Unbridled hate cannot be allowed to fester on our shores. Hate cannot be allowed to win. As has been said, the Jewish community has been warning us for years that this was a risk and that their worst fears could be realised. Tragically, they were on 14 December. These attacks and this kind of hate are an attack on and an affront to all of us. It is an attack on our Australian values and on our multicultural way of life. If allowed to fester, antisemitism and this type of poisonous hatred can descend into unspeakable evil, like we have seen tragically at Bondi. Again we say we condemn it. It is unacceptable, it is un-Australian and we will fight against it every single day and stand with our Jewish community until they feel safe on our streets and on our shores. We remember Matilda. We remember the 15 victims. May their memories be a blessing.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (13:32): I stand today to speak on the condolence motion following the tragic shooting at Bondi Beach. This was an act of violence that shocked the whole of Australia and the world. It shocked us all to our core, leaving families, friends and entire communities grieving. It was a tragedy that reached far beyond the shoreline where it happened, reaching households and communities nationwide. Bondi Beach is known to all of us. It is known to everyone in the world as a place of connection and of life. It is a place where people gather to enjoy the outdoors, to spend time with loved ones and to share the simple pleasures of everyday life – of family, of children and of laughter. To have such a place become a site of violence is very distressing and confronting. It challenges our sense of safety, and it reminds us how fragile even the most familiar and joyful spaces can be.

Today we mourn the lives that were lost. We mourn the people who should still be here: people with futures, with families, with plans and with hopes, whose lives were taken in an instant – lives that mattered. They will be deeply missed. On behalf of this Parliament and my community, I extend my deepest condolences to their families and all their loved ones. No words spoken by me or anyone in this place will ease their grief. They are now experiencing loss and profound grief and sorrow, something they will carry for the rest of their lives.

This terrorist attack cut me and my soul deeply. It was very close to home. That is because I have a very close connection to the Jewish community. I worked for over five years for two members of Parliament and worked closely with many, many friends who have a strong connection to this community. I saw their sorrow and the hurt on their faces and in their souls. I felt responsible because I stand in this place, like each and every one of us does, and it hurt and it cut deeply. This attack was not about guns; it was about hate – hate to its core – and it was about extremism. It was not about Islam. My Muslim community are hurting too. One of the first places that I went to, the day after this attack, was the mosque in my community. They were scared because they understood what the repercussions of this are. Along with many of my caucus members, the member for Cranbourne, the Premier and the Deputy Premier and I attended the vigil at the Caulfield Shule – a moment to hug our friends, to listen, to let them know that we were there and to tell them that we were sorry.

In these moments of tragedy we often see the best of humanity, and I want to acknowledge the courage shown by members of the public who acted instinctively in these moments to protect others, to provide help and to comfort those in distress. We have heard lots of those stories in today's motion debate. I also want to pay tribute to the first responders, the police, the paramedics, the medical staff, the lifesavers and everyone who just jumped in. I am sure there are many, many stories that are yet to be told. Their bravery and dedication reflect the highest values of public service, and we thank them. We also recognise the emotional toll all these events take on these people. They are experiences that will stay with them forever. I also want to acknowledge the Bondi community. I have many friends that live in that area, and they have been marked with sadness and sorrow. It is a community that will carry the memory of this day with them forever, yet it is also a community that will show resilience, compassion and unity as they begin to heal in this process.

Today we remember. We hold our families a little tighter. We say our prayers, no matter what faith we are. We acknowledge their pain and the long road ahead, and we stand with all of them in grief. We will find healing, and we will try and find peace. May our nation continue to respond to tragedy not with fear or division but with compassion and with unity. I commend this condolence motion to the house.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (13:38): I rise to support this motion and to tender Victoria's heartfelt condolences to the families and loved ones of the 15 innocent people murdered at Bondi Beach on 14 December 2025. On what should have been a joyful evening on the first day of Hanukkah, families gathered for the annual Chanukah by the Sea. Children played, parents smiled, and a community came together. Fifteen lives were taken, among them a 10-year-old girl, an 87-year-old Holocaust survivor who endured the horrors of the 20th century only to fall to hatred in the 21st, rabbis, grandparents and a couple who died heroically trying to disarm one of the attackers. To every family who lost a loved one, this Parliament grieves with you. This house condemns unequivocally the atrocity that stole these lives.

This was an act of terrorism deliberately targeted at Australia's Jewish community when they gathered to celebrate the first night of Hanukkah. We must name it plainly: it was an antisemitic attack. This attack did not emerge from a vacuum. It was the most devastating point on a trajectory of escalating hatred. It began with what some dismissed as small things: graffiti on a St Kilda synagogue and on the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation in South Yarra on more than one occasion, hateful slogans on the walls of Mount Scopus college and swastikas on cars. Then it escalated: windows smashed at a member of Parliament's office and my own electorate office defaced, children taunted on school excursions. Then, further still, in December 2024, the Adass Israel Synagogue in Ripponlea was firebombed. In July 2025 another synagogue was set alight during Shabbat dinner. The normalisation of small acts of hatred leads to spray paint. Spray paint leads to arson. Arson leads to Bondi Beach. I have always been an advocate for inclusion, because when one group is allowed to be targeted it gives permission for other minority groups to be targeted, and that is not the Australia that I want to live in.

I find it extraordinary that there are so many conflicts in the world – Russia and Ukraine, Thailand and Cambodia, Sudan and Yemen – conflicts causing immense suffering, yet none have brought protesters to our CBD weekend after weekend for two years. Only one conflict has done that, and the Jewish community has had to endure the consequences of it.

According to the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, there were 552 antisemitic incidents in this state in 2024 alone, a 52 per cent increase on the previous record. This house condemns the evil of antisemitism, and it vows stronger actions to keep our state safe, strong, proud and united. We honour the courage of all police officers, first responders and healthcare workers whose skills saved lives that evening, and we also honour the everyday people who showed extraordinary bravery. Boris and Sofia Gurman gave their lives attempting to disarm a gunman. Ahmed Al Ahmed, a Syrian-born Australian, charged at one of the attackers and wrestled a weapon from him. His courage reminds us that the bonds of our common humanity are much stronger than the ideology of hate. We acknowledge the trauma

of the men, women and children injured physically and psychologically. More than 40 people were wounded, and the scars will endure for an absolute lifetime.

The electorate of Prahran sits in the heart of one of the most culturally diverse communities in Australia. Our suburb adjoins that of the most significant centres of Jewish life in this country. Victoria is home to 60,000 Jewish Australians, the largest Jewish community in the nation. Melbourne's Jewish community is woven into the fabric of our city – the synagogues of St Kilda and Caulfield, the schools, the businesses on our local streets. These are our neighbours, our friends, the parents at school drop-off. Many came as refugees and rebuilt their lives here because Australia promised them safety, belonging and the freedom to worship in peace, and that promise must be upheld.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (13:43): On behalf of the Victorian Greens, I rise to add our voices to the condolence motion for the victims of the horrific antisemitic Bondi terrorist attack in December. Bondi, as people have mentioned, sent a shock wave through us all. We often look at the US and ask how that country has become so complacent to so many gun massacres happening in their community, and we thank our lucky stars that Australia is not like that and that when we go out in public we are safe. Then something like Bondi happens and it completely rocks our sense of safety and security. To have so many lives taken in such a brutal way at an event that is so familiar to many of us – people simply gathering for a celebration with their community by the beach – is an unspeakable horror. But none have been rocked more than the Jewish community, who were deliberately targeted with this brutal violence at a Hanukkah event, an attack fuelled by repugnant hatred and antisemitism. Fifteen families lost children, parents, grandparents and loved ones in the most horrific way at the hands of two men who held racist, antisemitic views that are simply and unequivocally wrong.

As many other people no doubt would have as they were reflecting on their speeches, I thought a lot of Matilda, the 10-year-old child. My own daughter is about to turn nine, and she too spent some of her summer at the beach, with not a care in the world, just like Matilda deserved to do. To lose a child is the worst thing imaginable, and to lose them in these circumstances is just too horrific to imagine. I would like to, as others have done, put the names of the Bondi victims on the record to remember them: Matilda, Edith, Dan, Boris and Sofia, Alexander, Rabbi Yaakov, Peter, Reuven, Marika, Rabbi Eli, Adam, Boris, Tania and Tibor.

Like many people with children, it has been a struggle to figure out how to explain it to my own children when they ask questions about an event like this, but I always remember the advice to look for the helpers and how extraordinary it is to see the lengths that people will go to to save others, even risking or giving their own lives.

I will not be mentioning the names of the killers here today. They do not deserve fame or notoriety. The people who deserve fame and recognition are the first responders who jumped into action and other people like Ahmed Al Ahmed, a Muslim man, who bravely wrestled the gun from one of the killers, chose not to shoot and was shot five times himself, thankfully not fatally. The people who deserve to have their names in lights are the Jewish couple Boris and Sofia Gurman, who were tragically murdered while confronting the killers at the beginning of the attack; people like Jessica Rozen, a pregnant mum who shielded a stranger's child during the gunfire; and people like Reuven Morrison, who drew the killers away from the crowd. And there are countless others of course whose names I do not know who risked and gave their own lives to save the lives of others. May their memory be a blessing.

In the aftermath of Bondi I have been thinking a lot about the Jewish phrase 'May their memory be a blessing' and talking with my Jewish family and friends about its meaning. They tell me it is more than just a condolence; it is an active wish that the departed's life truly mattered and continues to matter, and nothing could be more true for those who died at Bondi protecting others. My hope is that we honour their sacrifice and their lives by coming together across difference and seeing each other's fundamental humanity. I am grateful to the Jewish community organisations who took my calls, who invited me to visit before and after Bondi to start and continue a dialogue with me and to talk about

our common humanity and common ground. I acknowledge that the Greens statements criticising the conflation of antisemitism with the criticism of the actions of the Israeli government have not always been supported by some of these organisations, but our opposition to antisemitism and our belief that everyone should be safe to practise their culture and religion is not in doubt and should be very clear.

There have been and will no doubt continue to be debates about what direction policymakers should go from here to stamp out the scourge of antisemitism and racism but also to deal with the violent extremism and radicalisation of, let us face it, mostly men, which are on the rise, and there will be disagreements on how to do this. My hope is that as leaders we move forward with reflection, evidence, depth and care. In politics – I have been here for almost 12 years now – there is often an imperative to move quickly, to be reactionary, as the 24-hour media cycle and partisan players often demand. Politics does not often allow time and space for proper listening, for true and deep consideration of what is needed to get us from where we are to where we need to be. Politics often asks people to choose sides quickly and then pits groups against each other, with vested interests too often using this to advance their own interests and agendas. Disappointingly, this has already happened in the wake of Bondi, including from current and former senior politicians. This serves no-one except the cause of division. In this Parliament I hope we can all agree that we need to let a little more reflection and humanity make its way in.

Of course we should be celebrating this country's incredible diverse cultures and actively working to combat all prejudices. At the state level we can look to the recommendations from Victoria's parliamentary inquiry into extremism that happened in 2018, which sets out a clear expert-backed road map to invest in solutions which tackle the root causes of hate and extremism in all its forms to benefit all our multicultural, multifaith diverse community and not pit groups against each other.

I hope we are also able to listen deeply to David Meagher, the brother of photographer Peter Meagher, who was killed in the Bondi attack. At Peter's funeral he called for proper gun law reform, not just tinkering around the edges. We know our gun laws have been gradually eroded since the Port Arthur massacre in 1996. The shooting death of police officers in Porepunkah and the shooting death of three innocent people in a small New South Wales town recently should be a big wake-up call that our gun laws need serious reform to keep everybody safe.

This year, as the Bondi and Jewish communities continue to honour their loved ones and gradually attempt to heal from this atrocity, I will be holding our Jewish community and the community of greater Bondi in my thoughts and in my prayers. I will also be holding our Muslim communities in my thoughts as they again face collective blame and backlash, including from some political leaders, for the actions of individual violent men. It is not helpful. It is hurtful. It is wrong. The Christchurch massacre and now the Bondi massacre should teach us that racism in any form is a scourge and that heroes come from all backgrounds, Jewish, Muslim and more.

Today I am also thinking of our First Nations and multicultural communities who are facing a rising threat of racism, hatred and violence, most shockingly demonstrated last week by the attempted terror attack at a rally in Perth, where a man threw a bomb into a crowd of innocent people, including many Aboriginal community members, which could have also been a horrific mass casualty event and which has received far too little public and political attention.

Others have quoted Martin Luther King Jr here, and I would like to do the same. He said:

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere ... Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.

After Bondi the Jewish community invited us all to light a candle. Hanukkah, after all, is the Festival of Lights. As I lit my candle I was reminded of another Martin Luther King Jr quote:

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

I hope we hold this sentiment in our thoughts as we move forward.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (13:51): I too rise to acknowledge the horrific terror attack in Bondi on 14 December and extend my deepest condolences to the victims and their families. I acknowledge the acute pain, particularly for the member for Box Hill and the member for Caulfield, and I thank them for their leadership of their communities in this extraordinarily difficult time. I thank all members for their contributions today.

This act of violence has shaken the nation. It has also intensified the very real fear within Jewish communities, who have experienced a shameful and deeply troubling rise in antisemitism. It remains an appalling scourge on our society and a challenge to Australia's multiculturalism. It has no place in Australia, nor do hatred, intimidation or violence directed at any religious or ethnic community. Our diversity is a strength, and our social cohesion must never be taken for granted.

This is not a moment for blame or for importing overseas conflicts into our streets. It is a moment for leadership, for restraint and for unity. We must come together across political lines, across faiths and across communities to reaffirm our shared values. We should support our police and security agencies in the work they do to keep people safe, whilst also ensuring our response is calm, proportionate and respectful. In moments like this Australians and Victorians expect us to lower the temperature, reject division and stand together. In the face of terror unity is not optional, it is essential. But the challenge is large. It might well be the greatest social challenge of our time.

I want to quote the ASIO director-general Mike Burgess, who gave the 2025 Lowy lecture before the Bondi attacks. He said on 4 November last year:

Political differences, political debates and political protests are essential parts of a healthy democracy.

Unfortunately, here and overseas, levels of personal grievance and frustration are growing.

Rightly or wrongly some Australians feel dispossessed, disaffected, disenfranchised. There are spikes in polarisation and intolerance.

Many of the foundations that have underpinned Australia's security, prosperity and democracy are being tested:

- Social cohesion is eroding,
- Trust in institutions is declining, and
- Even truth itself is being undermined by conspiracy, mis- and disinformation.

Similar trends are playing out across the Western world.

Angry, alienated individuals are embracing anti-authority ideologies and conspiracy theories; engaging in uncivil debate and unpeaceful protest.

He is right. The answer is not more political opportunism – something that, sadly, both Sussan Ley and then Anthony Albanese engaged in over the summer. Nor should our leaders ever pause or delay in calling out radical Islamic terrorism or antisemitic terrorism for what it is. But if you think One Nation is the answer, you are asking the wrong question. We need more of the best of us. If there is to be some good to come of this horror, let it be that. We mourn these losses, we cry for the victims and we stand with Australia's Jews this day and every day. Long life.

Motion agreed to in silence, members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.

Bushfires

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (13:57): I move:

That this house:

- (1) extends its condolences and deepest sympathy to the Victorian communities affected by the ongoing 2026 bushfires;
- (2) praises the work of emergency services personnel for their courage and sacrifice in fighting fires and protecting our communities;
- (3) expresses its deep gratitude to the many volunteers and community members who have supported friends, neighbours and anyone else in need; and

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- (4) pledges to continue to work with communities and all levels of government to support and rebuild fire-affected communities.

As we rise to join in this motion today we also do need to recognise that firefighters and emergency crews continue to be out there right now fighting difficult and dangerous fires in different parts of the state and also, as a consequence of that, that there are many Victorian communities that are still living with the risk of fire in the landscape and the uncertainty and the anxiety that comes with knowing that these fires are not yet under control. But also we know what has been lost: homes have been lost, stock and machinery have been destroyed and businesses have been lost and damaged. Places, homes and communities that have held generational memories are now changed forever. So we rise today together in this house to acknowledge that loss, but also we acknowledge the strength and resilience these country communities have shown in the face of these natural disasters.

At the outset I want to start by acknowledging the tragedy that occurred in the Longwood fire: the loss of a much-loved member of that community, local farmer Max Hobson. I know his family are grieving, and the entire Gobur community, along with the wider region, are carrying that loss with them today. To his loved ones, to his friends and community I offer and we offer our heartfelt condolences, and the Parliament stands with them.

This tragedy is a stark reminder of just how fast these fires move in those extreme catastrophic conditions and how dangerous and deadly they become. It is also a reminder of the difficult, dangerous and confronting work our firefighters, police and emergency services perform every single day. These fires in January were brutal, with hot winds, dry fuels and fire behaviour that shifted and intensified without warning. I heard time and again how the flames moved with a speed that left very little time to act. It was a day those with decades of CFA service compared to Black Saturday. We know the impact could have been far worse. As bad as it has been, it could have been far worse. The fact that the loss of life was not greater than the tragedy of one life lost is a credit to every firefighter and every emergency services personnel on the front line. So I say this to the CFA volunteers and career crews, to Forest Fire Management Victoria and to our SES, our police and our paramedics: it is a credit to the team, including those in the State Control Centre, who are working around the clock, every hour of every day and every night. It is a credit to the technology and intelligence systems that have been built that help track the fire as it moves. But also it is a credit to the Victorian community, to the people who left early, to the families who had their fire plan in place, who listened to the warnings, who checked in on neighbours and families and who understood the risk that fire in the landscape presented to them and acted quickly. Those decisions saved lives, and they supported that difficult and dangerous work of our emergency services.

We think back to the 7 February 2009 Black Saturday fires, where 173 people lost their lives and thousands and thousands more were displaced. I know that the trauma of that disaster still sits with families and communities today and that trauma is reignited every time there is a fire anywhere in the state. What we also know is from that tragedy so much has been learned. We changed how we prepare. We changed how we warn. We changed how our emergency services coordinate together to save and protect lives. We have invested in the technology and equipment our state needed. We have strengthened the integrated response across agencies. We have also demanded that landowners in high fire risk areas have their fire plan and be ready long before the fire season begins. Those lessons, learned in the hardest possible way, are part of why more people are alive today.

I know personally just how important it is to follow the advice, and I know the member for Euroa knows that as well. On 9 January we were not at home, but I will never forget that sickening feeling when the emergency alert came through. To be told to leave – to be told that it is not safe to stay in your home, in your neighbourhood and in your community – was sickening. But also I understood the impact that sending those messages and being part of that integrated response has on our emergency services. A few days later when I was visiting the fireground in Harcourt I met a young woman from the CFA who came up to me and told me, ‘I sent that message to your neighbourhood on that Friday evening.’ She said, ‘Every time I press the button to send those messages, I feel sick, and I just hope

and pray that people take the advice.’ It is the understanding of this integrated response that I give thanks to today, also acknowledging the impact that the fires have had on so many communities.

In our personal community, our neighbourhood, we were fortunate. There were a huge number of brigades that rushed to Harcourt and supported that community. At this juncture I want to acknowledge the Werribee CFA, who travelled some distance with the member for Werribee on board. He messaged me very late on that Friday evening to give an update from the fireground, an update about how difficult those conditions were.

In the days after the fire I also met, hugged and cried with so many who had lost their homes. As I said, we were fortunate, but it was gut wrenching to sit with the woman at the Seymour relief centre who showed me the photo of her home that had been lost in Natimuk. The couple had lost their home and pretty much everything they owned. The clothes on their back were all they had. They had also been injured, and they showed me the burns on their arms from when they had to leave as the fire came through, and it was one of many emotional conversations that I will never forget. But even in that moment and also in the Harcourt community – and this was just a mere day or two after these fires – the conversation immediately turned to rebuilding and connecting back into community, checking in on their neighbours and helping one another.

That brings me to Harcourt, Speaker, a community you are so proud to represent and a community too that are my neighbours and a community I feel connected to, as my own kids went to kindergarten in that great community. There are so many examples of community spirit that can be pointed to in the Harcourt community. I just want to share one. Again, in the days after the fire, along with the member for Bendigo West, we visited the Victorian Miniature Railway site, a small tourist attraction, and people who know train people know how much they love their miniature railways. What they did that day was just an incredible display of community spirit. There was still smoke in the landscape – you could smell it – but what they had put on was a simple barbecue that then turned into a full-on community relief hub as were standing there, as truckload after truckload of food and support was being delivered. It became a place where community could go to immediately but also a place where people could come and talk, and this was all driven out of that great, strong local community.

While I was in Harcourt I had the opportunity to speak to the local CFA captain Andrew, who spoke about his crews, some fighting their first fire, others fighting while knowing their own homes had been lost – yet they got back on that truck and kept going. Then at Alexandra district hospital with the Minister for Health I met with the nurses and staff of that incredibly strong little country community. During the fires, that hospital became so much more than a place for great health care. It became a place of refuge, a place on that Friday night where people were sheltering. People who were sick and vulnerable were in that hospital, were receiving incredible care from those nurses and staff, whilst at the same time members of the local fire brigade were ringing the hospital and the town, pushing the fire away from where people were sheltering. And I had the opportunity to speak to the Alexandra CFA captain, who told me about the long hours that the brigades worked, the unpredictability of the winds they were dealing with and that deep responsibility they felt knowing that the fire line was so close to their township. I thank them for the work that they did. It is not work to them, it is what they do, but they do deserve that acknowledgement.

Finally, on the Saturday, at the Seymour relief centre, the Sikh volunteers were there. Of course they were there doing what they always do, often without being asked – just turning up and feeding so many people quietly, compassionately, knowing that they needed to be there because the community needed them. This is what the community looks like. This is Victoria at its best.

I think it is important to acknowledge, as proud as that made me as Premier, as a local member and as a community member, that it also needs to sit alongside a harder truth that we cannot ignore: our climate is changing. Our state is getting hotter, and for communities like mine this is not a debate anymore; indeed it has not been a debate for a very, very long time. This is our life. This is what we live with: more warnings; more smoke days; more dry, restless, windy, unpredictable weather; more

emergency alert messages; more evacuations; and more moments when families stand at their front door deciding whether today is the day they leave. So many of us have the bag packed every day during summer sitting by the front door, because we do not know if today is the day we need to grab it and go. I know there are some that do not want to admit this. There are some also here in the Parliament who refuse to accept what communities around the state already know.

It is true: the seasons are harsher, the land dries out faster and the high-risk days come more and more often. That is the reality we are living with. These fires show that we also must prepare for a future where the risks are greater and the pressure on our emergency services will continue to grow. It is alongside this that we also must confront something else that is challenging communities, and that is misinformation. We have seen how it is in moments like this that misinformation tries to take hold. It spreads quickly. It plays on fear and it exploits uncertainty. What I abhor is that it targets people precisely at the moment when they are most vulnerable. I say this in the context of going back to my contribution earlier, when I referred to the importance of those emergency alert messages. Trusted information saves lives. Clear warnings save lives. Taking the advice has saved lives. All of us have a responsibility to deal in facts, not fear, and to support our emergency services – the fire services and also across the entire emergency services ecosystem, because it is integrated and each component works together to save lives, held together by information and technology and fact and resources. It is all with that single focus: to give communities clarity when they need it the most, because it can be a matter of life or death. Communities deserve that honesty, and they deserve all of us standing behind them and supporting them.

On that matter of support, I want to say to all bushfire-affected communities that my government has and will continue to stand with you on the long and difficult journey ahead. At this juncture I also want to acknowledge the work of the Minister for Emergency Services – incredible work. Also I would like to thank the Prime Minister and the federal government, who have worked very quickly with us to ensure that there has been immediate relief and support. I acknowledge that sometimes it can never be as quickly as you would like, but we have seen so much support provided, with more to come. We know that there is more to come. I also want to acknowledge the work of local government, who have set up the relief and recovery centres and who are there often as the first port of call for local communities.

We are all doing this together to support families who have lost homes. In particularly acknowledging the livelihoods that have been impacted, I want to pause for a moment and acknowledge farmers, because it has been our primary producers who have also been so badly impacted as a result of these fires. They have lost stock, fencing and income. We also know that there are many local businesses that are working to reopen. I would like to acknowledge the work of the Victorian Farmers Federation to coordinate the fodder relief and to get that fodder out as quickly as possible into local communities.

We do look for moments of hope. One symbol of hope is the funding that was announced last Friday for the Harcourt Cooperative Coolstore. It was shattering to see the coolstore destroyed, because it represents not just the economy of Harcourt and the farmers and primary producers around it but also Harcourt itself. So to be able to support the rebuilding of the Harcourt Coolstore stands as a symbol of how we will work with communities in the recovery journey ahead. It is a symbol of this community's recovery.

There are many weeks ahead of us. There is so much work ahead of us. As I said, there are many more weeks of summer still to come, with fires continuing and those fires that are continuing to flare up. For those of us who have our VicEmergency app close by, the alerts are going constantly about ongoing fire risk in the landscape. The work ahead is steady, it is practical and it will always be focused on the people who need it the most, because I understand and my government understands that the road ahead will be long. I commit to this: no family, no business, no community will walk it alone. We will rebuild together. We will recover together. We will look after each other in that way that Victorians always do in the aftermath of difficult natural disasters and come back stronger. I commend the motion to the house.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:15): This year our state has seen one of the most devastating bushfire seasons in recent years. As the Premier has noted, fires continue today, and we thank our emergency services for their ongoing work and sacrifice. Across Victoria, from the High Country to the coast, fires fuelled by an unprecedented heatwave have burnt over 435,000 hectares. They have destroyed homes, farms and infrastructure, and they have brought suffering and hardship to families and communities who have called these lands home for generations.

According to the CFA, this year's season has been the longest duration heatwave event Victoria has experienced since 2009. Tragically, the ferocious Longwood fire claimed the life of Max Hobson, a cattle farmer from Terip Terip. On behalf of the Liberals and Nationals I extend my most sincere condolences to Mr Hobson's family and friends, who have lost someone so dear to their hearts.

I have made an effort throughout January to visit the communities across Victoria who have been affected by these fires. I have travelled to Harcourt, to Tallangatta, to Longwood, to Yarck, to Avenel, to Skipton and to Natimuk. Amid the scenes of devastation I found myself in awe of the courage and resilience of the Victorians who I met along the way. These are people who found themselves with nothing left but the clothes on their backs. They have lost their homes, their crops, their livestock, their machinery and their equipment. They have lost their income and much of their assets, and yet they greeted me with warmth, with a wry smile and an attitude that said, 'We will just get on and rebuild.'

In Harcourt I met the local CFA captain Andrew Wilson, who spent many long days on the fire front working to save homes, businesses and properties across the region, and I met his daughter, 16-year-old Kate, who volunteers alongside him. They are not paid. They receive no wage to go out and put their lives on the line, to abandon their own properties and homes to protect others. These are people who fight fires in full knowledge that their own home, their own property, may be lost.

In Longwood I met the most incredible CFA volunteer called Liza, who had lost her own property in the blaze, but that did not stop her from devoting every waking moment to fighting fires and protecting the homes and livelihoods of her community. Meeting Liza was one of the most moving moments of my parliamentary career. Liza had been on the fire front for almost two days and had not slept. She knew that her home had been reduced to ash. She knew there was no hot shower or comfy bed waiting for her to return to. When I visited the region I had taken advice on some small items I could bring up that could assist our CFA volunteers. When I handed over a pair of socks to Liza she was so pleased and told me she had been wearing the same clothes since the blaze began days ago. It was a humbling moment in the truest sense of that word. I met John from Yarck, who had lost everything – and I mean everything. His family home had stood there in the High Country for 140 years, but there was nothing left now.

The devastation is simply unimaginable, and yet through the devastation came incredible stories of Victorians banding together to support each other. In Longwood Neil and Kerrie Tubb set up a fodder depot to support fire-affected farmers. They received donations of feed, fencing and farm supplies that totalled over \$2 million in value. We know that those who live on the land have been the hardest hit by these fires, and Neil and Kerrie's efforts have been a lifeline to those farmers who needed it most.

Much has been said of late about political leadership and the need for it in troubled and uncertain times, and I want to take the opportunity to highlight the exceptional leadership from my friends and colleagues the member for Eildon, the member for Polwarth, the member for Euroa, the member for Lowan, the member for Benambra and the member for Ovens Valley, whose electorates have been significantly impacted by this fire season. These MPs and their electorate officers have worked tirelessly to offer support, leadership and advocacy for their constituents at a time when they needed it most. Difficult times like these require us to step up, and I could not be more proud of my colleagues for the work they have done in representing their communities across Victoria. Bushfires are not abstract events for local communities. They threaten homes, livelihoods, lives and our deep sense of safety. Local MPs understand the geography, the roads, the microclimates, the vulnerable communities and the lived realities of their communities. Their longstanding and deep connections to

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their communities meant they could raise urgent issues quickly and accurately with government agencies and emergency services, ensuring that local needs were not lost in the broader statewide response. The impacts of bushfires do not end when the flames are extinguished. The weeks, months and years ahead will be a tough road for many Victorians who have lost their homes and livelihoods, and I know that our local MPs will ensure these longer term impacts will not be forgotten in this place now or when the media crews have left and the headlines have moved on.

I also want to note the work of many local councillors in the affected regions, many of whom have worked diligently to offer whatever support is possible for their communities. Councillors such as Scott Jeffery, mayor of Strathbogie shire and a volunteer at the Avenel CFA, have truly exemplified the best of what local government can do in a time of crisis to support their community.

What I saw when I visited the people and the communities who have been affected by these ferocious fires was that the devastation that has been caused is so very real, but so too is the extraordinary courage and commitment of the CFA and its tens of thousands of volunteer firefighters – and of course our FRV firefighters as well. These are everyday Victorians who, without hesitation, left their families and jobs to protect their neighbours, their towns and their way of life. Over the last week CFA volunteers have responded to more than 3300 separate fire incidents, with over 23,000 individual turnouts recorded across the state. They worked in conditions that many described as beyond anything they had experienced before – extreme temperatures, erratic winds and fires moving faster than crews could protect against.

I will never forget sitting with Kylie Comte, the captain of the Seymour CFA. I sat with her at her station while she showed me footage of their trucks moving through the fire front on her phone. It was truly like watching a horror movie, and yet the calm, unflappable Kylie spoke about how they navigated the impossibly dangerous conditions to keep each other safe. These firefighters are not just from the community, they are of the community. This disaster revealed the intangible strength of the community spirit that defines our state of Victoria. Neighbours helped neighbours, local fundraisers sprang up, volunteers delivered feed and water to farmers and community groups rallied to support displaced residents and struggling small towns.

But alongside these uplifting stories of courage and community and the resilient spirit of our regional communities, we also saw just how deeply we rely on volunteers to keep the lives and properties of Victorians safe from harm. When I went to these communities, I listened. I listened to what the CFA volunteers had to say on the ground, their faces and gear still wearing the ash of the fires they had so valiantly fought. These people are not paid to walk into these dangerous conditions. They risk their own lives to protect the lives and livelihoods of others, of their communities and of their friends and families. They do it simply to protect those that they love, and many of them told me that they feel that the courage they show and the sacrifices they make no longer seem as valued as they once were. When Neil Tubb, a CFA volunteer for decades, said he was not sure it was worth continuing and that he did not feel valued in that role, that said to me that we must do more for these brave men and women. They are volunteers, and we must always keep that key fact in the front of our minds. We must always do the right thing by our volunteer firefighters in the CFA. The courage and selflessness that they display are among the most profound examples in our modern world of those traits.

Across Victoria families are now navigating significant loss and focusing on the task of rebuilding. I say to those affected communities and individuals: we are with you. Your resilience is remarkable and your spirit is what makes Victoria so strong. We will not forget what you have lost, and we will not neglect to support you as you rebuild. To the CFA volunteers and to all the emergency services personnel who stood on the front lines I say thank you. Your courage, compassion and selflessness have been a beacon of hope in a dark time.

It is incumbent upon all of us in this place to not forget the people of these fire-ravaged communities. Many of them have lost not just their homes but their livelihoods, their savings and their future. We must ensure that we are there for them for the long haul, not just in the immediate aftermath but for

the long road they must walk back now as they rebuild their homes and their lives, and we must back without equivocation the brave men and women who volunteer to fight these fires at a time our state needs them most.

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:26): Living in a bushfire-prone area can carry a heavy weight. It means an accepting and understanding that the landscape and conditions in which we live, raise our families and work can change quickly. It means recognising our weather is continuing to be more extreme – hotter days, infrequent rain, stronger winds. For Victoria’s firefighters, police, paramedics, SES, health workers, councils and supporting agencies it means stepping up when others are being advised to leave to protect their safety. For families and friends, it can mean waiting, holding your breath, monitoring the VicEmergency app and their text messages and waiting for news of safety.

Bushfires are not new in Victoria – we are one of the most bushfire-prone areas in the world – and 9 January, a day forecast to be catastrophic conditions for half the state and extreme for the other half, was a day when the landscape and the weather showed us their very worst and where Victorians showed us their very best. There were over 200 fires in one day, with 10 becoming major fires that have burnt for weeks. As Minister for Emergency Services and Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, I extend my condolences to all Victorians who have been affected. I offer my deep gratitude to all who have been involved in preparation, response and recovery. You have been extraordinary.

It is hard for many communities across the state, who carry within them deep heartbreak, whether for a neighbour, family member, schoolfriend or themselves. The shock, the trauma and the pain will sit like a stone inside them for some time. Every day since these fires began my thoughts have been and continue to be with each and every person working out each morning how to get out of bed and how to put one foot in front of the other. Whether it was from the constant pinging of the VicEmergency app alerts, images coming from the fireground, the stories or the firsthand accounts, Victorians across the state understood the enormity of this fire season and of last month. That is why, in the months and weeks and days leading up to the fires, we saw agencies and communities roll up their sleeves and prepare. Families cleared gutters, practised their emergency plans, had their emergency kits packed, heeded the advice of our emergency services and left early, and I thank them for that. The actions of Victorians and communities right across the state were nothing short of extraordinary.

Fires cause heartbreak, and last month was no exception. A life has been lost, that of Max, a cattle farmer from Terip Terip. Locals in Ruffy and Alexandra shared with me their sadness at the loss of Max, and I offer my sincere condolences to Max’s wife Julie, his family and friends and his community.

With pain in the hearts of all Victorians, we continue to see the best of people. The emergency services workers, the volunteers, incident control centres, councils, community organisations – to those I have met and to those I have not yet met, I say thank you. To Chris, the captain of Alexandra CFA, and Steve from Fire Rescue Victoria, who planned so extensively with their teams to defend their communities, thank you. To Felicity, Ruffy CFA’s community safety officer, for helping support and rebuild the community you love so much and for speaking so clearly on the ABC about the importance of leaving early, I say thank you. I say thank you to George, Ruffy’s CFA captain. And to all captains, I say thank you for your leadership.

Thank you to those at the Harcourt fireground who I met alongside the Premier and you, Speaker; to those at Seymour relief centre, where I went with the Treasurer; to Yvonne and the volunteers at Longwood Football Netball Club; to the volunteers at the Colac relief centre; and to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing workers, who are helping people access support payments as quickly as possible. To the community of Natimuk, with their stories of such a fast fire, of seeing grass one minute green and the next as black as tar – the fire moved so fast and with such intensity; to the people of Walwa and the crews, including Forest Fire Management Victoria, for the extraordinary work they have done across that forest, where I saw how the fire in a firestorm hopped, skipped and

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jumped across the forest; to the member for Werribee and his CFA responding in Harcourt; and to the couple from my community of Research delivering donations to Ruffy: thank you. To those council workers who kept working through, supporting their community, not knowing the status of their own homes and family, I say thank you. And to our State Control Centre: you are amazing. I say thank you.

I have seen and heard in communities across Victoria that one thing is very clear: Victorians will always show up and support each other through the most challenging of times. They are there for each other. They are united. There were stories told to me of neighbours who had not spoken to each other for years putting aside differences and turning to each other and offering support, of communities coming together and communities being cohesive. Thank you for your courage, your bravery, your endurance and your quiet determination in the face of these fires.

Steps towards recovery have begun. We know that recovery has a long tail. This Saturday sees the anniversary of Black Saturday and the 2009 fires. These communities know the challenges of recovery, and I offer my respect and acknowledgement to them. We are committed to continuing to back our emergency services and working alongside affected communities as they begin the difficult task of rebuilding their lives and their livelihoods. Whether it is critical relief payments, mental health support, emergency housing, clean-up or business supports, we are on this journey with you every step of the way. We will be there with you.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:33): I am saddened to have to rise on this condolence motion to address the incidence of the bushfires over the January period, and as previous speakers have indicated, that are still going in parts of the state today. These fires for some are an emergency, for others a disaster and for others still a tragedy. I begin by paying my condolences to the family of Max Hobson and his wife Julie in particular. Max died in the Longwood fire at Terip Terip, where they operated Aintree Farm Herefords. Max was a former mechanical engineer and project manager who for 50 years had spent time in South America and Western Australia before calling north-east Victoria home and setting up that Hereford stud. He tragically lost his life in the fire at Longwood, which has caused so much damage. We extend again our condolences to Max's family, to Julie in particular, and to all those impacted.

We also know that there were some 400,000 hectares of the state burnt, an area about five times the size of Singapore. We know that some 1300 structures were destroyed, including 400-plus homes. That leaves a legacy for people for years to come, because many have walked out with nothing but the clothes on their back and memories. That will be a very difficult recovery for those people. You can rebuild houses, for sure, but homes and memories can be destroyed with those flames. We also know that a death toll of livestock of around 40,000 is anticipated, which the Victorian Farmers Federation estimates comes at a cost of around \$20 million. We know there is far more than that in damage to farms around the state too, including loss of crops. In the Streatham fire in particular I saw the loss of stored grain that was damaged in the fire. And of course there is the toll on our natural environment and on the many thousands of wildlife no doubt killed in this event.

It is always difficult to travel to these areas in the wake of a fire, but I know people appreciated the efforts of many in doing so. The Leader of the Opposition has indicated where she went. I travelled with my colleagues from Seymour to Longwood to Hilddene, Axe Creek, Harcourt, Streatham, Skipton, Katamatite and Yarroweyah and along the way met many of the people who were impacted directly, many of the people still fighting the fires and running the operations from a professional career perspective and many of the CFA volunteers in particular, who do such amazing work. Indeed the irony was not lost on me when I caught up with the member for Ovens Valley and went up to Cobram to meet with a number of the CFA brigades over a beer at the Cobram pub. Literally as I walked up the road to the pub the fire siren went off and they all disappeared to go out to another event before I even got in the door. Thankfully, it was not another bushfire, but it was a representation of exactly the commitment they give, because only a few days earlier they had been fighting that Yarroweyah fire in that neck of the woods.

I want to pay tribute to my colleagues in the Nationals and in particular to the member for Lowan for her efforts in the fire in the Natimuk area. That comes on the back of last year as well, the fires of the Grampians and Little Desert –

Emma Kealy interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: And, I think she is saying, the year before that. When you represent 20 per cent of the state, you have got a significant job. The member for Euroa has done extraordinary work, and in the face of personal impact as well. This is a story for the member for Euroa to tell, but on the Friday there was a concern that she had lost everything. Thankfully, her house is intact, but there is still significant damage, and what she has done as a local member for her community since then is incredible. The member for Ovens Valley – as I said, there are a number of fires that I might touch on that were a little bit forgotten; the Yarroweyah fire did not get a lot of attention, but a dozen homes were lost there – has been a champion supporting that community. The member for Mildura – when you talk about fires that are forgotten, I reckon probably there is a good chance that a lot of people here do not realise that there was a fire in the Wyperfeld National Park that burnt 50,000 hectares –

Jade Benham interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: Seventy thousand, the member for Mildura is now advising me. Of course it was largely in national park, and thankfully there was not significant local infrastructure or public or private property, but that is still a big fire by any stretch of the imagination. The member for Gippsland East as well – there was a big fire in the Dargo area and also in East Gippsland at Mallacoota. But extraordinarily, despite there being dozens of lightning strikes in the Orbost–Cann River area, they did not take off, which was probably a reprieve, because I reckon the member for Gippsland East has had his fair share after the Black Summer fires, and that was very much welcome. Having said that, the Dargo fire had a perimeter of around 400 kilometres. It went about 50 kilometres in 6 hours. You can see, as you can with many of the fires, exactly which way the wind was blowing when you look at the fire area, because there is a very long, narrow strip of that area.

Many of those fires moved with ferocious intent and speed. The Premier mentioned the Natimuk fire, and the Streatham fire as well, which was predominantly in farmland, much of it crop stubble, and was extraordinary in the speed with which it moved. I had the privilege of having a look around the fireground once the threat had passed with Pat Millear of the Westmere group. He and his group are some of the unsung heroes. Some 100 private units took action on that fire, and there is no doubt that without those private units they would not have brought that fire up. It caused significant damage as well, and a number of homes were lost there, but the work of the CFA volunteers and the private operators was extraordinary. I sat in the kitchen with Ben Cameron, the Skipton CFA captain, and his family, including his brother-in-law Sanjan Dawson who is the Lismore CFA captain. They had saved the houses on their property but had seen damage, particularly to the farm. Sadly, only about two weeks later when a fire flared up south of Lismore, Sanjan's farm was damaged again – his personal farm – so that continues to hit that area.

There are so many amazing stories of the community. The first place I went as the fires still raged was to the Seymour relief centre, where by the Saturday lunchtime there were piles of food and piles of water. The Premier mentioned the Sikh volunteers, and I know the Salvos were there and the Red Cross – all of the usuals doing amazing things and feeding people in a situation where there were some absolutely harrowed faces, people who had lost their homes or had not actually been able to go back at that stage to their properties. There was generosity from the community, from within and from without. The Sikh volunteers had come from Frankston instantly to feed people and give them comfort, which was amazing, followed up within a day or two by the amazing efforts that the Leader of the Opposition referred to – the Longwood fodder drop – which I am sure the member for Euroa will go into more detail on because that was an extraordinary community rally. At Muckatah in the member for Ovens Valley's patch, we saw the work of one of the local farmers, Paul Grinter, who heard the fire warnings, saw the smoke coming, and jumped on his tractor and literally went through fences and

cut firebreaks with a plough around half a dozen homes I think it was, roughly speaking, and saved those homes. He just did it, just cut the firebreak and made a massive difference. I called in to Kestrel Aviation. These are guys who are not volunteers – they have contracts with the state government – but their work in the air does amazing things and has had a huge impact as well.

I would like to thank the media as well – the ABC and many of our commercial radio stations in rural and regional Victoria, including the ACE Radio network – for their work in making sure that the message gets out as well. They play a critical role in that warning system, as well as those working within Emergency Management Victoria getting those warnings out. I think one of the successes that we have had since Black Saturday in particular is getting that message out about leaving early, about getting people to understand bushfires. As the Premier indicated, that has saved lives, because whilst we have had Black Summer and now this event that has been pretty horrific, the loss of life was dramatically reduced from Black Saturday and Ash Wednesday and others in the past, and that says a lot.

I would like to comment on the engagement. I mentioned the work of local MPs. I would like to thank ministers and the Premier for their engagement in providing advice and updates to the opposition. One thing that one of my colleagues, the member for Polwarth, has mentioned is that the bureaucracy could do more to listen to local members. We have a unique perspective as local members, particularly in the country. We pick up information, we hear complaints and we find things that perhaps those who are busy focused on the firefight do not, and I think that is something going forward that really should be engaged a bit more. As I say, I think ministers' offices were great in keeping us informed and helping to solve issues. Again, my colleagues will say more about issues that got solved, but I think the bureaucracy and the firefighting apparatus they rely on could come back to local members more.

It has been said that the work of the volunteers was extraordinary. I do not just mean CFA volunteers; I mean the volunteers who came and packed food, provided food, volunteered their time and effort to bring fodder to cattle and sheep that had survived and desperately needed food, the volunteers right around the state who did so much work and the people who made donations and all of that.

I think it is important that this chamber realises we do have a problem with volunteers in this state. I am not just referring to the CFA again. We have seen a drop-off, and as parliamentarians and as leaders in our communities we need to see how we can relight the fire of volunteerism. The ones who are still doing it are doing amazing things, but we are certainly seeing an ageing of that volunteer force. There are some amazing young people – I think the Leader of the Opposition referred to Kylie at Seymour, who is the captain there and who is just a fantastic young volunteer – but we need so many more of them, and it is very much something that I think we need to work on.

The CFA and many others did extraordinary things, and we thank them for it. We thank all those who contributed during this fire. We mourn the loss of Max Hobson. We acknowledge the loss felt by so many – of their properties, of their livelihoods and of their farms. We commit that we will stay with them as the recovery goes, because as the minister said, the recovery has a very long tail: it is physical, it is mental and it is social. We will stick with you.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (14:47): Like many Victorians, I watched with deep concern as we saw catastrophic fire danger warnings issued in early January. Our farmers and our regional communities know too well the devastation that such fires can cause, and sadly those fears were realised. Tragically, cattle farmer Max Hobson lost his life, and I extend my deepest condolences to his family, friends and loved ones and the community that is mourning his loss.

I visited some of the communities most impacted by the fires in the north-east of the state. In Ruffey and Yareck I met with courageous farmers and community members who are now facing the long and difficult task of cleaning up and rebuilding their lives. I thank the member for Euroa, who was affected

by the fires, for joining me in Ruffy and sharing her insights. Despite the devastation that surrounded us, we saw strong and supportive communities looking out for one another and people lending a hand and offering support wherever they could.

As the Minister for Carers and Volunteers, I cannot overstate the significance of volunteers in times like these. Of course we rightly acknowledge our CFA volunteers, but many Victorians have stepped up, organising emergency food relief, checking in on neighbours, helping with clean-up and simply being there for people when they need it most. I sincerely thank every community member who has given their time, energy or resources to support others. As Minister for Community Sport, this includes so many hardworking volunteers at local sporting clubs who have stepped up, as they so often do. We have seen the devastating impacts that fires have had on community sporting facilities. The compassion, generosity and willingness to help define the very best of Victoria.

The fires of 26 January have left an enormous impact on our agricultural sector. As Minister for Agriculture, I want to focus particularly on the impacts on productive land, livestock and the farmers who work tirelessly to care for that land. The scale of the loss has been significant. Almost 1400 farm businesses have been impacted, covering more than 124,000 hectares. This has resulted in close to 44,000 livestock losses and more than 9200 kilometres of fencing lost. Around 420 sheds have been lost or damaged, often taking with them valuable feed that farmers have worked hard to secure. Many of these farmers were already managing the impact of drought over the last few years. Losing that feed, alongside livestock the farmers deeply care for, has been devastating and deeply traumatic.

The destruction of over 500 vehicles and machinery is not only the loss of precious assets, but these are vital in giving farmers the means to clean up and recover. I am proud to say that Agriculture Victoria have been on the ground from the outset, responding to the needs of affected farmers, and I thank all of our Ag Vic staff for their tireless efforts to support our farmers. In the immediate aftermath the focus was on animal welfare and livestock disposal. Very quickly the need for emergency fodder became clear. On 8 January Ag Vic activated the emergency fodder distribution agreement with the Victorian Farmers Federation. I am very pleased that all of the requests for emergency fodder have been actioned, with over 8300 bales being delivered or in transit. I sincerely thank the VFF for their efforts to work with Ag Vic to stand up this service so quickly, and I thank our farming community for their generosity in providing these fodder donations.

To support fire-affected farmers, more than \$60 million of direct support has been announced. This includes the fodder support recovery grants of up to \$75,000 and concessional loans of up to \$250,000. Agriculture Victoria continues to prioritise attendance at community meetings and recovery hubs, ensuring a strong on-the-ground presence to provide advice, information and practical assistance. I also want to acknowledge the importance of the free financial and wellbeing support available through the Rural Financial Counselling Service as well as the Look Over the Farm Gate community grants. On 30 January the Commonwealth and Victorian governments announced a further \$160 million in support to help families, businesses and primary producers. If there is one message I would like to convey to the fire-affected communities, it is this: you are not alone. Financial assistance, along with decision-making and mental health support, is available to help make your recovery easier. Please utilise those supports, because we know that they can help. Recovery is never straightforward and it can often be a long road, but as a government we will continue to support our farmers and regional communities every step of the way. I commend the motion.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:52): Late last year I attended the 150-year celebration of Horsham fire brigade. Horsham town hall was filled with volunteer firefighters and emergency services workers, acknowledging the many disasters that they had attended over the past century and a half. Little did I know that less than two months later it would be the same assembly of emergency services workers and volunteers – tired, feeling the load of firefighting and the loss of property – that would be in that exact same hall. It was a huge acknowledgement by Terry Fradd from the CFA to not just acknowledge and thank the CFA volunteers but also acknowledge the work of the private appliances, the people who turned out and turned towards fire and smoke rather than turning away from it and the people

who had slip-ons, fire pumps, speed tillers and the disk ploughs to build firebreaks. I will note that Terry said it was those farmers that turned out to build earth fire lines that saved Horsham. They have not been acknowledged nearly enough. In fact those people that stayed behind to build those firebreaks and to fight those fires, without whom we would have faced catastrophic outcomes had they not turned out, are not able to access any support funding because they did not evacuate. We must thank those people that turn out when things are tough. This courage cannot be underestimated.

For our region it was not just the disastrous winds and hot conditions – the catastrophic fire conditions. Those conditions meant that we had no air support at all. We had no line from the sky to understand where the fire front really was. This was compounded by the fact that the CFA comms are located on the Telstra tower on Mount Arapiles. Power was lost to this tower very early on in the fire. The power switched over to the battery, which after two hours ran out, and it failed to go across to the third line of power, the diesel generator. This meant that not only did we have volunteers by themselves on the ground with no air support, but they also had no comms. It was smoky. You could not see anything. It was chaotic is what I have heard from people on the ground. There were vehicles going everywhere trying to put this fire out to save lives and save property. I commend these volunteers not just because they turned out for this one event but because they are the same volunteers who turn out to every single fire, no matter where it is across Victoria.

I was moved on the day of the fire when I saw the Victoria Valley CFA truck coming through the northern part of my electorate. This is the same area of course that was hit so hard by bushfires just last year. They are the same faces; they are the same volunteers. They are the same people who have been turning out for a long time to fight against the unfair and unjust emergency services tax, and if the Premier is true to her word that she will stand by these volunteers, then I urge her to scrap that tax.

It is our communities that turned out to donate fodder. They offered their homes and spare bedrooms. They turned up with food and slabs of water before they were even asked to. They offered to look after pets and horses. They offered a shoulder to cry on. They offered a hug to say thank you. I thank absolutely everybody who chipped in. Unfortunately we are like a well-oiled machine in far western Victoria. We have had many fires, but that means that when it comes to the crunch we have leaders in the community who can stand up and rely on one another. They do not have to make a hero of themselves. They know where they fit and they do their role, and everyone respects them for what they deliver for our community. It is a voice of confidence and control when everything else for the community feels lost. I commend the communities for their incredible work to support one another.

I will make note of course of the Streatham fire, which started in my electorate and then quickly skipped across into another. For some reason borders matter sometimes, but in this case they did not. Bruce McKenna was one of the many volunteers who were on the back of a fire truck over that fire. It was chaotic, as I said. At the end of the fire Bruce needed a rest. When he needed a rest, he thought, 'I'm going to head home,' and then he was told, 'You don't have a home to go to.' He had lost everything aside from the shirt on his back. This is the story of so many of the volunteers in far western Victoria in particular. They are Parks Victoria employees, Forest Fire Management Victoria employees and people working within the CFA and other emergency services who lost their homes. They still turned out to save other people's property, even though their own homes were at risk. I thank them for their support and service to the community. We will stand by you. We will stand by these communities as they recover and rebuild.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (14:57): My electorate is no stranger to the impact of natural disasters, from floods to fires and storms. We have seen it all in the time that I have been the local member. While some communities in my electorate were threatened by these recent fires, including Sutton Grange, our thoughts have been primarily with your community, Speaker, with the people in the abutting Shire of Mount Alexander, and we are grateful that we were spared the terrible impacts of these fires. Of course across Macedon our CFA brigades and our local SES units do what they do every time – that is, rise to the challenge and make themselves available to be deployed as

required right across the state – and I thank them very much for that. I thank them for their ongoing commitment to volunteerism and to protecting the lives and properties of Victorians when they need it most. I also want to thank the community, because without a doubt the lessons that were learned so dreadfully during Black Saturday have been heeded, and I thank community members for leaving early, for enacting their fire plans and for evacuating when asked to. The Premier spoke to this earlier on. Undoubtedly this has saved lives, and we thank the community for taking action.

I want to take this opportunity today to pay tribute to our healthcare workers but also to the volunteers and indeed the public servants who are on the front line in our relief centres. In my community we stood up a relief centre at Kyneton, as you well know, Speaker, to support the Harcourt community. I was able to visit that relief centre, and I thank the members of the Macedon Ranges Shire Council staff, who worked tirelessly to make sure that our neighbours got the support and care that they needed, and similarly the volunteers from Red Cross and the Victorian Council of Churches, who are always there, proving that sometimes just the ability to take the time to listen provides really valuable care when it is needed most. I thank those volunteers for their readiness and their friendly smiles and cups of tea.

I also had the opportunity to visit both the Wodonga and Castlemaine relief centres, and, Speaker, I visited Castlemaine with you. I want to acknowledge that you took your entire office. You shifted it to the relief centre and then later you took your office to Harcourt. You made yourself available to your community in their time of need. When I went to the Castlemaine relief centre and indeed to the Wodonga relief centre, I saw council workers doing whatever needed to be done to ensure that their communities felt safe and supported. In Wodonga it was shire workers from Towong. Even though their own homes, farms and neighbours had felt the full force of the fires, they were there to deliver for their communities, and in Castlemaine similarly.

It has been picked up here earlier by other speakers that the department of agriculture people are delivering evidence-based support and advice. They were so ready to deliver the care, to provide the advice and to do what needed to be done. Disaster recovery funding arrangement teams were out there delivering relief payments with speed and with compassion. Our public servants do not always get the thanks that they deserve in these moments, and so I want to take the opportunity particularly to acknowledge them and also our healthcare workers. It was incredible to be able to visit Tallangatta hospital, to visit Dhelkaya Health, to be there in Darlingford in Eildon and of course, as the Premier said, to join with her at Alexandra.

At Alexandra we had the opportunity to speak with Luke and Simone, two fabulous nurses who, as the Premier has already indicated, were there delivering the care that was needed when the hospital ended up being a refuge. More than 50 people from the community slept there that night. Do you know what, we had the media in attendance to hear Luke and Simone's story. What a pity that that story was hijacked by a bunch of disaffected people who want to drive down trust in government and drive down trust in government workers. A small number of disaffected conspiracy theorists who made it all about themselves on that day took away the spotlight from our healthcare workers. How shameful is that? I want to thank the Murrindindi shire mayor Damien Gallagher for calling them out and being at pains to let the Premier and me know that this was not the people of Murrindindi and Alexandra and that instead they stood there alongside our healthcare workers. So right across the state we have seen our healthcare workers deliver 24/7 health care no matter what they have been faced with during this dreadful time.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (15:03): As we have heard, the fire at Longwood moved quickly and tore through the areas of the northern part of my electorate, doubling in size and eventually burning 140,000 hectares. Unusual because it did not have a particular fire front, it burnt in 360 degrees and left multiple paths of devastation: loss of homes, sheds, tools, machinery, stock, hay, silage, pasture, water troughs, tanks and livelihoods. As we have heard, we lost the life of Max Hobson, cattle farmer at Terip Terip. Seventy per cent of the Longwood fires tore through my electorate, predominantly in Murrindindi and also through Mansfield. The impact assessment shows that 45 per cent of the total

number of structures destroyed across Victoria were in the Murrindindi shire. Murrindindi shire is a small, cash-poor shire at the best of times, and it will very much struggle to make ends meet here and will need considerable government support. They have behaved exceptionally through these fires. 193 homes were lost in Murrindindi across 21 localities: Highlands lost 38 homes; Yarck, 33; Gobur, 23; Terip Terip, 19; Caveat, 18; Fawcett, 11; Molesworth, 10; Alexandra, seven; Dropmore, seven; Kanumbra, six; Ghin Ghin, five; and Koriella, four. Across Cathkin, Maintongoon, Whanregarwen, Limestone, Devils River, Gooram, Merton and Ruffy there were a handful. Merton also lost five, in the Mansfield shire. These are exceptional numbers of losses on top of 519 sheds, 2000 kilometres of damaged or destroyed fencing, 14,000 hectares of farmland, which is different from the areas burnt, and over 5500 livestock. What people might not expect was that 389 beehives were lost there, and this could have particular impacts on the agricultural sector going ahead. 3222 people sought drought disaster relief payments.

These losses were extensive. But for many in my electorate, this was not their first rodeo. Murrindindi is used to devastation. We had the October 2022 floods. We have had storms, cyclones and the tragic circumstances over Black Saturday. I acknowledge that this Saturday it will have been 17 years since that event. Our emergency services performed exceptionally, backed up by locals – the farmers with their own units and private vehicles – but also the staff from Forest Fire Management Victoria, who are seen very positively.

We saw the spirit of mateship through all of this. As I said, for many it was not their first rodeo. I was talking to young Kellan Fiske of Gruyere fire brigade. Kellan was 20 on the back of a truck in Marysville, where his family hails from, on Black Saturday. He had been there before. John Drysdale, who lost his grandfather's house in Yarck, had been through Ash Wednesday, Black Saturday and these fires. He stayed to defend but said, 'I knew when to leave.' It was evident that so many people did have plans, whether they were staying to fight or leaving early or choosing the time to leave.

The roads were burnt, so they were cut off. Our communities were cut off. People could not get there to give them support. What was remarkable was the growth from within. At the Yea Community House Carlie Underhill got into action really quickly. At Fawcett we had Sam Hicks, Andrea Bauer in Highlands and Lyn Burleigh at Terip. In Yarck the pub initially was the community meeting place, followed by the hall, and it was a community effort with everybody playing to their strengths. People came together locally to determine what they needed, and it was just amazing what could be achieved and brought together from the ground up. Community-led recovery absolutely worked so well here. They were overwhelmed with the support of donations and food. The hay supplies had a lot of trouble getting in. We had so many donations of hay, and it was slow to come in. When farmers lost fences, pasture and hay, they needed hay. They needed to get stock out and taken elsewhere. There were some delays there but it eventually got through, and we had some incredible convoys going through. Andrew Embling from Alexandra and Dame Pattie Menzies really got this going. We had the Need for Feed through the Lions club.

My gratitude goes to so many of the volunteers, whether they were the CFA, private vehicles, those providing food, those helping sort through the donations, of which there were many, or those that helped euthanise as well, because they do not want farmers to put down their own stock. There is nothing more distressing than to put down your livelihood, and people came to help them with that – community members who rallied. The council staff at Murrindindi were amazing, led by the mayor Damien Gallagher, who started on the back of a truck before ending up taking on more of his mayoral role. There was the collaboration – and this is so important – between Murrindindi, Mansfield and Strathbogie shires and then the support given to them by the Yarra Ranges shire and Whittlesea and most recently by Melbourne City Council, because they have skills that they can help Murrindindi with at the moment. We had the unbreakable farmers. The stock agents were fabulous getting into gear to help the farmers. Agriculture Victoria, as mentioned before, were on the ground trying to help people. I spoke to people from Leongatha, Colac and Horsham in Yarck, which is where they had

come from. My support has been unwavering, and this is not my first rodeo either. I will continue to support those impacted.

I have got to thank Jack Buksh from the Premier's office, who on some days I felt like I spoke to 40 times, and I still continue to do so. I did appreciate him being available and getting back to me. My messages now are: fencing, fencing, fencing. People have said we have got to get systems in place. Well, systems are in place. The communities are doing this. They cannot wait for government to make decisions and move. They need support in coordination. They need local support in getting that fencing done. The majority of people who were impacted are farmers and the difficult period is coming now, after that adrenaline wears off over the next few weeks. I pledge that I will be there for them. Things were not perfect; they are not perfect. There are still challenges, and we need to get through those so that our communities continue to thrive again in the future.

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (15:11): The beginning of 2026 has been nothing short of heartbreaking for so many families across our state. In my own community the year began with a frightening reminder of how quickly conditions can change. On 7 January a grassfire broke out along the Sunraysia Highway between Maryborough and St Arnaud. In extreme heat, around 40 firefighting units rushed to the scene. Before the fire was contained by crews on the ground and in the air, 28 hectares of farmland had been burnt. Families in Moyreisk, Natte Yallock, Redbank and Stuart Mill were told to leave their homes. Roads were closed. People waited anxiously for news about their properties, their neighbours and their animals. It was a really tense day for so many, but things worsened even more only two days later.

On 9 January catastrophic conditions created more than 30 active fires across Victoria, including major fires in Streatham, Carranballac and the rural areas of Skipton. These fires moved with terrifying speed, leaving devastation in their wake. I saw the impact firsthand when I brought the Deputy Premier to our region just a few days later. What we witnessed was gut wrenching: more than 18,000 hectares lost, dozens of homes destroyed, farm machinery and fencing obliterated and over 10,000 livestock dead. The stories of the farmers who had to shoot 2000 to 3000 sheep and of ammunition being completely used up are absolutely horrific.

Families who had lived on the land for generations were suddenly faced with unimaginable loss, and yet in the middle of that devastation we also saw the very best of our community. Neighbours and strangers were checking in on one another, helping to move stock, sharing equipment and opening up their homes to those who had lost everything. Local brigades worked around the clock, supported by volunteers who brought food, water and whatever else was needed. Together they protected and cared for so many. Even the Carranballac Cricket Club, whose cricket balls had literally turned to ash, were already planning their next training night just six days after losing everything. That determination, that refusal to be beaten, is exactly what defines our rural communities.

I have always said that we have some of the best people that you could ever meet in Ripon, but I have seen it proven over and over again in the last three weeks. I saw it again in Linton on 25 January, where hundreds of people converged on the rec reserve to support the Carranballac Cricket Club. In just two weeks, local clubs had organised a T20 double-header, with a jumping castle, face painting, an auction and a raffle – all to raise money for bushfire recovery. Thank you so much to everyone who made that event possible, especially Luke and Jess Jackson, Kirk McDonald and the Grenville league. Your leadership and your generosity lifted spirits at a time when people desperately needed hope. I also want to acknowledge our first responders – the firefighters, the police, the paramedics and the volunteers – who protected homes, farms and entire communities. Without their courage and skill, the losses from the Streatham fire would have been so much worse. The recovery effort is now well underway, and I want to recognise the many organisations and individuals who have stepped up.

BlazeAid are now based at the Skipton Golf Club, with volunteers clearing hundreds of kilometres of fencing already. Local volunteers like Tash, Lauren and Gayle are keeping families fed through the Skipton Food Bank, and donations have been so generous that a shipping container has been brought

in to store them. The local Skipton op shop is also working around the clock to get essential supplies to those who need them most. These acts of kindness matter so much. They help people feel less alone in these days.

As we begin the long road to recovery, it is vital that those impacted know that help is available and that they do not have to navigate this alone. Government agencies are working closely with the community to make sure every affected family receives the support that they need. Grants for immediate relief, mental health support and clean-up assistance have been made available, and a recovery network coordinated by amazing local women like Megan Read and Lyn Heenan has also been set up to keep momentum strong and make sure that no-one falls through the cracks. More assistance will follow, and healing will take time, but no-one will face that journey alone. Together we will rebuild.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (15:16): On Friday 9 January it was 45 degrees with a northerly wind blowing an absolute gale-force storm. It was horrendous. An ignition took place at the Yarroweyah roadhouse 4 kilometres west of Cobram and 20 kilometres north of Katamatite, and it just took off. Irrigation country like this is not used to bushfires because the ground is covered with green summer crops and grass, but this was different. It was roadside vegetation and Goulburn–Murray Water channel banks choked with weeds and overgrowth that fuelled this roaring blaze.

Over 30 appliances turned out to try and put a stop to this out-of-control blaze, which was headed directly for Katamatite. This furnace was covering ground at an unprecedented speed. Twelve houses were destroyed in a little over 3 hours. Fences were gone and sheds and outbuildings were destroyed. The Cobram and Tocumwal brigades became trapped and experienced a burnover, which they thought they would not survive. Thankfully, two Hercules C-130s and a helicopter gave these CFA volunteers a chance. If not for them, the Katamatite township would surely have been disintegrated.

The Muckatah community only a week earlier had hosted a rodeo where the firestorm was headed. The Muckatah tanker has been offline since October due to a mechanical fault, and the Muckatah crew did the best they could with a 30-year-old truck. They told me on Sunday that if they had been caught with the Cobram and Tocumwal units in the burnover, they would have been cooked. Tobruk Road took heavy losses, with houses exploding and buildings burnt, and as the name suggests, a siege took place. But the allied forces of our local CFAs just could not stop this beast.

I visited many of these local affected communities and farms, and we shall have a lot of work to do. Many thanks to Moira FoodShare, Moira Shire Council and particularly Scott Williams and the staff at the recovery centre. We all know there are those who shine when the emergency is on, but the slow grind of recovery requires different skills, patience and empathy, and I thank those in our community who are performing that role at the moment. I also want to say that Powercor were exceptional, returning power to what was left. No lives were lost, but we were oh so close.

Our volunteers came from all around – from Strathmerton, Naring, Katamatite, Cobram and further afield. Our New South Wales volunteers from across the Murray River were there in force, but as one said, it was like fighting a raging bull with nowhere to run. You will not find a more blatant example of roadside vegetation acting as a wick. The fire was contained east and west by the green grass in the summer crop, but north to south there was dead and dried-up vegetation as far as the eye could see.

More than a couple of people were evacuated from their homes with only minutes to spare, while farmers like John Stacpoole, Adrian Conti and Paul Grinter have been applauded for their courage on tractors, digging up ground and saving houses.

There are so many ifs and what-ifs. If the wind had been westerly, Cobram township, 10 times the size of Katamatite, would have been wiped off the map. If the Muckatah crew had have turned right instead of left on Peach Road, they would have been cooked. And if the wind did not drop around Sandmount Road, Katamatite would also be char.

With 12 homes destroyed in the Yarroweyah fire, we are better off than many. However, one house is too many and one family impacted is one too many. Hats off to our brave CFA members who ran towards this beast, and to all our CFA volunteers and other volunteers across our state who put themselves in harm's way to protect our people and property we say thank you.

The Katamatite community, led by Ian Fox, held a thankyou day for our CFA and other first responders on Sunday at the Katamatite Recreation Reserve. We got to say thank you and that we are on their side. I shout out to BlazeAid. Words cannot describe the work that these people do – absolutely salt of the earth people supporting others, strangers helping strangers. It is just unbelievable. Katamatite police officer Charles Ryall showed poise and leadership in a crisis, and many unsung heroes have helped out over the past three weeks during the clean-up and the painful steps of sifting through the rubble and wiping the tears for those who have lost everything and even those who did not. Our fire could have been avoided. If you leave fuel lying around, you have to expect one day it is going to catch fire. Thankfully the CFA are our safety net. They always are.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (15:21): I rise to extend the condolences and sympathy of my community for all those who have been impacted by bushfires in Victoria. In my communities, protected by CFA and SES volunteers, the annual Santa run means our kids do not think of Santa arriving on a sleigh – he comes on a fire truck. Santa comes on a fire truck. So towards the end of December families get out their maps and they check the route of the CFA Santa so they can be there on the side of the road welcoming their heroes – the kids waving so hard you think their arms are going to fly off with the excitement of it all.

That promise, the promise of summer, gave way to feelings of tension and worry as the catastrophic fire day warnings came through. Representing a community that was impacted by Black Saturday, that feeling is deep – and it is not just something that is imagined, it is a memory, so it has extra weight and extra fear. And of course it came to pass, not for us so much but for our neighbours – the fire and devastation, the loss of livelihoods, the loss of a life, the loss of homes and the impact on families that we know will be there for such a long time. Farmers, salt of the earth people that we know take such good care of their livestock, were having to deal with putting them down. It was devastating.

At the same time, day after day the brigades from my community, the men and women, jumped in the trucks and headed north and they headed west, leaving behind their families and their friends, heading to another community where maybe they did not know anyone – day after day. The stories that came back from the fireground were harrowing, and talking to girlfriends, they were worried about their partners who were out on the night shift with different strike teams. Our brigades have made our communities so proud, and that community pride has expressed itself through community members, almost like they took offerings to the CFA brigade stations. Wandong CFA spoke of the cars lined up in their driveway to bring pizzas, crackers, Gatorade, anything – a gift – to these men and women who jumped on the trucks and headed off. We sent the best from our community to people who were having the worst day in other communities. I am so proud to represent them. And of course when fires came closer to home, to our community, the favour was returned. We had Craigieburn there, we had Wollert there, we had Darraweit, we had Bolinda, we had Kilmore – all of them in their trucks coming to us in our time of need. This is who we are.

Visiting the emergency centre in Whittlesea with Minister D'Ambrosio, meeting people who did not know if their home up north was still there, who were worried for their families and their livelihoods and who did not know what they would return to, I was struck by the fact that the people caring for them there in Whittlesea were those who had been impacted themselves in Black Saturday. Time had come around full circle, and they were there with the knowledge and skills ready to support those who needed them. This is who we are. Thank you to the Whittlesea Agricultural Society, who opened the showgrounds so that farmers could bring livestock down to us if it was needed.

The recovery will take years. We know that where I am from because we are still recovering in our hearts, in our minds, from Black Saturday. We know how long it will take, and we know that all levels

of government working together makes a difference. Working together with organisations like BlazeAid, who have 11 base camps around Victoria – and they are calling out especially for volunteers in Walwa but also for all BlazeAid camps. All people working together is how we get through this. This is who we are.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (15:26): I rise today after what was the most extraordinary January I have had in my 10 years here. Many people in my community I know would say that if you did not laugh, you would be crying, because it has been an exhausting time. We have had floods, we have had fires, we have had tragic train accidents and we have had cliff rescues on top of all the normal day-to-day activities, in an electorate that is entirely looked after in the emergency management space by volunteers. Volunteers and community members from one end of it to the other are there at the forefront, and they are exhausted. They are exhausted after an unrelenting January where it went from one thing to another and from just the sheer concept of a large fire, sitting within 5 or 6 kilometres of a major population centre, which like a volcano sat rumbling and has continued to rumble for the last three weeks. It is tiring, and what the community understands and appreciates at the country level but may not be necessarily as well understood amongst many city folks is that these people that are at the coalface actually have other jobs to do as well. They are farmers, they work in shops and they run the local small business in the general store in the local town. They have other commitments and responsibilities. That has all come during January, and we all know January is a family time. There are literally hundreds of families across my electorate that have forgone rest and relaxation. They will go into the autumn farming season and just will not have time to catch up.

There are costs and consequences from a disastrous season right throughout. I do not have enough time today to mention all the various heroes, but I do want to acknowledge the volunteer groups. The CFA, the SES and the local P and A society, which got a shout-out in another electorate – they were fantastic offering their showgrounds. It is not only that but also the everyday people in the community who stepped up when we had unexpected flash floods. In fact the Lorne community barely knew it was even raining, yet within hours people had food and clothing and beds on offer for people who suddenly found themselves without a car, without any way of getting home. Communities can be so amazing in this area.

I also want to really acknowledge our local councils: Surf Coast shire, Colac and Corangamite. Their mayors, their CEOs and their emergency management staff were first class. They really have a well-oiled machine that kicks in and really knows how to set up somewhere safe for people to go and how to look after them and work with them. That comes on top of the flood of state government fire and forest management people and others that have come in and set up camp. There are some 200 people camped – and will be for some time – at the Colac Central Reserve, a great resource of people who know what they are doing and how to do it. The proof is in the pudding in the fact that despite floods, fires and other things we have managed to have no deaths and minimal property losses, but nonetheless it still sits there and, sadly for our community, will sit there for the duration of summer until such time as some autumn rains arrive.

I touched on train accidents, and I also want to point out the great tragedy for the small community of Cressy. It is important to note that this is the second major fatality within two years within literally a kilometre – two unmarked, unnoticed level crossings. It was a tragedy, and the fire brigade out at Cressy were called to that. They are just hardworking farmers who have left the farm for the day to go and deal with an absolutely catastrophic situation. But within days of that you also found them at the Lara Lee fire, up at the Skipton–Carranballac fire and down helping in the Otways. These Cressy people did a marvellous job. It was a very busy and hectic summer for them in a community where of course this time of year can be quite busy with finishing off harvest and crops for a late season.

On top of that, just in the time I have left I really want to acknowledge the wonderful job of our local Lions clubs, the Salvation Army and the op shops in my community, all of which flooded. I met with the Minister for Emergency Services, who came down to Lorne, and she would have seen too firsthand all the clothing and things that were offered onsite very quickly as the Salvos bought their emergency

vehicles in to help look after people. We had our surf clubs – there are eight surf clubs in Polwarth – all step up, providing meeting venues and providing, in the case of the coastal ones, somewhere for people to sleep overnight for a few days. Right across the community, people and community organisations and footy clubs all stepped up. The Lorne football club, for example, at a training day cleaned the beaches and picked up what could become dangerous obstacles in the sea, to keep people safe. All in all, it was a fantastic effort from the people of Polwarth, a community that knows how to come together, work together and keep not only themselves but also literally tens of thousands of visitors safe, for whom they still managed to provide a wonderful holiday in a wonderful part of the world at what was a very tricky time for so many.

John LISTER (Werribee) (15:31): We cannot avoid the motto. It sits on the training PowerPoints and on the booklets we get from Emergency Management Victoria. Despite its corporate presence, it reflects a deep feeling all emergency service workers, volunteer or paid, feel when people need your help: we work as one. In delivering my condolences to the communities affected by fires across Victoria – and we have heard about so many different communities, which have been name-checked today, across Victoria this summer – I want to highlight the role of my fellow emergency service workers in living this motto. I have not only sat through policy meetings for emergency services in a previous life and in this place; I have seen my share of the red stuff up close. I want to share just my small experience with what this summer has been like so far.

The story of my role this summer is like that of thousands of other volunteers. I have always referred to our outer suburban brigades as the cavalry. We sit watching EM-COP – if you are in the game, you will know what that is – on the big screens at the station as they track the fires live, and we can see the helicopter footage as well. We follow that situation throughout the day. You are on alert from so early in the morning, living that unofficial fire services motto of ‘Hurry up and wait’. Not only did we go out every hour to the assortment of emergencies in our own urban area; we knew that it was only a matter of time before that page comes through to form up at some random service station on the way out of town and head in to help. Over summer so far 400 of these strike teams have been deployed with, as has been mentioned, 23,000 individual turnouts.

Later that Friday night, like many other volunteers, I had just sat down for the evening at home. I got a quick call from our crew leader saying that we were likely to go to Harcourt that night and to make sure my bag was packed, which I always have packed, and 60 seconds later the pager message went off. I had been to Harcourt many times as a kid; it is a beautiful place. But in the dark, surrounded by the orange glow of the day’s threat, it took on a different feeling. As we arrived to the staging ground, which was well set up and had lots of food actually, which was really nice – we do not always get that when we get there in a hurry – seeing the tired sector commanders, the local crews darting back and forth to the control lines patrolled by the cavalry of strike teams and the pumper crews who stayed back to defend the township, it hit me: the job was not done. The threat was not over, but here were trucks from dozens of towns and suburbs from all across Victoria all there for a single purpose: to help. You see the forest fire management crews guiding the bulldozers to make firebreaks in the dark – I have no idea how they do it; it is amazing – mapping the fire across country they saw green and lush only six months ago. The green frogs, as we affectionately call them, are some of the bravest firefighters I have ever seen.

I saw the line of Fire Rescue Victoria pumpers winding through the main street in Harcourt, ready to defend the township once again in the morning when the wind picked up. Shifts that started in suburban stations, where the days are punctuated by emergency medical responses and fire alarms, now ended up hundreds of kilometres away. SES workers and police helped set up staging grounds and roadblocks, working with those who had evacuated, keeping them in touch with what the situation was. CFA, Forest Fire Management Victoria, FRV, SES and police worked and work as one. Our ranks in the CFA are growing, including in my own brigade, and often we think of the operational firefighters in our bright yellow gear on the fireground. In paying tribute to the people who helped defend communities across Victoria, I also want to recognise everyone who worked back at the

stations and units where we came from, restowing and washing trucks at all hours of the morning when we get back, checking gear, driving crews hours back and forward to staging grounds. The lists of jobs we do when we are not in front of the red stuff is really long. Whether it is on the fireground or back at home, we work as one.

To all emergency services workers, thank you. The impact of the fires has been well outlined by previous speakers. I again extend my support to these communities not only as someone, like many, ready to get on that truck but as a member of a government that is working to help them recover. Despite some attempts to turn this summer into politicking, I do not want to countenance this. Instead I look at the thousands of people, from the Prime Minister and Premier down, who worked as one. This is what makes us Australian, and I commend this motion to the house.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (15:37): Condolence motions are often about the loss of life – I am already struggling; it is going to be a long 5 minutes, sorry – and today we mourn the life we lost in the Longwood bushfire, Max Hobson. My heart goes out to Julie and Max’s family and friends during what is an unimaginably difficult time. He is known as a great person far and wide, with significant impact in the Hereford industry. Today I also want to speak about something our community is carrying: its grief, fear and the heartbreak of losing so much, so fast.

On the Friday of the catastrophic fire day I received a call from our neighbour. His wife is my best friend, and we are raising children together. He screamed into the phone, ‘I’m alive, I’m alive. Tell her I’m alive.’ For our families throughout our region – Longwood, Ruffy, Euroa, Highlands – and right across the state this summer did not just take homes and livestock, paddocks and fences. A devastating fire tore through our region, and it shook something deeper: it shook people’s sense of safety. It is the fear of driving down a road you have known your whole life and suddenly checking the tree line. It is the fear of hot winds. It is the fear of a text message, a siren or that relentless bloody beep-beep-beep of the VicEmergency app. Your heart rate will never stop rising when you hear it. It is packing the car in a hurry and telling your children to grab what you love most – important documents, photo albums, the pets, your wedding dress – and then trying to explain why the bike cannot come, because it cannot fit, or why the chickens and the cubby house have to stay, why the dream you spent your life building with your partner cannot be packed in the back seat and why Dad has decided to stay and defend. You drive away praying that there will be something to come home to. But at that exact moment others are driving as well. The pager goes off, the boots go on and the truck goes out the gate, driving towards flames while their own families sit at home waiting.

More than 400 local volunteers fought our fire – farmers, mums and dads, tradies and neighbours. People who had every reason to stay and fight and protect their own property chose to protect everyone else. Some stayed on the truck for three days straight, some for several weeks – weeks of smoke and heat, weeks without proper sleep and weeks of seeing things that no-one should have to see, and they will carry the toll of those memories forever. They were led by local captains who carried enormous responsibility for their crews and their communities: Will Fenech, Hilledene; Kylie Comte, Seymour; Michel Becks, Whiteheads Creek; Chris Baker, Creightons Creek; Shaun Hearmon, Longwood; Steve Brook, Locksley; Damon Rieusset, Euroa; Jeff Jennings, Violet Town; David Hamilton, Strathbogie; and many, many, many more. They stepped up without hesitation, and when they finally came home exhausted there was another army waiting – neighbours cooking meals, dropping off supplies, checking in and making sure they could rest before heading straight back out again. Friends and colleagues, like the member for Kew, dropped in undies for me, a clean shirt and clothes and nappies for the children because we could not get home – and beer and socks for our community because we had nothing.

I spoke to George Noye, the Ruffy captain, on Thursday night in the midst of it all. For 30 hours he had been on the truck; he had no sleep, and homes had been lost in Ruffy. The town was lost within hours, and he felt like he did not do enough. He called me with a shock in his heart, and I want to say he did do enough. They all did enough. They protected lives, homes and people’s dreams, and when

the flames passed they stepped straight into helping their neighbours organise fodder, water, feed and supplies, because that is what our community does. We do not wait; we just get on with it.

Alongside the loss, we have seen the very best of who we are as a community and who we are as Victorians. Within hours the Tubb family called me and said, ‘What do we need?’ Within 30 minutes we announced a fodder drive on the radio. The Tubb family opened their property and turned it into the heart of the response, moving \$2.5 million worth of fodder in two weeks. We wanted to keep stock alive, and we wanted to keep farmers farming. We saw Don and Felicity Sloman, Colleen Furlanetto, Anne Douglas and Katie Hill making sure families who had lost everything still had clothes, food and water. We saw hay runners cross state lines through the night; truck drivers refusing to fill up their tanks so more could go to someone else; bakeries, cafes and the IGA feeding volunteers while their own businesses were hurting – they still are; Rotary, Lions and the RSL showing up without being asked; and people stopping work, putting their own income aside and simply saying, ‘What do you need?’ and then just doing it.

I remember sitting that Friday night with my sister Clementine, our six children and our pets and working dogs and a small zoo army. We were watching the fire zooming in, wondering if we still had a home. That is a helpless feeling, and there were so many people who lived that nightmare. You just feel lost – decades of work, livelihoods, livestock and memories gone in a minute. But the hardest job of all was for young people walking burnt paddocks euthanising stock because help could not get there fast enough. I personally thank Ash Rowling and Onion. ‘Thank you’ seems so inadequate for the job that they had to do. If there is one thing that we need to change, it is that no farmer should ever have to put down their own livestock, wildlife or pets because the system is too slow – because that is not resilience, that is actually failure.

We lost one life, but we also need to care for the living and for those with trauma and exhaustion, the firefighters who cannot sleep, the parents holding it together for their families – some falling apart on camera – and the families wondering whether they have the energy to start again. Our responsibility in this place is not just to mourn, it is to stand with them, to make sure recovery is real, to make sure support actually turns up and to make sure no regional family ever feels forgotten. A mighty fire tore through our region, but it did not break us. What I have seen is courage, generosity and decency, and that is the value of Victorians – ordinary people doing extraordinary things for each other.

Yesterday, walking off our burnt property, I saw green shoots pushing through blackened ground. I see them and the first shoots of trees everywhere. It is emotional. There is no rain. This is resilience. Our land is tough and so are our people. Today, when we honour the life we lost, Max Hobson, I want to also honour those who ran towards the flames and the communities who were courageous enough to protect each other. We make the promise that we will not let them rebuild on their own.

I also need to do a shout-out to Jack. Sorry, that sounds terrible. I have just got him as Jack on Siri. Do not call him, Siri. We moved mountains together. We reconnected water. We got shipping containers delivered. We changed the limit on the freeway within an hour, I think. We put up signs so that this community response was safe and supported. I am so proud. We got Tones and I. Jack, you promised me Zach Bush, so it is on the record, mate. There are too many legends to name in 5 minutes – I apologise – but I just want to say I am so proud of my community.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (15:47): On behalf of the Greens I want to express my sincere condolences to the victims and survivors of Victoria’s latest horrific bushfires, as well as the floods that affected Victoria over summer. I want to acknowledge the contribution that came before me. In particular we send our thoughts to the family and friends of Max Hobson, a beloved farmer who died defending his property in the Longwood fire. We send condolences to all the Victorian communities impacted by bushfires this summer, which have already torn through more than 400,000 hectares of land and destroyed around 200 homes, with an unknowable number of animals killed and injured.

I also want to thank the firefighters and the volunteers, who have given an incredible amount to save lives and property at great risk to themselves. As I have spoken about in this place before, my dad was a firefighter with Parks Victoria and the department out on many, many, many bushfires. I know that fear of waiting up at night, wondering when he will come home. I know what it feels like to see your loved one come home exhausted and shattered like Dad did after Black Saturday. Firefighters endure so much with very little, night shift after night shift, battling infernos with no visibility, just trying to save who and what they can in horrifying circumstances.

People lost everything in these fires, people like Dr Robyn Coy, who was forced to shelter in a dam, standing in the water with her brothers, watching as fires destroyed the Tarcombe wildlife centre, along with almost all the incredible animals that she had devoted her life to rescuing and rehabilitating. Then there are people like Alex Kelly, who not only had to evacuate catastrophic fires in Castlemaine but then had to evacuate again a few days later when flash flooding hit the Great Ocean Road, where she was staying. The cruel reality is that we have more intense and more frequent disasters, and it means that communities barely have a chance to recover from fire before they then have to face floods, and it feels like nowhere is safe.

I want to acknowledge every Victorian who felt that fear as they checked the VicEmergency app, looking at fires growing all across the state. As I sat up late last Tuesday night, with the mercury still well over 30 degrees at 10 pm in Melbourne, I could not sleep, and it was not just because of the heat. It was because of the dread – smoke blanketing Melbourne, huge swathes of forests in the Otways on fire, people's homes literally going up in smoke, followed by cars being swept out to sea. I stroked my children's hair as they tossed and turned and tried to go to sleep in that extraordinary heat, and it felt like there was a rock in the pit of my stomach, because if these children are facing nearly 50-degree heat in 2026, what on earth does the world look like for them in 10 years time, in 20 years time? Our state is becoming almost unlivable. Huge parts of the state had to evacuate because their communities were literally on fire, and if they were lucky enough to escape that, they could not escape the oppressive heat or the smoke that blanketed the state that we all had to breathe in. There is literally nowhere that is safe anymore. But the scariest thing is that scientists tell us this is worse than they predicted and it is only going to get even more catastrophic.

I know so many Victorians felt that same sense of dread but also a sense of palpable anger at our governments, who have approved almost a dozen new oil and gas drilling projects in Victoria over the past year alone. On 10 December, just a few weeks before the latest fires, the Victorian Labor Premier approved exploration licences for two new gas drilling projects in the Otway and Gippsland basins. The Premier last year personally met with the CEO of gas corporation Woodside. Just one day later Anthony Albanese put out another five new tenders to drill in our oceans just off the Otways, which have just been decimated in the fires. How is this acceptable as our communities burn? How dare they? I appreciate that many MPs' support for their communities in this place is real. The grief is absolutely real. But it is insulting to these communities to see Labor MPs cry and mourn in Parliament and then go off and meet with the CEO of Woodside and approve more oil and gas drilling off the coast of the Otways when they are still on fire.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members that this is a condolence motion. Irrespective of what your views are, everyone is entitled to make a contribution without assistance.

Ellen SANDELL: I am sorry, but MPs cannot go out and with one hand hand out meals at relief centres and then approve new oil and gas drilling with the other hand that makes these fires and floods worse. It is offensive. It is simply offensive to communities.

Burning coal and gas causes climate change. That is simply a fact. Climate change fuels more floods and more fires. That is simply a fact. What will it take for Labor and Liberal MPs to take this goddamn seriously, because our communities are on fire, and what will it take for Labor and Liberal MPs to

stand up to the coal, oil and gas corporations that are causing this devastation? This is a complete failure of leadership and, despite what some might say, it is actually not complicated. It is actually very simple. When we learned that asbestos was killing people, governments banned it straightaway. There is only one reason why politicians now refuse to ban the burning of fossil fuels: because politicians do not have the backbone to stand up to the coal and gas companies who line their pockets and run this country. In the last 25 years almost every federal resources minister has gone on to work for gas or oil or coal companies shortly after leaving Parliament, and the public deserves to be outraged about this.

A man has lost his life. Hundreds of people have lost their homes, their buildings and their livelihoods. Countless animals have been killed. Entire forests have been destroyed and entire communities have been devastated, and we have been here before. And who pays for this? The people who have lost everything are the ones who pay for it. The ordinary Victorians who have to take their kids to the hospital with asthma because of bushfire smoke and the elderly people who die during heatwaves are the ones who pay for this. Ordinary Victorians pay, and the governments let fossil fuel corporations get away with it. Actually, governments do not just let them get away with it, governments keep giving them licences and subsidies to cause even more climate damage. Coal, oil and gas companies privatise their profits and take the money for themselves, but the damage they cause we all pay for. It is a screwed-up system, and it needs to change.

Alex Kelly was one of the people who saw her community devastated in the Harcourt fires. Her home narrowly escaped the fire by just a couple of kilometres. She said:

How is it ... that my friends, my footy captain and my kid's psychologist be out volunteering to protect our homes, sports fields, schools and cafes from these wildly unpredictable ferocious fire storms when the companies responsible for them are let off the hook?

How is it indeed? Because governments let them. Coal and gas corporations should pay for the damage that they have caused. They should pay to rebuild people's homes, to rehabilitate our forests, for the healthcare costs and treatment for those who get lung cancer or an asthma flare-up from inhaling smoke and particles due to bushfire smoke and for the water supplies in regional towns that are now at risk.

Ordinary Victorians did not cause this catastrophe; coal and gas corporations did, and they should pay for it. Will the Labor government force them to pay for it? No, I do not think so. So while I very much support this condolence motion coming to Parliament today, I hope all those who got up and spoke, who mourn the devastation these fires caused, also take a good look at what the government are doing and the decisions they are making that are making this a hell of a lot worse, because we cannot have more and more devastation like this. Our state will not survive it.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (15:56): I rise to speak to the Premier's motion on these bushfires in her absence and thank her for bringing it to the chamber. I rise not so much as the member for Ringwood but as a part-time constituent of the member for Euroa. My family live and work and farm and grow in the member for Euroa's electorate and we have been personally deeply affected by these fires, and I will be speaking a bit to that experience. But in doing so I do want to acknowledge that in many areas of the state, be it the Otways, Walwa, Dargo, Mallacoota, the fires are still burning. Those communities are living with fear and living with exhaustion, and people are watching conditions minute by minute and checking warnings and watching the wind, not knowing what the next few hours or days will bring. For many people, sleep is broken, bags are packed, animals are stressed and kids are anxious. People are doing their best to carry on while knowing things can change very quickly. That constant tension takes a real toll, and it is important that we recognise that this is still unfolding for many communities.

The fires are still burning in parts of the Longwood fire, including on my parents' farm, so this is personal for me. My brother's vineyard in Upton Hill, near Avenel, was hit by fire on Thursday 8 January: 350 acres of vines gone, a thousand sheep lost, my brother's family home and my uncle's

home both destroyed, my nieces made homeless and then my parents' farm burnt and is still burning. What used to be productive land now looks like a moonscape. Fences are gone, infrastructure is gone and 20 years of work has disappeared in a few hours. Unless you have stood there and seen it, it is hard to understand how complete that loss is. For farming families, it is not about what has burnt, it is about what comes next. How do you feed stock when the paddocks are bare? How do you replant when all the income is gone? How do you rebuild when insurance does not and cannot cover everything and the emotional toll is already so high?

I want to place on the record my sincere thanks to the CFA volunteers, FRV firefighters, emergency services workers, contractors and everyone involved in the response and in the clean-up. You turned up in dangerous conditions, and you kept going. You walked towards the flames. You stepped into the danger. Many of you were working long hours, often not knowing what was happening at your own homes or with your own families. They made dangerous places safe, though, sadly or unfortunately or perhaps due to bureaucratic red tape, not safe enough for some. A thousand sheep, many of whom burnt – there is a horror with sheep that when they get badly burnt their hooves fall off. They are left walking on bloodied stumps, and the need for euthanising in those circumstances is immediate. Unfortunately, despite the fact that all of our friends, neighbours, family and staff were working on that hideous project, it was deemed unsafe for the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to attend to assist with the euthanising. That is unfortunate, and that is one of the many matters that I hope we get an opportunity to ventilate in this place as we look to the learnings out of these fires.

Fighting the fires is hard enough. We should be making it easier for the firefighters, providing them with the right vehicles, sure, the right gear and the right support. The difference these vehicles can make on the fire ground is real. It can be the difference between getting to a fire quickly or not, between holding a line or losing it and between protecting a home or watching it burn. I think we need to have a real look at the resourcing requirements of the CFA but also some of the red tape that stands between sensible burn-offs in the off-season and areas of the Hume Highway that simply cannot be accessed by fire trucks because of the barriers. There are a range of issues that need to be ventilated, and I support the Nationals in their call for a substantial review. Our firefighters do an extraordinary job, but they should not be asked to do it burdened by unnecessary bureaucracy, and they deserve the best we can give them. Communities deserve to know that when fires come our emergency services are properly resourced, properly supported and ready to go, and that means governments – all governments – have a responsibility to invest early, consistently and seriously in firefighting capability, not just after disasters and not just when public attention is focused on them. It is about preparation, not politics.

I want to acknowledge the neighbours, friends and community members who stepped in straightaway – people checking on each other, sharing food, water, equipment and shelter, helping with stock, fencing and clean-up. That kind of support is what gets people through the first days when everything feels overwhelming. I have to say chief amongst those is the member for Euroa. What a superstar – an extraordinary effort. Her own home almost burnt, and yet all of her thoughts were for her community. Then there are heroes like the Tubbs – it is no accident that there is a Victoria Cross in that family – the Mercers, Ash, my old schoolmate, and Scott Jeffery, the mayor of Strathbogie. There are just so many people who stepped into the breach. Some are only just beginning to take in what has been lost, and others are trying to work out where they will live, how they will keep going and how they rebuild from here. For some the stress has not eased at all because fires are still burning close by. That constant uncertainty wears people down. It affects sleep, mental health, family life and professional lives. We need to take that seriously and respond properly, not just in the immediate aftermath, but over the long term. I say this not as an observer but now as someone who has lived experience; unlike some, I do hold a hose.

Recovery will take time. It will need practical help for families, farmers and businesses. It will take proper and substantial mental health support, and it will take a long-term commitment to regional communities who have been hit hard and will be dealing with the consequences for years. As an MP

I say to these communities: we see what you are going through and we know how much has been lost. We all have a responsibility, irrespective of which side of the chamber we sit, to ensure that either as government or in our scrutiny of government we keep listening and we keep turning up for as long as it takes.

The SPEAKER (16:03): With the indulgence of the house, I would like to make a few statements in relation to the motion. Can I firstly thank members for their contributions this afternoon to both motions, and can I acknowledge the members who have been impacted both directly and indirectly in their electorates by the fires and the current fires that are still burning.

Fire has a way of stripping back things to a rawness and a truth. In central Victoria and across our state the recent bushfires did just that, taking a life, homes, livelihoods, wildlife and our environment and leaving communities shaken. What has been lost is significant. What has been tested once again, though, is our collective resilience, and what has been revealed is the depth of care people hold for one another, especially when it matters most. My condolences to the many people and communities who have endured a horrific and devastating loss and who continue to face a summer of risk and ongoing fires.

In my electorate the impact of these fires was felt deeply in Harcourt, Harcourt North, Barkers Creek, Walmer, Ravenswood, Ravenswood South, Sedgwick, Sutton Grange and surrounding districts. Like many rural communities, these are close-knit communities, places where people know one another and look out for one another. For these communities under threat of fire, to see it was deeply distressing. We lost over 50 homes in this fire. It was small in geography, but its impact was merciless. Harcourt, which was hit especially hard, is a special place, held close by many in my electorate and far beyond it. For those who do not know, the Harcourt Valley rests beneath the shadow of Leanganook, or Mount Alexander. Leanganook watches over the valley and its residents. Harcourt is known for its apple orchards, cideries and wineries, cherries, its rich gold rush history and its enduring resilience. It is a small town with a big heart.

I want to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of our emergency services, like everyone here knows, particularly the CFA volunteers who stood their ground in exhausting and dangerous conditions on 9 January. To the Walwa, Maldon and Baringhup brigades – and the member for Werribee might like to know that it was the Maldon takeaway that provided the food on Friday night – who were first on the scene, and to the brigades across district 2, who responded so rapidly, thank you. Their courage and tireless work protected lives and property. Local brigades from central Victoria were supported by strike teams from right across the state, as well as many other emergency services, and we are grateful for their support. Then there were the locals and volunteers who stood their ground and fought the fire with their own equipment, like the owners and volunteers at the Victorian Miniature Railway. They battled the fire front and saved the central township of Harcourt. This recently opened tourist attraction swiftly became an essential hub for relief, coordination and community support following the fire.

I also wish to acknowledge the leadership shown from within the community itself: the Harcourt Progress Association and the Harcourt Valley Community House, who stepped forward immediately, working closely with the Mount Alexander shire to ensure assistance reached affected families quickly and with care; the Harcourt brigade captain Andrew Wilson – no relation, Leader of the Opposition – who initially called for more trucks, then even more trucks and then more trucks again; and to the Harcourt brigade volunteers Michael Henry from Henry of Harcourt, who lost his orchard and his home, Jason McAinch, Remy and Bonnie Sowman, who lost their cafe and livelihood, and Andrew Mierisch from Victorian Miniature Rail, for their resilience, kindness and for stepping up in the face of adversity to support our community.

In the days and weeks that have followed, I and my staff have spent time at the recovery hubs in both Castlemaine and then Harcourt, and I was deeply moved by what I saw and the stories I heard – stories of loss, of fear, of raw honesty and grief. Beyond the firegrounds, there were countless acts of kindness

and generosity from people near and far. People opened their homes, prepared meals, checked on neighbours, transported and sheltered animals, and offered help without hesitation. That is the backbone of any strong community, and this is the Harcourt we all know. I also want to thank the volunteers from the Rapid Relief Team, Castlemaine Community House, the Indian Association of Bendigo, Bendigo Foodshare, Turbans 4 Australia, the Australian Sikh Support and BlazeAid, who have provided important practical support. And of course there are so many others who have been a great solace and inspiration with their support. To everyone who has played a part in the recovery so far we owe a great deal of love and gratitude. As has been mentioned, we also lost the Harcourt Coolstore and in it the over 90 businesses from across the region who lost their produce – the wines, the ciders, the craft beers, the apples, the pears and more. We will rebuild this central economic heart of Harcourt bigger and better.

I want to make mention of two brigade members from Walwa and Harcourt who donned their uniforms and stood alongside fellow volunteers while facing the devastating loss of their own family homes. That level of service captures the very best of the spirit of our volunteers. Recovery will take time, and for some it will take years. But as has been the case in recent weeks, my community and your communities will wrap their arms around each other for as long as it takes. Already Harcourt is rebuilding and reopening. Next month Harcourt Applefest will celebrate its 35th year on Saturday 7 March. It will be a powerful moment of renewal, an opportunity to stand with this community to celebrate its produce, its people and its determination to move forward together. Friends, colleagues, Victorians, I invite you to come visit Harcourt and the Castlemaine region. Pack up the car and take a drive or stay a little longer. Visit the award-winning cideries, small-scale producers and growers and enjoy a ride aboard the miniature railway.

Fire leaves scars on the landscape and on the heart – I have heard many condolence motions in this place in my time following significant bushfires – but it does not define the future. Harcourt and the beautiful Harcourt Valley will endure. Leanganook is scarred, but it is not beaten. And just as the orchards will regrow and bear fruit again, this community, like many others, will heal together and stronger than ever. Thank you, members.

Motion agreed to in silence, members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (16:12): I move:

That, as a further mark of respect to all those affected by both events, the house now adjourns until 5:30 pm.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 4:12 pm.

The SPEAKER took the chair at 5:32 pm.

Members

Ministry

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (17:32): I wish to advise the house that there have been some changes to the government's ministry and that a copy of those changes has been provided to the Clerk for circulation as necessary.

Shadow ministry

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (17:32): I wish to advise the house that the member for Caulfield has been elected as Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and I make an updated version available to the Clerk.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Police resources

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (17:33): My question is to the Premier. There are 367 fewer police on this Premier's watch. Why?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Laverton is warned.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (17:33): It is good to see the Leader of the Opposition could fit us in – that in her diary there were no scheduling clashes for the Leader of the Opposition being here in question time today.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I know it is late in the afternoon. It is no excuse. Members will be removed without warning.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker: relevance.

The SPEAKER: The Premier to come back to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: Of course we on this side of the house, who will always back our frontline Victoria Police, know that Victoria has the largest police force of any state or territory in the nation, and we thank Victoria Police.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Rowville and the member for Polwarth are both warned. You are very fortunate that I am giving you a warning.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question went directly to the Premier's cuts to police.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier was being entirely relevant to the question. She was asked a question about numbers of police, and she is only making the point that we have more police here in Victoria than any other jurisdiction.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has only been on her feet for a short time. I will give her an opportunity to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Of course we have funded and have supported more than 3600 new police. What we do is we back the men and women on our front line. We back and support the work of the chief commissioner, who is working incredibly hard, as he said, bringing about a new-look Victoria Police to get those additional police men and women out on the streets to prevent and respond to crime. I will make this very clear: we will always back the chief commissioner, not undermine them like those opposite.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to answer the question and the Premier has not yet dealt with the question. She has been evasive but has not yet answered the question.

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (17:36): Crime has increased 29 per cent on the Premier's watch, and 41 police stations remain closed or on reduced hours. Why is this government failing to keep Victorians safe?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (17:36): As we have demonstrated a number of times over the course of the last year, we understand very keenly from listening to many victims of crime and their families that the levels of crime are too high. We are backing the work that the chief commissioner is undertaking to get more police out on the streets. We have the largest police force of any state and territory, and the chief commissioner is working to get more of those police out on the streets to both prevent and respond to crime. But also we have made important changes to the law. Adult time for violent crime is about understanding that there need to be serious consequences for this new type of offending. Also new responses are needed, which is why the work of our violence reduction unit is so crucially important – tackling the root causes of crime while we are being very clear that there need to be serious consequences for those causing the crime.

Ministers statements: leadership

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (17:37): Leadership matters. It mattered last weekend on Sunday at Pride, standing with communities and showing that every person in this state deserves dignity and respect when the extreme right are attacking queer communities. It mattered in January when we saw bushfires tear through our state, devastating lives and livelihoods, and when Victorians relied on their leaders for trusted information – information that was keeping people safe and supporting the efforts of our emergency services. It matters too in mosques, in synagogues and in temples, where communities carrying grief and fear look to their leaders for compassion, love and support in times of division. Leadership is not just about what you say, it is about what you do and who you listen to, and it is about who you choose to stand with. Standing with One Nation at a right-wing misinformation convention and pretending you did not know Barnaby Joyce was going to turn up and join you as a headline speaker is not standing with Victorians. I make available to the house the flyer that has been circulating for weeks.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mordialloc can leave the chamber for an hour and a half.

Member for Mordialloc withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER: I would like a written apology from every single member on the government benches for what just happened, in my office after question time.

Jacinta ALLAN: Leadership is about trust. Victorians can trust that my government will always stand with multicultural communities against division, will stand with queer communities against hate and will always fight against misinformation that harms. Victorians know that it is only our Labor government that is focused on them, focused on delivering Victorians with new solutions and backing them with good public services, not the cuts that we know the Liberals always offer.

Police resources

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (17:40): My question is to the Premier. Why has the Victoria Police fire patrol unit been disbanded in the middle of Victoria's deadly bushfire season?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (17:40): I thank the member for Berwick for the question. I will check the information he has provided to the house with the Chief Commissioner of Police, because, as we have learned on a number of occasions from this opposition, they are very prepared to put misinformation into the house for the purposes of question time.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, if it helps the Premier, I am more than happy to forward the email with the facts of the CFA calling for it to be returned.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I say that because I will take my advice from the chief commissioner, who has the largest police force of any state or territory jurisdiction – a chief commissioner who knows his

government backs the work of the men and women of Victoria Police and does not undermine them or undermine the work that they do to keep our communities safe. We will continue to do that work and back the men and women of the front line, not cut like those opposite did when they were in government – \$100 million in cuts to Victoria Police.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, this is an important question that the Premier is mocking. We are in the middle of a bushfire crisis. She needs to go through and –

The SPEAKER: Order! If members cannot raise points of order appropriately, please do not raise points of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (17:42): Isn't it a fact that the fire patrol unit has been disbanded and there are 367 fewer police because this government cannot manage money?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (17:42): The supplementary question was a combination of both the substantive question and the question asked by the current Leader of the Liberal Party, and therefore I refer the member to the content of those answers and repeat that the answer is no.

Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (17:43): Victoria is a great place to live and a great place to raise a family. It is a great place to work and, by God, we all know on this side of the house that it is a great place to visit as well. And on this side of the house we are focused on making it even better. Late last year we opened the Metro Tunnel – five brand new underground stations – opening up new connections to our world-class university and medical precinct in Parkville, to the St Kilda Road employment precinct and of course to the shrine and other locations too. Over the weekend the big switch timetable added more than 1200 new services to our rail network, giving more Victorians more options to leave the car at home and to get to jobs, education and the many special events we host here. But this is just the beginning, because our investment in the Metro Tunnel allows us to keep adding more services more often for many years to come – services that, quite frankly, without the Metro Tunnel we could not even contemplate. While we have been busy doing that, we have been making public transport more affordable for families than it has ever been before, with free public transport for under-18s now coming online.

Investment in transport is an investment in Victorians. It is an investment in Victoria's livability. But of course those opposite tried to block the Metro Tunnel. They tried to block the extra services that it unlocks, because they are always looking backwards, they are never looking forwards. They are always cutting, they are never creating. So while Victorians are now experiencing the benefits of the big switch, they will soon be wondering what switch those opposite will deliver. Is it a switch of leader? Is it a switch to One Nation?

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are not an opportunity to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: I uphold the point of order. The minister to come back to her ministers statement.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Or is it a switch to MAGA messaging and murky misinformation?

The SPEAKER: The minister will not be continuing with her ministers statement.

Economic policy

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (17:45): My question is to the Premier. How much will Victoria's interest bill rise following today's interest rate increase?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House can leave the chamber for half an hour. The member for Rowville can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Minister for Health and member for Rowville withdrew from chamber.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, on your previous ruling that members are to provide a written apology for using props, may I ask that the manager of government business also provide the same written apology.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. The Premier to answer the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (17:46): With today's announcement by the Reserve Bank of Australia that following their meeting they have made a decision to increase the interest rate of the nation, my thoughts today are with those working people and families who are deeply concerned about what this means for them and their household budgets, and that is why the last thing that those families need now is cuts to public services, cuts to hospitals, cuts to schools – cuts to the things that they rely on.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I would ask the Premier, on relevance, to deal with the substance of the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has only been on her feet for a short time. I will give her an opportunity to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Which is why too, in understanding that in recent years the fluctuations in interest rates have put real pressure on household budgets, we have worked hard to provide support when we can, whether it is through the programs in our schools to help families to save at schools. Just this year, logos are out on shorts and pants and skirts and socks – one way to help families save. We are always looking at ways that we can, as a state government, support families with real and meaningful cost-of-living support.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, we are nearly halfway through the response time and the Premier has not dealt with the substance of the question.

Ben Carroll: On the point of order, Speaker, the Premier has dealt with the substance of the question. The question went to the interest rate rise delivered today by the Reserve Bank. The Premier made a very strong commitment that under her government there will not be cuts to services.

The SPEAKER: The Premier to continue, bearing in mind the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: I am, Speaker, and I will not disappoint the member for Brighton and ensure that I do come back to directly answer the question. As I say, I am doing so because the interest rate rise has a material impact on households, and that is our focus. And when questions are asked about the Victorian budget, we are always looking at ways to invest in the things that matter for families, to help them save time in terms of getting to work but also to ease the cost-of-living pressures. And it is in that context –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, we are now 2 minutes into the response and the substance of the question has not been dealt with.

The SPEAKER: You do not need to elaborate on your point of order, Manager of Opposition Business. I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question. The Premier will be relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: It is in that context, because those investments matter and you cannot make those investments when you have got an \$11 billion black hole. That would only mean cuts that the Leader of the Opposition has committed to.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, sledging is not a response. The Premier is not responding to the question.

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will raise his points of order appropriately.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Premier will come to order. Do you wish to continue to answer the question, Premier?

Jacinta ALLAN: Speaker, I do. The Leader of the Opposition is now saying it is not an \$11 billion black hole. I think Victorians deserve to know what is the black hole –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier to cease interjecting across the table. The Manager of Opposition Business looks to raise another point of order. I assume it is the same point of order that he has raised three times in a row. The Premier will come back to answering the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: In terms of the Victorian budget, we will continue to look at ways to provide families with that support they need. It is going to be clear from today's interest rate rise that there is going to be greater concern and greater stress on families, so we will continue to look at ways to make important investments through the Victorian budget – the power saving bonus, support at schools and investment in good public services.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier at no time has dealt with the substance of the question, and you have asked her three times to go to the substance of the question.

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question. The Premier was being relevant in referring to the interest rate rise. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (17:51): Premier, how many police officers can be employed with the money which will go to paying this government's increased interest bill?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (17:51): The Leader of the Opposition is making some assumptions there. We will never cut \$100 million, like those opposite did, from the Victoria Police budget. We will only back the men and women of Victoria Police.

Ministers statements: bushfires

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (17:52): I rise in respect for the incredible contributions of our emergency services this summer. On 9 January we saw catastrophic fire conditions across Victoria with over 200 fires in a day, conditions like Black Saturday and Black Summer, catastrophic and extreme conditions our emergency services told us would make fires uncontrollable – over 435,000 hectares burnt, hundreds of homes destroyed, farmland turned to ash and, tragically, one life lost, Max Hobson.

In these extreme conditions we saw the best of Victorians. Volunteer and career personnel came together to protect life and property. Communities acted on the advice. Thousands made the brave and the right decision to leave. Victorians' combined efforts saved so many lives. Our emergency services have done an extraordinary job keeping communities safe this summer, and this government will never undermine their incredible and life-saving work. Their hard work has been rewarded with the news that every single fire has now been contained.

But with bushfires increasing in frequency and intensity, the work does not end here. Every fire offers an opportunity to learn more. That is why we have announced a review of this season's fires by the inspector-general for emergency management Dr Emily Phillips. The IGEM was established as an independent agency by a previous coalition government, yet its integrity is now undermined by the shadow minister as 'IGEM marking his own homework'. Perhaps those opposite need to take their own advice, do some homework and recognise that the IGEM is a woman and independent.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Manager of Opposition Business, if you rise to make a point or order, I ask you not to interject before you do so.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are not an opportunity to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: I ask the minister to come back to her ministers statement without attacking the opposition.

Vicki WARD: We should not have oppositions reading straight from Donald Trump's playbook, attacking independent authorities, spreading furrphies and parodying MAGA slogans.

The SPEAKER: The minister will resume her seat. The minister has concluded her statement.

Country Fire Authority

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (17:54): My question is to the Premier. On 18 January the Premier falsely claimed that:

There has been no cut to funding for the CFA, it has only increased year-on-year ...

Why did the Premier gaslight my community when the CFA annual report shows consecutive cuts in the three years to 2024–25?

Ben Carroll: On a point of order, Speaker, that question contained a very serious imputation on the Premier, and I ask that it be rephrased in more appropriate language.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold that point of order. The question stands.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Emergency Services can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Minister for Emergency Services withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (17:55): I understand that the member for Euroa, like the member for Eildon, like the member for Bendigo West, like the member for Ripon, like me, are all representing fire-affected communities who went through some of the worst of days in January. The member for Euroa and I have talked about what it is like to be told that you have to leave your home because it is unsafe to stay there. I find it frankly astonishing that someone who has that lived experience would make the accusation of gaslighting fire-affected communities, and it is this sort of misinformation and behaviour that I am going to call out every day of the week.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, the question was very specifically related to the CFA annual report, and it is now the Premier who is providing misinformation. She needs to read the CFA annual report.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals, when you raise a point of order, it needs to be succinct. The Premier was addressing the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: The point of order went to the CFA's annual report. How could anyone walk into this place after having read the annual report – the annual report makes it clear that the 2024–25 CFA funding reached its highest level in five years –

A member interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: Grant funding. I know grant funding has been part of the misinformation campaign that is being run. It has increased, and the total income is up more than \$26 million. If ever there is a time for a line to be put under this misinformation, these lies that are being told to regional communities, now is the time.

The SPEAKER: I remind the Premier about parliamentary language.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, once again, the question was about the three years to 2024–25, which the Premier is deliberately avoiding. She clearly has not read the annual report, which shows cuts.

Ben Carroll: On the point of order, Speaker, page 154 of *Rulings from the Chair*, 'Relevancy', says that a Premier or minister 'may answer questions as he or she sees fit provided the answers are relevant'. The Premier has gone to the increase in funding and the other resources through grant funding as well. The answer is completely relevant by the Premier.

James Newbury: On the point of order, Speaker, sledging is not relevant.

The SPEAKER: I suggest, Manager of Opposition Business, that that applies to both sides of the house. The Premier is being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: The CFA today is stronger, better funded and better resourced under our Labor government. The annual report, in black and white, says that there is more funding for the CFA. The CFA board released a statement because the campaign of lies and misinformation was so great that the record needed to be corrected. This sort of misinformation does not only do a gross disservice to the member for Euroa and her Liberal–National colleagues. You know the people it really impacts? It is those country communities that we represent. It is those country communities that are in high fire risk areas. They do not deserve this campaign of lies and misinformation. What they need and deserve is our support and our backing.

Danny O'Brien: A point of order on the question of the use of parliamentary language, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: I remind all members that the words 'lie', 'lies' and 'lying' are not parliamentary language and are not appropriate.

Jacinta ALLAN: I will continue to reject this fearmongering. But really, for someone who used to be Barnaby Joyce's chief of staff, it is really no surprise.

Members interjecting.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (18:00): If that is the case, will the Premier come to my electorate, look our CFA volunteers in the eye and repeat her false claims that CFA funding has increased each and every year when we know the Premier has cut the CFA budget by \$55 million in real terms?

Jacinta Allan: On a point of order, Speaker, the standing orders require questions to be factual. I ask you to draw –

A member interjected.

Jacinta Allan: You can do your own points of order. The member for Brighton is perfectly capable. I ask you to direct the member for Euroa to reword her question to be based on fact, not lies and misinformation.

The SPEAKER: In determining the facts of a question or indeed the facts of an answer, it is very difficult for a Speaker to do so, as you would all know. If the member for Euroa has made an assumption, then I assume that the Premier will understand that that is an assumption and will dispute it as a fact if it is so.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (18:01): Again the member for Euroa has peddled lies and misinformation in her question. She has absolutely done it again.

Members interjecting.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on parliamentary language, the Premier has been reminded repeatedly not to use the language –

The SPEAKER: You do not need to remind me, Manager of Opposition Business; I am aware. Premier, I ask you not to use the language that you have been using in relation to that.

Jacinta ALLAN: The member for Euroa is wrong. She is continuing to spread misinformation. It looks like we have got a Liberal–National–One Nation misinformation campaign being spread right across regional Victoria.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier might be rattled, but this certainly is irrelevant.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: The member asked about visiting her community. I have visited her community and I have spoken to members of the Alexandra community, and I thanked them for the work they did supporting one another. I spoke to the Alexandra CFA captain, who spoke to me about the concern he had about the misinformation that was being peddled by some. If ever there was a time to put the politics –

Annabelle Cleeland: On a point of order, Speaker, I understand that misinformation is very important to the Premier. Just to clarify, the Premier did not visit my volunteers in Longwood or on the fireground.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: There has been only an increase to the CFA budget. The 2024–25 annual report demonstrates that very clearly. The CFA board has released a statement. Anyone who says otherwise is deliberately misinforming regional communities.

Ministers statements: major events

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (18:04): I rise to update the house that Victoria is the major events capital. We do not need to make Victoria great again, like some are saying. We do not need cues from Donald Trump or Barnaby Joyce. Victoria is already great. Do not take my word for it. Here is what the Veronicas said last Friday at John Cain Arena:

This is our first sell out arena show ever and it just makes sense that it would be in Melbourne because Melbourne, you're actually our favourite city in the world.

And they went on:

You know everyone always thinks we're from Melbourne and we're actually from Brisbane, but we always say we wish we were from Melbourne. We wish.

We have just finished the biggest ever grand slam in the history of all grand slams, not just the Australian one; the biggest ever grand prix at Albert Park in the history of the grand prix at Albert Park; and the biggest ever Australian Open golf in the tournament's history. But, sure, let us go back to the dark old days – or the good old days, apparently, according to some – pre 2014, to make Victoria

great again. The Australian Open attendance was less than half the size of the Australian Open attendance now. The grand prix was almost 150,000 people less than what it is today. The Australian Open golf? We did not even have it. And the tourism spend was 42 per cent of what it is today.

But we are not stopping there. Because of this Premier, we secured the NBA last year and we have secured the NFL this year for a long-term deal. Thanks to our government, we have secured the Australian Open until 2046, the grand prix until 2037 and the grand final until 2059. Do you know what else? We made it easier for Victorians to get there because we made public transport free during summer. While those opposite look to Donald Trump and Barnaby Joyce for inspiration, we are inspired by Victorians, and every other global city is inspired by Melbourne in major events.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, a third minister in a row has misused their ministers statement.

The SPEAKER: The minister has concluded his statement.

Country Fire Authority

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (18:06): My question is to the Premier. In a radio interview on 20 January the Minister for Emergency Services said, in relation to CFA funding:

It's just that it's complicated. Emergencies are complicated. Emergency services are complicated. We're focused on readiness, we're not about focusing on spreadsheets.

Is the reason the CFA budget has been cut by \$55 million in real terms since 2021 because the government has taken its eye off the spreadsheets?

Jacinta Allan: On a point of order, Speaker, I refer you to my previous point of order about questions being factual. As you ruled on that point of order, you said there was an assumption that is made in the question and I had the opportunity to correct that assumption, which I have done, in making it absolutely clear that the false claim that has been repeated in this question is –

A member interjected.

Jacinta Allan: Yes, I am making a point of order.

The SPEAKER: Premier, through the Chair.

Jacinta Allan: Thank you, Speaker. I was just looking forward to the opportunity to make my point of order. As I have done in answering previous questions, I have made it absolutely clear that the claim that is being made in this question and in the previous question is wrong. As such, I have pointed to the evidence that is provided in both the 2024–25 annual report and the statement from the CFA board. Therefore I ask that you require the member for Gippsland South to reword his question so that it is factual and accurate.

The SPEAKER: In relation to the Premier's point of order, it is the Premier's prerogative to answer the question in any way she chooses. If she wishes to discredit the question as not a statement of fact, she is entitled to do so. I do not uphold the point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (18:08): Thank you, Speaker. It is not a statement of fact, the claim made by the member for Gippsland South. I have read the 2024–25 annual report, and it shows very clearly that there has been the highest level of funding for the CFA in five years. The member for Gippsland South referred to comments made by the Minister for Emergency Services, who, can I say, has worked so incredibly hard and strongly over this summer period. She was making the point that, yes, emergency response is incredibly complex. I went to this in my condolence motion earlier, about the huge complexity that is involved in coordinating an integrated response across multiple emergency services agencies that have only had their funding supported by our government. I would have thought, with all the evidence – the annual report and the statements from the CFA board – that finally the member for Gippsland South and his colleagues would come to the realisation

that they are wrong and that their campaign of misinformation is doing them a great disservice. But worse than that, this misinformation is harming country communities. What does it say about a political party that they want to continue to deliberately deceive –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order on the question of relevance, Speaker, there is only one person who is deliberately deceiving. What is in the CFA annual report?

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

Jacinta ALLAN: It tells Victorians all they need to know – that they cannot trust this Liberal–National–One Nation coalition for their campaign of misinformation.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, how can nasty sledges be relevant?

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, Manager of Opposition Business. I ask you to raise your points of order as points of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (18:10): What is the CFA budget for 2025–26?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (18:10): I will remind the member for Gippsland South that we are still in the 2025–26 financial year, and I will remind the member for Gippsland South how emergency services budgets operate. When there is an emergency, what do we do? We fund our emergency services, like we did ahead of this fire season.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Nationals, I have asked you to cease interjecting several times. Now you want to raise a point of order. I ask you to raise your point of order and be succinct.

Danny O'Brien: The point of order is on debating. The Premier seems to forget that we have a budget every year that estimates what the entire government is going to be spending its money on.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. The Premier was being relevant and not debating.

Jacinta ALLAN: There can be no debate: the 2025–26 financial year is still not over. There can also be no debate that the 2025–26 fire season is not over. We provided additional funding to the CFA ahead of this fire season within this financial year because they asked for the additional funding. We have only ever increased funding to the CFA, as this year's annual report demonstrates, and we will continue to back our emergency services.

Ministers statements: education system

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (18:12): Usually Victorian summers are known for cricket, the Australian Open and temperamental weather, but this summer has been different. This was a summer of delivery: delivery of the Metro Tunnel, delivery of the West Gate Tunnel, delivery of new hospitals – one in Frankston and one soon to be opened in Footscray – and delivery of Labor's 100th new school. While Labor has had a summer of delivery for the future, for others it has been back to the future. Their very own Doc Brown, the adjunct professor, is back as deputy pilot in the DeLorean.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the government is just defying the rulings of the house. This is the fourth ministers statement that has abused the standing orders in that it attacks the opposition.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Education to come back to his ministers statement without attacking the opposition.

Ben CARROLL: On this side of the house we are all for the future because we know education is the single most powerful investment in our future. It was wonderful to be in South Barwon with Labor's great new candidate Rebecca Thistleton and with the Premier opening a brand new school in

Charlemont, one of the growing suburbs; with the member for Melton opening a brand new secondary college in Cobblebank; and with the member for Sydenham opening a brand new primary school too. Nineteen new schools in one year has never been done before. We promised 100, and we have delivered 100 new schools.

We have the biggest school infrastructure program in Victoria's history and the best NAPLAN results in Victoria's history. Our government has funded and upgraded every specialist school in this state. That goes to our values for the most vulnerable students in our state. As we know, 50 per cent of all new schools in Australia are built under the Allan Labor government right here in Victoria. While others talk us down, we are leading the nation when it comes to education. Others might say they want to make Victoria great again. We on this side of the chamber know that under a Labor government Victoria always will be great and under an Allan Labor government it will only get greater.

Constituency questions

Caulfield electorate

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (18:16): (1468) My question is to the Minister for Planning. Caulfield, Glen Huntly, Ormond, Elsternwick and Balaclava are all now subject to the Allan Labor government's ruthless activity centre program. Residents are demanding to know what is being planned in their suburbs. These activity centres are deliberately built around areas that are already quite dense. The process is moving, but unfortunately constituents have been kept in the dark about what is happening. Height does matter. It dictates traffic congestion, infrastructure strain, overshadowing and weather issues in suburbs and livable communities that are permanently being reshaped by the ideology. Will the minister finally come clean and tell residents in Caulfield, Glen Huntly, Ormond, Elsternwick and Balaclava exactly how tall the skyscrapers Labor is planning for their suburbs will be?

Northcote electorate

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (18:17): (1469) My question is to the Minister for Health. How will families in Northcote benefit from the Allan Labor government's reforms to enable trained GPs to diagnose and treat ADHD in children and adults? In the inner north, particularly in school circles, people often share with me their struggles on the journey to diagnosis for either themselves or their children: months of waiting and angst to see a specialist, costs upwards of \$2000 for psychiatrist assessments and the pain of seeing a child struggle when they could be getting help. The current system is locking too many local families out of care when we know what a difference early intervention and support can make. That is why our Labor government is changing the system so GPs can train to expand their scope of practice to safely diagnose, treat and prescribe medication for ADHD. It makes life that little bit easier for people just wanting the best for themselves and their families.

Euroa electorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (18:18): (1470) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. Will the minister back AusNet's \$40.5 million BN11 express feeder line and actively support its submission to the Australian Energy Regulator so people in my region can finally have a safe and reliable electricity supply? For years, long before the Longwood bushfires, families and businesses across the region have endured repeated outages, damaging power surges and ongoing voltage drops. During recent outages in temperatures exceeding 40 degrees residents were left without cooling, refrigeration or communications. Emergency call-outs went unanswered, telecommunications failed alongside the power and people could not contact emergency services, family or support. Young children, older residents and vulnerable people were put at risk. This is a public safety failure. Without meaningful investment, this region will remain economically constrained, socially disadvantaged and increasingly unsafe as climate risks intensify. Reliable power is not a luxury, it is foundational infrastructure.

Sunbury electorate

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (18:19): (1471) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Minister, how many youth Mykis have been purchased in my community since 1 January? It was terrific to have the minister out just last week as we spoke to families about how the youth Myki will ease pressure on the family budget and of course encourage those under 18 and their families to explore all that our state and city have to offer. It was terrific to be able to chat with 10-year-old Sunbury local William Wheeldon as he secured his brand new Myki for free travel every day, everywhere. Whether you are travelling to the footy, to the Australian Open or to one of the many places in and around the city, in and around the suburbs or out into our regions, we know and understand that this will make a significant difference to cost of living. I look forward to the minister's response.

Prahran electorate

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (18:20): (1472) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. When will the government deliver urgent proper remedial work to Williams Road and Dandenong Road so that the Prahran community can have the safe, reliable roads they deserve? I have been contacted by a growing number of constituents across Prahran who are deeply concerned about the worsening condition of our local roads, particularly along Williams Road and Dandenong Road, major arterials into and out of Melbourne. Residents describe large and dangerous potholes, uneven surfaces and crumbling sections of road that are not only causing repeated damage to vehicles but also creating serious safety hazards for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. These are major arterial roads used every day by thousands of people, including families, workers and emergency vehicles. Despite repeated reports and temporary patch-ups, the underlying problems remain and conditions continue to deteriorate, causing dangerous conditions for everyone.

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (18:21): (1473) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources regarding the Allan Labor government's 100 neighbourhood batteries initiative. I welcome that the Victorian government is supporting the installation of a 25-kilowatt, 50-kilowatt-hour neighbourhood battery in my electorate of Wendouree. Minister, how will the Ballarat community benefit from a neighbourhood battery at the Ballarat badminton stadium? Neighbourhood batteries soak up solar energy during the day when it is plentiful and cheaper and discharge it during high-demand periods when it is needed the most, enabling more renewable energy and lowering power bills. Significantly, neighbourhood batteries also provide a resilient source of power during extreme weather events or power outages. This is great news for my community. I look forward to hearing from the minister and sharing the information with my community.

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (18:22): (1474) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, when will you request the department of transport to urgently undertake a road safety review into the increasingly dangerous behaviour of unregulated e-scooter riders in my electorate of Rowville, who are risking not only their own lives but those of other road users and pedestrians on local roads and footpaths? I raise this issue on behalf of a number of Rowville electorate constituents who have raised the issue of dangerous, reckless e-scooter riders and their increasingly erratic and dangerous behaviour, particularly in and around Eildon Parade and Taylors Lane in Rowville. My constituents are seeking support and action now to avoid injuries and to save lives. They suggest possible measures may include existing laws being enforced – that would be a change – e-scooter registration and identification examined, realistic penalties imposed for reckless and illegal use of e-scooters and increased police presence and enforcement in known problem areas.

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (18:23): (1475) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. How will the Lara community be fully informed and aware of their opportunity to have their say in the upcoming review into Geelong's bus network? The northern suburbs of Geelong are home to vibrant communities, with people from a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds. Multiculturalism is a defining feature of our community, with residents from many different backgrounds contributing to a rich tapestry of language and traditions. The diverse environment enhances the character of the northern suburbs but needs to be accounted for when we are seeking community feedback on important matters such as the upcoming Geelong bus review. With significant population growth experienced in recent years and more to come, this is incredibly important, and I look forward to hearing from the minister on this.

Croydon electorate

David HODGETT (Croydon) (18:24): (1476) My constituency question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. When will the train timetable on the Lilydale line be improved so that commuters are no longer required to wait 30 minutes between services during the off-peak period? The recent opening of the Metro Tunnel was promoted as improving the regularity of trains across the network. However, there are no timetable changes for commuters along the Lilydale and Belgrave lines. These lines have the longest wait times across the network during the off-peak period, and should a connecting bus be running 5 minutes late, travellers are then forced to wait exceptionally long periods while waiting for the next service. The Lilydale and Belgrave railway users and commuters deserve the same level of service as the rest of the network has.

Mulgrave electorate

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (18:24): (1477) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. How many commuters from Noble Park, Sandown Park and Springvale stations are going to benefit from the increased frequencies following the big switch? During the peak hours trains will arrive at each of our new Metro Tunnel stations up to every 3 minutes, and with trains running at least every 10 minutes between Watergardens and Dandenong stations, this is a game changer. Alongside free public transport for under-18s every day, everywhere, and free public transport for seniors across Victoria on weekends, this will save families in Victoria money and time. I look forward to hearing the minister's response.

Bridget Vallence: Deputy Speaker, I have a point of order on an extensive list of questions unanswered by the ministers. Despite having a break, they still have not done their work. I would like answers from my constituents on unanswered questions. Questions on notice to the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs: questions on notice 2994, 2993, 2995, 2996, 2997, 2998, 2999, 3000, 3001, 3002, 3003, 3004, 3005, 3006, 3007, 3009, 3021, 3068, 3069, 3070, 3071, 3072, 3073, 3074, 3075, 3076, 3077, 3078 –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Evelyn, could you maybe provide the clerks with the list?

Bridget Vallence: 3079, 3080. Questions unanswered by the Minister for Finance are questions on notice 3026, 3027, 3028, 3029, 3030, 3031, 3032, 3033, 3034. Questions unanswered by the Treasurer: questions on notice 2421, 2512, 2777, 2853, 2854, 2855, 2856, 2857, 2858, 2859, 2860, 2861, 2862. Questions unanswered by the Minister for Government Services are questions on notice 2763, 2764, 2765 and 2776. An unanswered question by the Minister for Education is question on notice 2932. Unanswered questions by the Minister for Public and Active Transport are questions on notice 2935 and 2936. An unanswered question by the Premier is constituency question 1442. An unanswered and overdue question by the Minister for Environment is constituency question 1458. I will pass that list for the convenience to the clerks. I would request that these are answered for my constituents.

James Newbury: On a point of order, I have a number of unanswered questions myself I would like to raise with you, Deputy Speaker. To the Premier, due in April 2025, question 1049. That is an adjournment. Due in October, a question to the Premier, constituency question 1299. Again to the Premier, due in November, 1359. Again to the Premier, due in December, 1393. To the Premier again, 1408. And to the Premier again – that is six questions to the Premier – 1450. I do note the Speaker wrote to the Premier about a number of those questions last year and they remain unanswered.

Bills

Energy and Other Legislation Amendment (Resilience Reforms and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (18:29): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Electricity Industry Act 2000, the Gas Industry Act 2001, the National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005, the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Act 2025, the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Act 2025, the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Act 2025 and the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (18:30): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (18:30): The Energy and Other Legislation Amendment (Resilience Reforms and Other Matters) Bill 2026 seeks to obligate the electricity distribution network companies to publish network resilience plans to ensure investment in network upgrades that reduce power outages. We are the first state to mandate such requirements.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (18:31): General business, notices of motion 9 and 54 to 56, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 7 pm today.

Notice given.

Petitions

Container deposit scheme

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) presented a petition bearing 83 signatures:

The petition of Residents of Eildon District and surrounds, and residents of Murrindindi Shire, the Eildon Electorate,

Draws to the attention of the House about the closure of The Container Deposit Scheme in Eildon by Visy.

Points out to the House

No suitable reason has been provided by Visy and there has been no further correspondence with the existing operator.

The residents of Murrindindi Shire are passionate about the Scheme being returned to Eildon, for community, clubs, mental health, organisations and individuals that used and relied on the scheme for personal or fundraising efforts. The Eildon CDS over-the-counter operation was the first to sign with Visy in 2023. The

operations at Eildon were essential to local groups such as, The Biggest Morning Tea, Eildon RSL and Lions Clubs, Buxton CFA, Buxton Progress Association and Alexandra Football Netball Club (AFNC). ANFC was subsequently the recipient of several recycling industry awards because of the collaboration with Eildon CDS.

The scheme in Eildon has been hugely successful in keeping townships clean, high in community support, and would have reached 2 million containers in just 18 months.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria investigate fully the reasoning behind the decision by Visy, and look to immediately reinstate the Eildon Container Deposit Scheme at the new site.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow on motion of Roma Britnell.

Heyington train station

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) presented a petition bearing 192 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that Heyington Station, located in Toorak, is the only Metro station in Melbourne without step-free access, making it inaccessible for people with disabilities, elderly residents, parents with prams, and others with mobility challenges. The station's steep stairs prevent fair and safe access to public transport, contravening the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002. This lack of accessibility isolates members of our community and limits their ability to travel to and from the city. We call on the Victorian Parliament to prioritize and fund the installation of ramps or lifts at Heyington Station to ensure inclusive, equitable access for all residents.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly allocate funding and prioritize the installation of ramps or lifts at Heyington Station to provide step-free access, ensuring compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002, and enabling equitable access to public transport for all residents, including people with disabilities, elderly individuals, and parents with prams.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Northcote electorate road safety

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) presented a petition bearing 720 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the safety risks faced by students and community members at two crossings:

- a) Darebin Road at Wilmoth Street; and
- b) Station Street at Collins Street in Thornbury.

These intersections currently lack adequate protections for pedestrians and cyclists and present a safety risk to those using public and active transport, especially school children.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call upon the Government to commission a traffic safety audit of these two intersections in order to obtain expert, evidence-based recommendations for treatments that will improve public and active transport user safety in these areas.

Climate change

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) presented a petition bearing 13 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the need to take immediate action against the causes of climate change. Climate change is a rapidly growing problem all around the world. Cities such as Adelaide have already been experiencing the effects and are facing multiple natural disasters drive by climate change, including various and more common heatwaves, and dead marine life on their shore. The rise in temperatures all around the world is not just changing us and our environment directly, but it is also rapidly accelerating the increase of various illnesses around the world. There has been

a surge in vector-borne diseases and EID outbreaks. To keep our world and mankind, we must take immediate action.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly achieves a minimum 20% reduction in statewide fossil fuel consumption by promoting eco-friendly actions and replacing the use of fossil fuels for energy in housing and factories with sustainable energy sources such as windmills, solar power, water energy and various other sources.

Cohealth

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) presented a petition bearing 466 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the cohealth medical sites at Kensington, Fitzroy and Collingwood that are slated to be closed in December due to ongoing funding constraints. We, the undersigned, call on the Victorian Government to take immediate action to safeguard the future of cohealth medical clinics, a not-for-profit community health service that provides vital care to some of the most vulnerable individuals and communities in Victoria. cohealth delivers essential services including: primary healthcare, mental health support, alcohol and drug services, homeless outreach, refugee and asylum seeker health programs and culturally appropriate care for diverse communities with a focus on equity, inclusion, and prevention. cohealth serves over 117,000 people every year – many of whom would otherwise fall through the cracks of the mainstream healthcare system. Ongoing funding decisions and proposed changes threaten the sustainability of cohealth's medical programs and workforce. Without urgent government support and commitment to long-term funding, these closures will result in leaving thousands without access to critical healthcare or presenting to already overburdened emergency departments. Every Australian deserves quality healthcare now more than ever, in the wake of multiple global crisis, growing mental health crises, and increasing inequality, Australia must invest in community health. We stand with cohealth. We stand for health equity. And we call on the Government to do the same.

Action:

The petitioners respectfully call on the Legislative Assembly to guarantee long-term, sustainable funding for cohealth, recognise and protect the role of community health in delivering equitable healthcare and reducing health disparities, recognise the current Medicare Benefits Schedule model and the mismatch in catering for the needs of community health practices that work with extremely complex and vulnerable patients.

Committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 1

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (18:34): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 1 of 2026, being two volumes, A and B, on the following acts, bills and subordinate legislation, together with their appendices. In volume A:

Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Supporting Stable and Strong Families) Bill 2025
 Crimes Amendment (Coercive Control) Bill 2025
 Electoral Amendment Bill 2025
 Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025
 Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025
 Justice Legislation Amendment (Community Safety) Act 2025
 National Gas Victoria Amendment Bill 2025
 Summary Offences Amendment (Begging) Bill 2025

In volume B:

Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Act 2025
 Consumer Legislation Amendment Act 2025

Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Act 2025
 Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Act 2025
 Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025
 Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Act 2025
 Justice Legislation Amendment (Vicarious Liability for Child Abuse) Bill 2025
 Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025
 Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Bill 2025
 Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety Complaints and Worker Regulation) Act 2025
 Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority Act 2025
 Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Act 2025
 SR No. 73 – the Powers of Attorney Regulations 2025.

Ordered to be published.

Documents

County Court of Victoria

Report 2024–25

The Clerk: I have received the County Court of Victoria Report 2024–25, replacing the version tabled on 4 December 2025, for presentation by command of the Governor.

Tabled.

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Alpine Resorts – Report 2024 – Released on 2 January 2026, together with the Minister’s reported date of receipt

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) – Report 2024–25

Country Fire Authority – Report 2024–25 – Released on 20 January 2026, together with the Minister’s reported date of receipt

Eastern Health – Report 2023–24 (*Replacement for copy tabled on 14 November 2024*)

Financial Management Act 1994 – Report from the Minister for Planning that she had received the report 2024–25 of the Surveyors Registration Board of Victoria

Fire Rescue Victoria – Report 2024–25, together with the Minister’s reported date of receipt

Greater Western Water Corporation – Report 2024–25 – Released on 24 December 2025, together with the Minister’s reported date of receipt and an explanation for the delay

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 136/2025 (*Gazette S720, 17 December 2025*)

Planning and Environment Act 1987:

Infrastructure contributions and development contribution levies – Report 2024–25

Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Alpine – GC267

Ararat – GC267

Ballarat – C257, C258, GC282

Banyule – GC282

Bayside – C196, GC264

Boroondara – GC282

Brimbank – GC282

Casey – C291, C303
Colac Otway – GC282
Darebin – C220, GC282
East Gippsland – C169, C172
Frankston – C156, C165, GC267
Golden Plains – C104, GC282
Greater Bendigo – C282, C297
Greater Dandenong – C230
Greater Geelong – C278, C457, GC282
Hindmarsh – C21
Hobsons Bay – GC282
Hume – GC282
Kingston – GC264
Macedon Ranges – GC282
Manningham – GC282
Mansfield – C56 Part 1
Maribyrnong – C191, GC282
Maroondah – C162
Melbourne – C447, GC282
Melton – GC282
Merri-bek – C196, GC282
Mitchell – GC282
Monash – GC282
Moonee Valley – GC282
Moorabool – GC282
Mornington Peninsula – C286, C312, C313
Moyne – GC267
Nillumbik – GC282
Southern Grampians – C61, C62
Stonnington – C358, GC282
Strathbogie – C85
Surf Coast – GC282
Warmnambool – GC267
Whitehorse – C257, GC282
Whittlesea – C251, C275, GC282
Wyndham – C267, GC282
Victoria Planning Provisions – VC277, VC278, VC303
Yarra – C329, GC282
Yarra Ranges – C212

Puffing Billy Railway Board – Report 2024–25 – released on 8 January 2026, together with an explanation for the delay

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012 – SR 152/2025

Building Act 1993 – SR 140/2025

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2003 – SR 144/2025

Casino Control Act 1991 – SR 137/2025

Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017 – SR 154/2025

Confiscation Act 1997 – SR 151/2025

County Court Act 1958 – SR 135/2025

Gas Safety Act 1997 – SR 145/2025

Human Tissue Act 1982 – SR 139/2025

Land Tax Act 2005 – SR 149/2025

Local Government Act 2020 – SR 146/2025

Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 – SR 141/2025, SR 153/2025

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 – SR136/2025

Public Administration Act 2004 – SR 142/2025

Road Safety Act 1986 – SR 155/2025

Subordinate Legislation 1994 – SR 138/2025

Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 – SR 147/2025, SR 148/2025

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 – SR 143/2025

Water Act 1989 – SR 150/2025

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 131/2025, 132/2025, 133/2025, 134/2025, 136/2025, 137/2025, 138/2025, 139/2025, 140/2025, 141/2025, 142/2025, 143/2025, 144/2025, 145/2025, 147/2025, 148/2025, 149/2025, 150/2025, 151/2025, 152/2025, 153/2025, 154/2025, 155/2025

Documents under s 16B in relation to:

Local Government Act 1989 – Ministerial guidelines for Councils relating to payment of rates and charges

Australian Grands Prix Act 1994 – Public access area declaration for the 2026 Formula 1 Australian Grand Prix

Triple Zero Victoria – Report 2024–25 – Released on 20 January 2026

Victorian Law Reform Commission – Artificial Intelligence in Victoria’s Courts and Tribunals – Ordered to be published.

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER STANDING ORDERS – The Clerk tabled:

Government response to the Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee’s Report on the Inquiry into capturing data on people who use family violence in Victoria (*Released on 19 December 2025, replacing copy released on 17 December 2025*)

Proclamations fixing operative dates:

Consumer Legislation Amendment Act 2025 – Part 3 – 10 March 2026 (*Gazette S743, 23 December 2025*)

Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Act 2025 – Part 4, Division 2 of Part 6 and Division 2 of Part 7 – 30 January 2026 (*Gazette S42, Wednesday 28 January 2026*)

Labour Hire Legislation Amendment (Licensing) Act 2025 – Parts 1 and 3 – 17 December 2025 (*Gazette S715, 16 December 2025*); sections 3, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29 – 24 December 2025 (*Gazette S743, 23 December 2025*)

Wage Theft Amendment Act 2025 – Parts 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 – 12 December 2025 (*Gazette S689, 9 December 2025*); Part 3 – 17 December 2025 (*Gazette S715, 16 December 2025*).

*Bills***Labour Hire Legislation Amendment (Licensing) Bill 2025***Council's agreement*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (18:38): The Speaker has received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Labour Hire Legislation Amendment (Licensing) Bill 2025 without amendment.

Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Bill 2025*Council's amendments*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (18:39): The Speaker has received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Bill 2025 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

Labour Hire Legislation Amendment (Licensing) Bill 2025**Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Bill 2025***Royal assent*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (18:39): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Labour Hire Legislation Amendment (Licensing) Bill 2025 and the Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Bill 2025.

Electoral Amendment Bill 2025**Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025****Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025***Appropriation*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (18:39): The Speaker has received messages from the Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025, the Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025 and the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025.

*Announcements***Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission**

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (18:40): I advise the house that on 15 December 2025 the Speaker administered to Stephen John Farrow, the acting Commissioner of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, the affirmation required by section 31 of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011.

*Business of the house***Program**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (18:40): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 5 February 2026:

Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025

Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025.

This is the first time I have ever delivered a government business program speech at 20 to 7, but nonetheless it has been a different day and a rather sombre start to the 2026 parliamentary sitting, with two very important condolence motions. Again, I just reflect on the many great contributions that were made across the chamber on recognising these significant events – that horrific terrorist attack in Bondi, targeting the Australian Jewish community, and of course the bushfires, which many speakers noted are still going, and it is only the first week of February. These are things that we need to hold in mind as we commence the parliamentary sitting for 2026.

It was also, I might say, rather beautiful to start the parliamentary sitting with a Welcome to Country. Uncle Andrew Gardiner gave a beautiful Welcome to Country today, and I think that reflects changes that we continue to see in the way in which we do our business here in the Parliament, off the back of having reached treaty with our First Nations people. We want to continue to honour these great cultural traditions that are offered as a gift to those of us that are non-Aboriginal people to embrace and accept as we move forward as one.

We have talked about some very difficult periods over summer, but it has also been a busy period, as I think the Deputy Premier noted in a contribution during question time, of delivery. Again, I look around the chamber and I look at my Labor Party colleagues, and I know many of them were out in their community celebrating a range of significant milestones. It was fabulous to be able to join with a number of members here for the opening of Peninsula University Hospital. I note the member for Footscray is in the chamber, and she had a fabulous community open day at Footscray Hospital on the weekend. The Deputy Premier also noted of course that the school year has kicked off, and we are celebrating 100 new schools built by this Labor government.

Because of the need for us to do what Parliament does best, and that is to have those very important condolence motions, we will only be debating two bills this week in the chamber. I did suggest, in the spirit of the beginning of the year, that perhaps the Manager of Opposition Business would see fit to just endorse the government business program. Let us see. It is an offer that remains on the table for the Manager of Opposition Business, because I have already explained why we are debating two bills and they are both really important bills.

I want to talk about my bill, the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill, and it is important also that I have the Minister for Equality sitting here with me. I will note there has been extensive consultation in the development of this bill, and indeed this is part of our government's commitment to people born with variations in sex characteristics, which was made a number of years ago through the development of the *(i) Am Equal* report, which was developed by the Victorian Intersex Expert Advisory Group. It also responds to Equality Australia's *The Missing Voice* report, which was released in December last year, in fact here at the Parliament. So this is a very important matter to be debated in this house. I might make the point that this is very uncontroversial, because all we are asking is that people who are born with variations in sex characteristics have autonomy over their own bodies and that where deferrable medical procedures can be deferred they are done so until such a time as that young person, or that person, can consent to it. I am getting excited because it is my bill, so I will halt there; I will not go further.

The second bill is the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. Of course, as the name suggests, a range of matters will be debated. I commend the government business program to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (18:46): I think there is a time clock for a reason, Leader of the House, so that we can manage our time, and much like the Leader of the House has mismanaged her time speaking on the government business program, the government have mismanaged their time in this chamber. Of course the coalition will therefore be opposing the government business program, because the government is not able to manage the time of this chamber. We have seen, without reflecting, some changes in the government business program between what was initially put and what we have seen. No reflection, Leader of the House, I say on record because it is worth acknowledging

that of course much of today was spent on two extremely important motions that almost the whole house spoke on with heartfelt support. Though points were raised in debate, almost the entire house spoke to the importance of those motions and supported those motions, as well they should at a difficult time for our community.

The government business program, as the Leader of the House acknowledged, includes two bills this week, and without anticipating, just before the government business program was moved, the Attorney-General did move a motion in relation to the scope of one of those bills that will be dealt with throughout, presumably, tomorrow, perhaps – the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. That motion, for the background of the house, without going into the substance of the debate – it is fair to note that the scope of that bill being considered on the government business program will be extended to include a matter relating to the Director of Public Prosecutions. That scope will be extended on that bill, noting that the motion that has been presented from the house exempts everyone under 18 years old, which was not briefed out by the government, and I note that at 6:30 at night that motion did extend the scope of that bill. We will of course be speaking to that bill quite strongly in terms of this matter and the rest of the bill. I can say it is mostly a non-controversial bill and one that should not be otherwise controversial, but this additional matter will require some discussion in the chamber.

The government has also listed the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025 for consideration on the government business program. As the Leader of the House said, it is an important bill and one that we will debate in the chamber. Both of those bills will be debated throughout the government business program this week.

As I said earlier, though, we have seen today and this evening the mismanagement of time in the chamber. At this point, just for the background of members, I would expect that probably we will see a rising of the house or a move to adjournment around 7:45. I know that lots of members in the chamber are keen to understand where we are on that. But on this government business program, the coalition is concerned and has been concerned for some time about how the house is being managed and the time that is being managed in this chamber. We have seen over recent weeks –

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

James NEWBURY: I will not put the Leader of the House's comments into *Hansard*, because I think that even she might, on reflection, think about what was just said and realise how petty that was. The coalition cannot support the government business program while it does not have a clear plan and one that properly manages the time of this chamber, so we will be opposing it.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (18:51): I rise in support of the government business program, which started with some very important activity this morning. For me, I can say, unlike those opposite, who characterise it as a mismanagement of time, my time could not be better spent than to acknowledge the loss and suffering of people in our communities impacted by fire, to acknowledge the suffering of the Jewish community in Australia who were subject to the most horrific attack. How could those opposite say for this place, on behalf of all Victorians, to acknowledge that pain is a mismanagement of time?

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I literally just said the opposite. On relevance, the member should not misconstrue things that have been said in this chamber.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. The member has the call to continue on the government business program.

Lauren KATHAGE: I will continue to use my time to support my community, and this government will continue to use its time to support all Victorians. In fact that is what this government business program does. It is about giving a voice to people. We are there with people who need a voice, and we are going to make sure that they can have their say and have their rights protected. We

see that in the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025, which is before the house this week. It seeks to give voice to people who have been put under suppression orders for family and sexual violence, people who have not been able to have the opportunity to tell their story – and not just for their benefit, because that is not how it works; people want to share their story for the benefit of the broader community. They have a right to tell their story. This legislation supports victim-survivors who are going on a journey, who have been through difficult times, and we are there with them looking for ways to support them.

Similarly, the Health Safeguards for People Born with Variations in Sex Characteristics Bill 2025 seeks to give a voice to people who probably cannot speak yet: babies and young children that are born with variations in sex characteristics. This bill is protecting them from harm that can come from misunderstanding, from perceptions, from old ways of thinking, and acknowledging that we would be taking away a choice from the baby, from the child, from their families. So it is right that the Minister for Health is proud and wants to speak about this legislation because it is really important. It is important, and the issue is one that I became more aware of in my workplace, working with somebody for whom this was an issue. It was through them sharing their story and speaking with me that I know how deeply and permanently this legislation will improve lives of Victorians, keeping people safe from harm, giving people a voice and giving families choices.

That is why I say that the government business program this week is clearly that of a Labor government, because we are focused on the people who need us. We are not focused on ourselves. We are spending our time supporting communities in Victoria who have been through the very worst, and we are protecting Victorians from going through the worst in the future. That is an eminently good use of time. Any references we have heard from those opposite about us being petty – perhaps there was something more important that the member opposite wanted to be talking about today, but I cannot think of anything. It was important for us to spend time thinking of our communities and thanking them for what they have been through with the fires and what they have been through with the horrific antisemitic attack.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (18:56): I support the Manager of Opposition Business, obviously, in opposing this government business program, but I am not opposed to the motions that we heard earlier today. I do want to congratulate very enthusiastically my dear friend and colleague the member for Euroa, not only for her contribution today and being able to get through that but for the work she has done since the Longwood bushfires and continues to do. Now that she has finally got a break, she is exhausted. So I wanted to congratulate her on being able to stand in this place and take part in that bushfire condolence motion.

I did only hear once, though, during that motion any mention of the bushfires up our way thanks to the Leader of the Opposition – sorry, the Leader of the Nationals. The member for Lowan also made mention of that. But we did have 70,000 hectares burnt. In fact we have had a number of fires since December. There was one in December. The Charlton CFA have been overworked, and they are still using their station that was built in 1931, which their tanker does not fit in. I called in there on Monday. They had a bushfire themselves on 18 December, and they are unable to access any assistance. That municipality is also still waiting on drought recovery money. This is a municipality, a local government area, that is large in geography but small in population and rate base, so any hold-up or inability to qualify for that kind of assistance from the state government really hits this community hard. And to be still waiting on flood recovery money is putting the entire council – the mayor and councillors – under enormous pressure.

I do think that the bushfire motion and of course the motion for Bondi today were appropriate. What I do not think is appropriate, though, are the bills that we have seen the government put forth today, the weakness in the legislative agenda and the poor time management in this place. This is something that we continue to see. As the Manager for Opposition Business has pointed out, and rightly so, we are big fans of managing things in an efficient way on this side of the house. That goes for budgets and that goes for time management and being productive. There are, with another interest rate rise

today, Victorian families and in fact families all over Australia who are going to continue – even more so now – to feel the pressures of the cost of living, which is just trying to make ends meet in this state. It is getting harder and harder. There is nothing on the on the agenda this week that might help to ease that.

When I saw the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025, though, I thought, ‘Oh, hello – crime.’ We might actually toughen up those tough bail laws, given that we have seen – and I spoke about this late last year in this place – an alleged criminal, no other way to put it, that went on a crime spree in Mildura, stabbing two retail workers. This was during the debate on the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025. They stabbed two retail workers, were bailed the first time, did not comply with bail conditions and were bailed again to appear on 28 January. Guess what, bailed again. So when I saw the justice legislation further amendment bill come up on the government business program, I thought, ‘We might have something here.’ Then I read the report, and there is nothing to help members in my community.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I move:

That the sitting be continued.

Motion agreed to.

Jade BENHAM: With my last minute, as we saw in question time, in the words of some of the greatest poets of our generation, ‘Welcome to the circus.’ Here we are once again. Honestly, I would have thought for the first session back we would have been able to manage our time much better.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on the first session back, the first government business program debate, I ask that you counsel the member for Mildura to come back to the government business program. She has been wideranging in her contributions, very few of which have any reference to the government business program.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member to continue on the government business program.

Jade BENHAM: Many have tried to counsel me in the past, Leader of the House; none thus far have been successful. But I am still a great believer in law, order and good management, none of which we are getting from this Labor government.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (19:01): I want to rise proudly to commend the government business program, but instead I find myself utterly mortified by the contributions from the other side. They have the audacity to talk about wasting time or time management, yet in the previous contribution we heard not one single word about the government business program. In fact the member for Mildura talked about the weakness of this program. Can we just have a look at what is on this program? Let us think about the people that stand behind the legislation that we are proposing.

On this side of the house we are focused on Victorians. We are focused on making their lives better, safer and easier. Those on the other side have openly said that they are objecting to this incredibly important program simply around some notion of mismanagement of time. Others before me have highlighted the fact that ‘mismanagement of time’ seems to allude to the condolence motions, but I will not go there. What I am really upset about is that they would rather talk about mismanagement of time and slow down the progress of these bills, because behind the government business program is a government that thinks about people. We are there to support people.

Let us have a look at what they are objecting to. They are objecting to the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025. Yes, it is a miscellaneous bill, and there are a variety of elements to this bill. What is incredibly important in this bill is the work around the Drug Courts: the County Court Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court. We need to extend those provisions. I will highlight that this wonderful institution, which provides consequences to people who are in court over drug use,

also, importantly, provides ways forward for them to go back into the community. That is what Labor governments believe in. We believe in the safety of our community, and we believe in helping people to contribute to that community.

The Drug Courts were first established under a Labor government in 2002, the first in Dandenong. In 2020 it became a whole part of the County Court. It is incredibly important. I have seen it at work in Ballarat, and it is there to support people in our communities.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is a narrow debate, and not on the legislation but on the business program.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I was listening to the member for Eureka. There is context on past legislation, but I counsel the member not to be debating the bill.

Michaela SETTLE: I do not seek to debate the question. I guess what I am here to say is that the content of this program is incredibly important. For those on the other side to object to it – the words were simply ‘a mismanagement of time’. I would ask those on the other side to tell the people that would be protected by this bill, those people that front the Drug Court, but also the people that have been born with variations in sex characteristics. This legislation is incredibly important to those people, and for those on the other side to again be focused on games of politics – talk about mismanagement of time. We will now go to a vote. We will waste yet more time just so that they can grandstand.

While that is happening, people in Victoria who need our care, need our protection and need our leadership are being ignored by those on the other side. They describe these bills as weak. The member for Mildura said that this agenda was weak. She said they were weak. These bills are about Victorian people that we are focused on, Victorian people that we will stand by and protect. We want to create legislation that supports those people in the community. Those on the other side want to play political games. They want to talk about weaknesses and mismanagement of time while there are people out there that have been born with a variation in their sex that need our support and need our help. Only a Labor government will give it to them.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:06): I am pleased to rise for the first time in the chamber for 2026 and welcome everyone back. I look forward to a very productive year ahead. I rise to speak on the government business program, which today started with the condolence motions, during which my colleagues spent a considerable time doing honour to the people of Bondi who lost their lives and also to the communities who have been suffering through the bushfires that are already upon us in January, which is so early in the season, and have gone through such a challenging time. As the member for South-West Coast, we have been subjected to the conditions, but I am very pleased that we have not actually suffered extensive bushfires like my counterparts here, particularly the member for Polwarth, who is my neighbour and has the bushfires in the Otway region, and of course my colleagues in the north who have gone through such terrible times.

But I am really very proud of the community of South-West Coast, because we have had our fair share of tragedy when it comes to bushfires. Not so long ago we had the St Patrick’s Day fires and of course Ash Wednesday and Black Saturday and many other times in between. We certainly understand the tragedy that goes with events like fires, but nothing could make me more impressed than what I saw on Saturday morning when a convoy of trucks gathered in the early hours – half past 6 in the morning – to take hay and supplies to the Alexandra area where they were desperately needing our help.

Fifty trucks left from Allansford at Eddie White’s property; his family hosted and organised the majority of that convoy. It was just incredible to see the farmers and the truck drivers and the community members who have seen this, like I said, too many times in the past just get organised and get the hay together and send it up north – 50 trucks. The week before, 70 went from the whole of Victoria that was not affected, and our region got 50 organised as well. For the last two years we have been through incredible drought conditions, and it is not over yet. For those farmers who just had a window of a spring to get a little bit of hay and silage behind them, to give away so much of it is

extraordinary. Thirteen trucks came from the Glenelg area. Dale Clark organised that, and Russell Cummings, one of our farmers and truck drivers, was very involved. So were many other farmers – farmers like Trevor Fry. He knows only too well – he runs a trucking business and a farming operation – how challenging it has been, particularly throughout this drought. But they just got organised and gave when they really have not got much to give, given the challenge of the drought is still upon us, and the costs will go on for a long time. If we do not get an autumn break, we are in real trouble. Also Ron Jelbart was there. Ron was very affected by the St Patrick's Day fires, which were eight years ago, but it feels like yesterday. The trauma of that fire on families like the Jelbart family was felt. Ron said to me that day, 'It's so much easier to give hay than it is to receive it.'

I want to just note the generosity, the goodwill and the incredible community that we have, who all pulled together, and the many others that I have not named that have quietly gone on, and all those truck drivers who worked all week but gave up their weekend, put forward their trucks, put forward their time and convoyed up to the north of the state to Yea, to Alexandra, to all the areas that were affected, to give hay. Thank you to the community of South-West Coast. You are an honour to serve, because I represent an incredible part of the world. I could not be more proud of the people there that I represent.

It is for those people that I represent that I should be standing in this place and able to say, 'I've been able to consult about the business program,' but it gets so pulled from pillar to post because this government is so tired, so arrogant and so disorganised. We had three bills we were debating this week, but just last night they pulled a bill because they did not understand that the condolence motion would take a long time, as it should. We are not seeing things like the child protection bill, which I was hoping to speak on because our children in the child protection system are so vulnerable and so poorly managed by this government that it is important to improve things. I was actually looking forward to a bill that may do that, but this government did not see it as important enough and pulled it from the program. How disappointing that we have bills that the government just tell us they are going to debate but our community does not get that honour to be able to be represented.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (51): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, 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, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, 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, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (27): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallenge, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I am deeply concerned that on a day when we moved an important motion on Bondi in this chamber, the front steps of Parliament are now covered with extremely antisemitic graffiti – many, many times across the steps of Parliament. People are sending me photographs right now. It is shameful, and it unfortunately shows that antisemitism is too alive on our streets.

The SPEAKER: The matter is one that will be raised with security.

*Members statements***Gavin Collopy**

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (19:18): It was wonderful to join in the celebrations at Balwyn Park last weekend to thank Gavin Collopy for his extraordinary contribution as president of the Balwyn Saints and Blasters Cricket Club. I have known Gavin for many years and had the privilege to work with him and witness his tireless work firsthand. Gavin first became president in 2010 and has played a central role in building the club into what it is today. When he started, there were just over three senior men's teams. Today the men's team is thriving, alongside a senior women's team and a vibrant junior club for girls and boys. Gavin has been truly the heart and soul of the Saints and Blasters. His leadership and commitment have left a lasting mark on the club and the community. On behalf of all of the local community, can I say thank you to Gav and thank you to his lovely daughter Zoe, who is always there on the cricket pitch. I am looking forward to getting out with the girls in a couple of weeks time.

Australia Day

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (19:19): One of the best parts about being a local member is welcoming new citizens, and there is no better day to participate in a citizenship ceremony than Australia Day. It was a privilege to witness the individuals and their families who chose to become citizens on Australia Day at Hawthorn town hall. Can I congratulate the Boroondara Citizens of the Year for 2026: Teresa Molella, who has been named for her outstanding contribution to community through rotary and who has helped raise \$30,000 for local community projects, and Dr Rion Ahl, who has been named Young Citizen of the Year for his work in youth education. Congratulations to both of these wonderful local community members.

Emergency services and essential workers

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (19:20): Today, as bushfires continue to burn across Victoria, we come together to recognise the extraordinary courage, resilience and dedication of those who have worked tirelessly to protect our communities during an incredibly challenging period. On the hottest day ever recorded in our state's history, reaching an unprecedented 48.9 degrees, our CFA, SES volunteers, firefighters, paramedics, police officers and emergency services personnel stood on the front line in conditions that tested the limits of human endurance. While most sought shelter from the extreme heat, these men and women ran towards danger, placing the safety of others above their own. They worked around the clock, often for long shifts with little rest, defending homes, farms, businesses and critical infrastructure. They faced unpredictable fire behaviour, extreme temperatures and exhausting conditions yet never wavered in their commitment to serving the community. Their professionalism, skill and bravery saved lives and reduced the devastating impact of these fires.

I also acknowledge the vital role played by community members: neighbours checking on neighbours, families opening their homes to those forced to evacuate, volunteers providing food, water and shelter and local organisations stepping up in times of need. These acts of kindness and solidarity reflect the very best of Victoria.

To our emergency services personnel and volunteers in Melton: we thank you for responding to and getting fires across the electorate under control. Whether it be in Melton, Toolern Vale, Eynesbury, Bacchus Marsh, Coimadai, Rockbank or Parwan, your service to the community never goes unnoticed. We are all grateful for your courage, compassion and duty, on behalf of our community and all Victorians.

Bushfires

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (19:21): The bushfires have taken a massive toll, and I note in the Premier's condolence motion debate earlier today the Premier said that we will stand side by side with affected Victorians and we will not leave anyone behind. I request the Premier to assist the small

cohort of fire victims of this summer in regional Victoria who are ineligible for any agency support because the fire occurred pre the major natural disaster. I understand that a natural disaster and a funding arrangement do not kick in until a certain level of property loss. I genuinely get that, and I understand it. There has to be a starting point. What I do not understand is when a natural disaster has been declared, which it has for this summer, those who have lost their homes through fire cannot then be included within the safety net. In other words, once declared, a natural disaster can be backdated to the beginning of this summer.

In the Ovens Valley, in a small bushfire on the 9 December, two houses were lost in an out-of-control bushfire. Leshya Perkins and Helen Harrington, both of Markwood, now watch all of the support that is afforded to the major fires literally pass them by because their fire was on the wrong date. I know there are rules in place for a natural disaster, but please, Premier, I beg you: if you genuinely want to support fire-affected families, reach out and include them in the support packages afforded to others. At the end of the day the funds required will be a drop in the ocean compared to the support that we need to offer to all regions. I ask that you be fair and consider both Leshya and Helen of Markwood to be eligible for funding. They are Victorians too. This is a chance to offer a hand up to those who desperately need support. We have an opportunity to assist families who fall through the cracks. I seek your assistance.

Niraj Lal

Katie HALL (Footscray) (19:23): Congratulations to my West Footscray constituent Dr Niraj Lal, or Nij, presenter of the ABC Kids podcast *Imagine This*. He has also been on *Play School Science Time*, and he has written a fantastic book called *Behind the Screens*, and it is a must-read for young people aged nine to 13 navigating the online world. If you want to learn about what sunscreen is, where snot comes from, how we control our feelings or whether they control us, then his podcast for kids is a fantastic listen too.

Footscray electorate truck curfews

Katie HALL (Footscray) (19:23): In the inner west over summer it was oh so quiet because the truck bans have come in, and I have had constituents tell me that for the first time in their neighbourhoods they have been able to hear the birds in the morning instead of trucks. So I would like to thank the minister and member for Williamstown Minister Horne for her support in getting 9000 trucks every day off local roads in Melbourne's inner west.

Footscray Hospital

Katie HALL (Footscray) (19:24): Exciting news is coming with the new Footscray Hospital opening in two weeks. This \$1.5 billion investment is just such an extraordinary commitment for the western suburbs and – *(Time expired)*

Police numbers

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (19:24): There are 376 fewer police since Jacinta Allan, the member for Bendigo East, became Premier. In my electorate of Bulleen home invasions are up and cars continue to be carjacked or youths crash them and sprint out of the cars. Out the front of my electorate office I am constantly having to give security to Victoria Police because these incidents in central Doncaster are happening all the time. In Manningham assaults are up, robberies are up, knife attacks are becoming, very sadly, all too frequent at Westfield in Doncaster. This matches the fact that we have a 29 per cent increase in crime under the watch of the Premier. The Police Association Victoria says we are 1400 police short in Victoria – 1400 police short. Stations are closing – in fact there are 41 closed or reduced-hour stations that are now in Victoria. That is the case under Jacinta Allan. Experienced police are leaving. The government is not giving the police the powers they need to do their job, such as strengthening bail laws. Wayne Gatt, the head of the police association, says:

If police numbers continue to drop, crime will continue to rise.

This is the state Victoria is in. This is why crime is up 29 per cent under the watch of the Premier. The only way to fix this at the end of the year is once and for all to change the government.

Waste and recycling management

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (19:26): Tonight I call on the Minister for Planning to categorically reject any planning application she may receive to build an energy-from-waste facility in our community. Members of the house may remember last year I raised this matter in the Parliament and as a result had a productive meeting with both the Minister for Planning and the Minister for Environment to outline the many concerns that have been raised by the community.

The community has indeed been loud and clear when it comes to expressing our views surrounding any future proposal. I have taken the time to listen to these views and consider them carefully. As a community, we say no to any approval which may come before the minister and ask her to strike it out. Residents have raised the proximity to homes, the possible pollutants, the type of technology that may be used, as well as congestion and noise of a future possible site. These are valid concerns, and they need to be heard. There is of course an upcoming parliamentary inquiry into the matter established by the Legislative Council on statewide energy from waste. It is an important and rigorous process. That process needs to be undertaken. Our community is a wonderful place. It has been my home for nearly 40 years, and I will fight for it today and every other day.

Crime

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (19:27): It is not normal. It is not normal to have graffiti covering key road signs, making it difficult for people to find their own exits on freeways here in Victoria. It is not normal to have sound barriers like on the Monash Freeway that are covered in graffiti all the way from the city out to Pakenham. It is not normal to have potholes all the way across Victoria and now in areas like the metropolitan growth zones, where the potholes are basically big enough to be pools, and the government failing to fix them continuously. It is not normal for police stations to be closed or to have hours reduced when we have got a crime crisis in our state. It is not normal for a government to spend \$30 million on a new police station and not put one police officer in that station to respond if someone calls 000. It is not normal for suburbs in Melbourne to have increases in crime of 134 per cent in 12 months. This is what happens when a government loses control of the budget and fails to keep our community safe. Through every electorate, not just mine, we are seeing crime go up across this state, and what I am going to say to every person is: it is not normal to see crime continue to increase and a government continue to ignore it.

Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (19:29): On the weekend Geelong hosted the Mapei Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race. Every year, this event draws thousands of spectators, and with all these eyes on Geelong, it is fantastic being able to showcase the best of our community. Thank you to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events for his ongoing commitment to and support for the race and the Geelong community. I also wish to thank and acknowledge Cadel Evans for bringing his vision to life, along with his amazing team, Jason and Karen; Visit Victoria; and the many sponsors of the race, which is broadcast to 65 countries across the globe. A shout-out to Visit Vic for their tireless work and support to move the Surf Coast Classic to Eastern Gardens in Geelong due to the bushfires. I also want to put on record that the winners of that race have donated their prize money to the bushfire appeal. Elite cyclists from all over the world compete in the race spanning the Geelong region. People line the streets around the course to cheer on competitors, and our waterfront transforms into a lively festival during this event. The economic benefits generated by the large volume of visitors is a huge boost for our accommodation providers, cafes, restaurants and shopping precincts. It was also great to see our new Crowne Plaza hotel open for the first time to visitors for the race. Everyone gets a chance to compete on the same course as the pros. To see their cycling heroes up close creates a lot of excitement in Geelong. The TAC People's Ride and the GeelongPort Family Ride have thousands of people riding the same journey.

Bushfires

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (19:30): After the fires we are working through into the recovery stage. The private landholders of health are now grappling with their insurance companies to try and ensure everything is covered and that for what is covered the payout comes through quickly. They are navigating government funding, and I do congratulate and thank all of those who have been working in the hubs to assist with that pathway. We are still awaiting the release of housing so that people who have lost their homes have somewhere to live in the longer term while they work to rebuild.

In terms of public assets I urge the government to provide funding for Natimuk Bowling Club, which was destroyed through the fires, and to Natimuk gym, a club which hosts some 400 kids in gymnastics and is a really important part of the community to get together and stay fit and active; they cannot use their current facility for a long time to come. Natimuk Field & Game of course was not destroyed, but it was hit around the perimeter and certainly deserves some funding support. We also need to see support for our CFA volunteers, with upgraded CFA appliances so no more CFA volunteers are on the back of trucks, and we want to make sure we have got enough fire sheds as well that are up to scratch to house those trucks. We need assurance that the Telstra tower will not go down and lose power again. We need assurance that there will be support for fencing along public land, 50–50, and we need a clear pathway for landholders to access that, and rebuilding of the dog-proof fence in the north-east of the state. I urge the government to support these programs.

Bushfires

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (19:32): I am very pleased to take the opportunity to thank some of the extraordinary members of the Cranbourne community who have assisted in the response to these terrible bushfires that have been afflicting this state this summer. I would like to start by firstly thanking Operation Veteran Assist and John Wilson, Drew Maddison, Lee Whitty, Eamon Hale and Stuart Couch, a man whose humility means he kept on insisting that the other names went before his. I would like to thank them for the work that they have done in going to the firegrounds. There is of course our local CFA. As always I am grateful to Cranbourne CFA, and to Mitchell Newman and to the team: thank you for your sacrifice. Our SES have been working tirelessly, the Cranbourne SES is a beautiful new facility that is bursting with amazing volunteers, and I am incredibly grateful to them. And there are the extraordinary Sikh Volunteers. We know they are in the member for Hastings' electorate, but so many of them live in my electorate and so many of them are the pride of Cranbourne as well. So to Jaswinder, Manpreet and all of the crew: thank you for your diligence in making sure you had access to the firegrounds and for the care. I am so pleased to hear them acknowledged so fulsomely across the chamber today.

Climate change

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (19:34): Each year the floods and fires and heatwaves get worse. Last month 434 homes were lost to bushfires in Victoria, and while they burnt, cars, caravans and homes were destroyed and swept out to sea in the Otways. Some families will never recover from these disasters, but Labor continues to throw fuel on the fire, approving just in the last nine months five new gas projects in Victoria when we know fossil fuels drive the climate crisis. These fossil fuel companies are raking in billions to pollute our air and water, creating the climate crisis and paying little or no tax. Our gas bills keep going up, and it is our communities that are left to clean up their mess when disaster strikes. In fact climate disasters are costing Victorians \$2.7 billion every single year, and it should not be like this. Taxing fossil fuel corporations properly would fund our firefighters and our emergency services. They would fund resilient homes packages. They would fund our communities to clean up and rebuild – and yet Labor lets them off scot-free because fossil fuels also drive their election campaigns, with the old major parties raking in hundreds of thousands of donations every year from the big polluters.

Pride March

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (19:35): The Victorian Pride March was held over the weekend – a powerful demonstration of visibility, inclusion and pride for our LGBTIQ+ communities. I was proud to march alongside the Premier, the Deputy Premier and many of my parliamentary colleagues, shoulder to shoulder with thousands of Victorians who came together to affirm a simple but profound truth: everyone deserves to be safe, respected and celebrated for who they are. The Pride March is more than a celebration; it is a reminder of the progress we have made, the struggles that came before us and the responsibility we carry as lawmakers to continue advancing equality and dignity for all. During the march I saw a friend and local St Kilda icon, the fabulous Dolly Diamond, whose warmth, humour and visibility means so much to our community. Following the march I spent time at the Victorian Pride Centre, a world-leading hub that stands as a beacon of support, connection and belonging. It is a place where people can be themselves without fear and where the community truly comes alive. I want to thank the organisers, volunteers, performers and attendees who made the day such a success. Events like this matter because visibility matters, community matters, and love always wins. I will also do a special shout-out to Rainbow Labor: you always do us proud.

Bushfires

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (19:37): Victoria has suffered catastrophic bushfires in all corners of our state since early January, and our deepest sympathies are with the people who have lost homes, pets, livestock, crops, wildlife, small businesses and livelihoods. Despite the ferocity of the fires, our emergency services courageously went to the danger. We thank them for their tremendous efforts: Forest Fire Management Victoria, FRV, police, ambulance and of course the volunteers of our CFA and SES. We have been fortunate so far in the Yarra Ranges, with only a few fires that were contained swiftly, such as at Seville East. While ensuring trucks and volunteers are on standby and monitoring risks in the Yarra Valley and the Dandenong Ranges, we have seen exceptional efforts by our local CFA volunteers of the Yarra Valley and Maroondah groups deployed on strike teams to help contain fires across the state, including at Longwood, Alexandra, Walwa, Cudgewa and the Otways. We thank them for their work, and we thank their families for their support. This includes Gruyere, Coldstream, Lilydale, Mount Evelyn, Silvan, Seville, Wandin, Montrose, Mooroolbark and Chirnside Park CFAs. Thanks also to volunteers from Lilydale SES, deployed to help, including after the floods at Wye River. From volunteers of Wandin CFA, doorknocking in Alex to help evacuate people in danger, to volunteers of Gruyere CFA, giving respite to the Terip Terip CFA, manning their station and cleaning their trucks, and to Montrose and Lilydale CFAs, delivering food and supplies in the weeks after, they are our true heroes.

Mulgrave community

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (19:38): I rise to share a heartwarming encounter with 95-year-old Hilda, a true Mulgrave treasure for approximately 50 years. Whilst visiting her home to assist her with her \$100 power saving bonus application, we discovered remarkable connections. Like my mother, Hilda was born in Calcutta and moved to Australia in 1969, but the surprise did not stop there. In a remarkable coincidence we discovered that Hilda and I actually share the same birthday. Meeting Hilda was a poignant reminder of why we do this work. We do it because we care about the people in our community and the diverse stories that they come with.

Australia Day

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (19:39): I also rise to celebrate the vibrant spirit displayed across Mulgrave this Australia Day. It was a privilege to attend citizenship ceremonies in the cities of Monash and Greater Dandenong, welcoming our newest Australians. I was particularly proud to attend the Greater Dandenong Australia Day awards, where the incredible team at SisterWorks received twin acclaim. SisterWorks was named Community Group of the Year, and its Dandenong Empowerment Hub manager Nika received the Community Leadership Award. SisterWorks has empowered over 2500 women to achieve economic independence. At their Springvale hub, up to 40 sisters gain hands-

on employment, from reupholstering iconic Melbourne tram seats to manufacturing equipment for Yarra Trams. I congratulate the entire team.

Hume City Football Club

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (19:40): I was delighted to join the Hume City Football Club community for the season launch on Saturday afternoon. This is a wonderful football club in the heart of my community. It provides pathways for soccer players – football players – in the world game from the junior rank boys and girls right the way through to the elite level, with the club knocking on the door of the proposed Australian Championship. Under the leadership of new president Ersan Gülüm over the last 12 months or so, this club has really put in place the building blocks for success on and off the field. I really want to thank committee members Ersan, Haydin, Moe, Hadi and all of the team for the work that they do in ensuring that young people in our community have a fantastic place with great coaching and great leadership development to play football. Thanks to Nick Hegarty and the coaching team, Josh Bingham and the playing squad, and also the sponsors, who make it all possible and who give generously to support a club that has been at the heart of the Turkish community in Melbourne's north for over 40 years.

Kevin O'Callaghan OAM ESM

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (19:41): Thank you and congratulations to Kevin O'Callaghan OAM ESM on his appointment and conferral of the Order of Australia Medal in the Australia Day honours. Kevin was a founding member of the SES unit in Craigieburn in 1981. He is a life member. He was an integral part of the establishment of the Craigieburn War Memorial and Remembrance Committee. I cannot speak more highly of Kevin's contribution to our local community and indeed his service to Australia. Thank you, Kevin.

Country Fire Authority Point Cook brigade

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (19:41): It is a privilege to rise and acknowledge our CFA members in the Point Cook community and their efforts in combating the serious fires across the state over the summer so far. I would like to acknowledge Chris Anderson, second lieutenant; Seamus Arch; Glenn Bowden; Bill Garner, the brigade training coordinator; Connor Hogarth-Clarke; Peter Howlett; Taylor Isaacs; Rik King; Doris Lang, third lieutenant; Hoikee 'Ricky' Li; Benjamin Loveridge; Angelo Magro, first lieutenant; Ryan O'Leary; Brett Pender; Graeme Prentice; Japinder Sandhu, comms officer; Brett Sausse – I hope I pronounced that correctly, Brett, I apologise otherwise; Renu Sindhu; Andre Smith; James Sun; Garry Sykes, who is on probation – congratulations and thank you for coming out, Garry; Peter Tester, captain; Karthick Thanigaimani, fourth lieutenant; and Emily Watson. They have done such an amazing job heading from the community in Point Cook out to those fire sites. I want to acknowledge your families as well and thank them as well because they assist you and make sure you can actually turn out to these fires, and without them you could not do the job of protecting Victorians. I want to acknowledge all our emergency services: the SES, FRV, Ambulance Victoria, police and all those volunteer communities who have assisted on the fires over this summer. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Italian Senior Citizens of Kingston

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (19:43): Congratulations to the Italian senior citizens club in Kingston, La Baracca, for their celebrations every Sunday, and congratulations on the funding of more than \$12,000 to improve their facility for training and for Sunday bocce tournaments under the SRL Community Projects Fund – a great result. Congratulations once again to Mary Pistone and everyone at La Baracca, the Italian seniors group.

Australia Day

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (19:43): Thank you to everyone – and it was such an honour to join the local member for Mulgrave – at the Australia Day celebrations across Clarinda district. Also it was

a privilege to welcome new citizens of the City of Kingston and the City of Greater Dandenong and to join the Australia Day celebrations with the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, the Federation of Chinese Associations and the Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian associations of Victoria, a great example of multicultural Australia.

South Eastern Melbourne Vietnamese Associations Council

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (19:44): Finally, congratulations to the South Eastern Melbourne Vietnamese Associations Council on its AGM dinner fundraiser. The event was attended once again by the local member for Mulgrave and a few mayors and councillors. It is such a wonderful organisation, serving thousands of community members in the south-east.

ADHD services

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (19:44): I have spoken with a local constituent this morning who, like me, was overjoyed at the Premier's announcement earlier today that GPs will soon be able to diagnose and prescribe ADHD medications to children over the age of six right through to adulthood. Having waited two years to see a paediatrician for her son, Liz expressed just how life-changing this is for families and children. I heard how being unable to access that support put unnecessary stress on the entire family unit and his teachers at school. Daily phone calls and emails from teachers are a constant reminder of their endless waitlist. Having the ability to visit their trusted family GP to receive a diagnosis and prescriptions will remove the many barriers individuals like this family face when accessing treatment and care. With positive flow-on effects for classroom management – supporting our students whilst reducing teacher burnout – this is an absolute game changer. I am proud to be part of a government that supports families and individuals to thrive, strengthening our healthcare options and giving Victorians more accessible health care and a stronger community. This announcement will lift the burden on families. It will relieve stress and relieve financial pressures, and people will no longer have to wait years to see a paediatrician, a psychologist or a psychiatrist. And as a former teacher, I have seen families have to go through this in the state government system and at special developmental schools. It is painful for families and painful for teachers, and it often stalls the education of children. This is an absolute game changer.

Peninsula University Hospital

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (19:46): I am a bit surprised the member for Frankston did not make this announcement, but a couple of weeks ago I had the honour of attending the opening of what used to be the Frankston hospital and now is the Peninsula University Hospital. For all the work that you did, member for Frankston, congratulations on making that happen. The Premier was there, the Minister for Health was there and everyone that helped build the place. It really is a stunning hospital, one of nine that have been opened recently. What I love about it too are the small details that make it such a beautiful healing space. I hope I never have to go there, but I know I will be in good hands if I do.

Victorian Bushfire Appeal

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (19:46): A couple of weeks ago I attended Emu Plains Market to support this summer's CFA fundraising for the Victorian Bushfire Appeal. Captain James and I had a great chat about what it was like to be out in the fire zone, and it was pretty horrific. Normally they would make \$1500 to \$1800, but on the day they made over \$6500, and I thank the community for their generosity.

Wildlife road strike

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (19:47): In unfortunate news, we have had 17 koalas killed on the peninsula so far this year. There are yellow signs saying, 'Koalas in the area. Please be careful,' especially around O'Neill's Road and Western Port Highway. Keep your eyes out. Please do not kill any more.

Pride March

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (19:47): Lastly, I had a wonderful time on Sunday at the Pride March. I am very honoured to be able to support the LGBTQIA+ community and always do. You are loved and heard and supported.

Yan Yean electorate

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (19:47): There are four ways that we are making life easier for busy families in the morning. Number one, more trains at peak time from Wandong, Wallan and Donnybrook. So if your daughter cannot find her hat before school, you have got options. You have got more trains to catch and more seats. I caught the train this morning. Two, a dedicated school bus from Donnybrook to our new college, Ngayuk College, from different estates. There are multiple buses. Three, we are improving the flow of traffic on Watson Street. When I get stuck in the traffic in the morning on Watson Street, I feel just as frustrated as everyone else, so I am so glad we have got extra works coming to upgrade the intersection with the Northern Highway. And number four, we are building or funding kindergartens on school sites at Muyan Primary School, Our Lady of the Way and Mernda Hills Christian College. Thank you for that.

Bills

Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Bill 2025

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 2, lines 2 and 3, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

“(1) This Part and sections 11(2) and 11(3) come into operation on the day after the day on which this Act receives the Royal Assent.

(1A) The remaining provisions of this Act come into operation on a day or days to be proclaimed.”.
2. Clause 2, line 4, omit “of this Act” and insert “referred to in subsection (1A)”.
3. Clause 5, line 26, after “ecological” insert “processes, and ecological”.
4. Clause 9, omit this clause.
5. Clause 11, line 20, before “After” insert “(1)”.
6. Clause 11, after line 22, insert –

“(2) After section 6(2)(j) of the Principal Act **insert** –

“(ja) provide that any use or development of land is conditional on the provision of an affordable housing contribution;”.

(3) After section 6(2) of the Principal Act **insert** –

“(2AA) For the purposes of section 6(2)(ja), an affordable housing contribution may be imposed as a condition on a permit if –

(a) the relevant planning scheme identifies a need for affordable housing in the area; and

(b) the application exceeds a threshold prescribed in the regulations that is expressed in terms of number of dwellings or value of development.

(2AAB) An affordable housing contribution is to be in the prescribed form, including a monetary contribution in lieu of the provision of affordable housing.

(2AAC) The regulations may prescribe the maximum affordable housing contributions that can be required under a planning scheme, including the application of differing maximums by reference to different zones and overlays.

(2AAD) If a monetary contribution is made to acquit a requirement specified in a planning scheme for the provision of an affordable housing contribution, the monetary contribution must be collected by the responsible authority for the proposed use or development of land.

(2AAE) Despite anything to the contrary in any other Act (other than the **Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006**), any monetary contribution collected by a responsible authority under subsection (2AAD) must be spent on a project to construct new affordable housing in the municipal district in which it is collected.

(2AAF) A responsible authority must keep proper and separate accounts and records of any monetary contribution collected under subsection (2AAD) and how that monetary contribution was spent on the provision of affordable housing in the municipal district.

(2AAG) The accounts and records required under subsection (2AAF) must be kept in accordance with the **Local Government Act 2020**.”.

7. Clause 39, omit this clause.
8. Clause 48, omit this clause.
9. Clause 49, omit this clause.
10. Clause 86, line 14, before “A planning scheme” insert “(1)”.
11. Clause 86, after line 16 insert –

“(2) A responsible authority must give notice of a specified type 2 application in compliance with this Division.”.
12. Clause 86, page 89, lines 2 and 3, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
13. Clause 86, page 89, line 16, omit “50D” and insert “50B(2)”.
14. Clause 86, page 89, line 22, omit “50D(1)” and insert “50B(2)”.
15. Clause 86, page 89, line 30, omit “50D(1)” and insert “50B(2)”.
16. Clause 86, page 90, line 11, omit “50D” and insert “50B(2)”.
17. Clause 102, line 4, omit “50D(1)” and insert “50B(2)”.
18. Clause 102, line 19, omit “50D(1)” and insert “50B(2)”.
19. Clause 145, page 140, line 32, omit “50D” and insert “50B(2)”.
20. Clause 232, page 216, lines 1 to 7, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
21. Part heading preceding clause 233, omit this heading.
22. Clause 233, omit this clause.
23. Clause 234, omit this clause.
24. Clause 235, omit this clause.
25. Division heading preceding clause 249, omit this heading.
26. Clause 249, omit this clause.
27. Division heading preceding clause 255, omit this heading.
28. Clause 255, omit this clause.
29. Clause 256, lines 8 to 10, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
30. Clause 257, lines 16 to 18, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
31. Clause 258, lines 23 to 25, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
32. Clause 259, lines 31 and 32, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
33. Clause 261, line 9, omit ‘1AA’;’ and insert ‘1AA’.’.
34. Clause 261, lines 10 and 11, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
35. Clause 262, lines 18 and 19, omit all words and expressions on these lines.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): Before the house considers these amendments, I direct the attention of the house to amendments 1, 2, 5 and 6 made by the Legislative Council. Following examination, the Speaker is of the opinion that the amendments are a direct infringement of the privileges of the house, as they seek to impose a tax. Under the Constitution Act 1975, a new tax can only originate in the Assembly.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (19:50): I move:

That:

- (1) Amendments 3 to 4 and 7 to 35 be agreed to.
- (2) The Assembly refuses to entertain amendments 1, 2, 5 and 6 as they infringe the privileges of the Assembly.
- (3) The Assembly makes the following further amendments to the bill:
 1. Clause 2, lines 2 and 3, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
 “(1) This Part and section 11(2) and (3) come into operation on the day after the day on which this Act receives the Royal Assent.
 (1A) The remaining provisions of this Act come into operation on a day or days to be proclaimed.”.
 2. Clause 2, line 4, omit “of this Act” and insert “referred to in subsection (1A)”.
 3. Clause 11, line 20, before “After” insert “(1)”.
 4. Clause 11, after line 22, insert –
 ‘(2) After section 6(2)(j) of the Principal Act **insert** –
 “(ja) provide that any use or development of land is conditional on the provision of an affordable housing contribution;”.
 (3) After section 6(2) of the Principal Act **insert** –
 “(2AA) For the purposes of section 6(2)(ja), an affordable housing contribution may be imposed as a condition on a permit if –
 (a) the relevant planning scheme identifies a need for affordable housing in the area;
 and
 (b) the application exceeds a threshold prescribed in the regulations that is expressed in terms of number of dwellings or value of development.
 (2AAB) An affordable housing contribution is to be in the prescribed form, including a monetary contribution in lieu of the provision of affordable housing.
 (2AAC) The regulations may prescribe the maximum affordable housing contributions that can be required under a planning scheme, including the application of differing maximums by reference to different zones and overlays.
 (2AAD) If a monetary contribution is made to acquit a requirement specified in a planning scheme for the provision of an affordable housing contribution, the monetary contribution must be collected by the responsible authority for the proposed use or development of land.
 (2AAE) Despite anything to the contrary in any other Act (other than the **Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006**), any monetary contribution collected by a responsible authority under subsection (2AAD) must be spent on a project to construct new affordable housing in the municipal district in which it is collected.
 (2AAF) A responsible authority must keep proper and separate accounts and records of any monetary contribution collected under subsection (2AAD) and how that monetary contribution was spent on the provision of affordable housing in the municipal district.
 (2AAG) The accounts and records required under subsection (2AAF) must be kept in accordance with the **Local Government Act 2020**.”.
5. Clause 86, page 89, line 4, omit “(2)”.

I would like to make clear that the proposed amendments would, using the authority of the Legislative Assembly, give effect to what was in fact agreed to in the other place. The government supported these amendments in the other place and continues to support these amendments being made to the Planning and Environment Act 1987 through the bill. I note that these amendments were carried on the voices in the other place and were not opposed.

In summary, the amendment establishes a new head of power that enables planning schemes to make any use or development of land conditional on the provision of an affordable housing contribution. This is in line with action four of *Plan for Victoria*, which seeks to increase social and affordable

housing across the state, including through legislative reform. The details, regulations and operation of this provision will be worked through with the planning regulation advisory committee, made up of stakeholders, councils and experts who deal with the planning system day to day.

I take this opportunity to thank all those members who contributed to the passage of this legislation, including members of the crossbench in the other place. I want to thank them for their thorough consideration of the bill and their willingness to work with government to ensure its passage and support much-needed planning reforms here in Victoria that will get more homes built right across Victoria.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (19:55): I want to start by saying that the government gave an ironclad commitment that this set of amendments would not be dealt with tonight. I am appalled that the government would break their word on the first day of the –

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: No, no, no. Government members, when you give your word in terms of managing the chamber – there is a lot of management of this chamber which is dealt with in good faith, and for the government on this basic principle on day one of the year to break their word is appalling. It is absolutely appalling. The Leader of the House personally told me not 1 hour ago that these amendments would not be dealt with tonight. I offered to facilitate and said we could deal with them quickly because in my view we would not be calling a division, and we will not be calling a division. But in good faith I offered to assist with the management of those amendments. So how sneaky could you possibly be on a non-controversial matter?

Sonya Kilkenny: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, we have a very narrow debate here on the amendments, and I would ask you to ask the member to come back directly to the amendments that are before the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): I ask the member for Brighton to come back to the amendments.

James NEWBURY: I am speaking to the amendments, Acting Speaker. These amendments that I am holding are the amendments that the Leader of the House gave an ironclad commitment would not be dealt with tonight. Not an hour ago across the chamber the Leader of the House said to me these would not be dealt with. How can you possibly have any integrity when you cannot keep your word for an hour?

Sonya Kilkenny: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I reiterate my point of order that the scope of debate here is very narrow, and it is on the amendments before the house. I also note that the opposition did not oppose these amendments in the other place, and I would ask you to ask the member to come back to the very narrow debate on these amendments.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): I bring the member for Brighton back to the amendments.

James NEWBURY: I note that there are some three pages of amendments which have just been moved, not in the original form as they were passed through the Council. They were just passed to me in the chamber as they were circulated some 3 minutes before I got up to speak on them. How could I possibly be across cross-referencing these amendments? This is outrageous. This is spurious.

Steve Dimopoulos: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is not talking about the amendments. If he wants to make a point of order about process, he should make a point of order about process. He is not talking about the amendments.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): I bring the member for Brighton back to the amendments.

James NEWBURY: I am speaking directly about the amendments, Acting Speaker. I directly referred to the amendments that were passed to me. How much more closely could I speak to the amendments than by talking about the substance of what has been handed to me? It is absolutely outrageous to be passed these amendments, which I have already noted the coalition will not be opposing. However, this is a set of amendments that there was an ironclad commitment would not be dealt with tonight and would be dealt with tomorrow. It says everything about integrity.

We have spoken about this bill in substance. This bill in substance makes substantive changes to the planning system, which of course these amendments go further to, which of course take away community rights and strip away community rights. What are communities? Communities have no say when it comes to the planning system under this government.

Sonya Kilkenny: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I reiterate my earlier point of order, which was to remind the member that we are on a very narrow debate here, and I ask that you bring the member back to the debate on the amendments before the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Brighton to continue on the amendments in front of the house.

James NEWBURY: We are speaking on the amendments, and that is, I think, the fourth interjection by the sneaky minister who broke the government's word.

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: It is sneaky to break your word.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Imputations on members are disorderly. The member for Brighton to continue on the amendments without imputations.

James NEWBURY: Just to provide you context – as you were not in the chamber, Deputy Speaker – for the amendments themselves, what I was speaking to before you came back into the chair was the ironclad agreement that the government gave that these amendments would not be dealt with tonight and would be dealt with tomorrow, the ironclad commitment which has now been broken. I am refreshing you in terms of the debate that occurred just prior to you coming back into the chamber and my disappointment that, of course, on the first day –

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: They would not know how to lie straight in bed, these people. It is true.

Sonya Kilkenny: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, again I remind the member that the debate here is narrow and it is on the amendments. I also note that the Shadow Minister for Planning was advised that this amendment would be debated tonight.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Thank you, Attorney-General. The second point was not a point of order. The first point –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Who is going to be first this year? The member for Brighton to continue, without imputations, on the amendment. Other matters are matters for debate and not a matter for the Chair to decide on content or if factual.

James NEWBURY: I have made my point. In relation to the amendments and the bill that they pertain to, I also made the point during the substantive debate when the bill was first in this place that this bill does strip away the rights of the community. It entirely strips away the rights of the community, and it centralises –

Steve Dimopoulos: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member for Brighton is being dishonest with himself, the community of Brighton and the rest of the Victorian community.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, Minister, and you know that frivolous points of order are annoying.

James NEWBURY: Deputy Speaker, I could not have said it better myself: annoying. That is the comment of the day. Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Steve Dimopoulos: Better than being dishonest.

James NEWBURY: That is right. So you are annoying; they are dishonest. That is fair. I will cop that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, through the Chair. You are not innocent yourself.

James NEWBURY: Again, the coalition will not be opposing these amendments. I reiterate my disappointment in relation to these amendments.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (20:04): It is ironclad, isn't it? It is ironclad. I think this is really confusing. It is really interesting to be here this long and still have to explain how Parliament works. But the thing is, we cannot understand it for you. We can only explain it to you. For the Liberals, I note that this amendment was carried on the voices in the other place. It was not opposed by any other party. So why would we be so rambunctious right now? Why would we be so stirred up about this? Is it because maybe members opposite have gone home? What is the reason? But I also note I have it on good authority –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker: relevance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask the member for Frankston to continue on the amendments.

Paul EDBROOKE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker, I will be guided by you. But I would like to say that I draw to the attention of the opposition that they might need to communicate with each other, because I have it on very, very good authority that there are some MPs that were advised of this at 4 o'clock and they replied. They replied, and you will take back what you have been saying about people on this side of the house being liars.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the House an hour ago –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think I can pre-empt your point of order if you indulge the Chair. The member for Frankston on the amendments, or give someone else a chance.

Paul EDBROOKE: This amendment establishes a new head of power and enables planning schemes to make any use of land conditional on the provision of an affordable housing contribution. It is in line with action 4 of *Plan for Victoria*, which seeks to increase social and affordable housing across the state, including through legislative reform. It adds an additional tool to the toolbox that can be utilised to build more social and affordable homes, which I think we can all agree is an aim. That is particularly in settings where there is uplift or additional benefit or capacity being delivered in a given area. Mechanisms like this are already in place in Fishermans Bend and Arden, delivering affordable housing outcomes in new developments, and this government is certainly committed to building more homes, including more social and affordable homes across Victoria. This bill will make the planning process quicker and simpler, with clearer timeframes for developers, councils and the community. I want to thank the minister for bringing this amendment forward today, and I do just want to set the record straight that the opposition were told about this. They just do not get along with each other and they do not communicate.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, it is total rubbish.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member has concluded.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (20:07): I cannot speak to the veracity of whether or not the opposition was informed about any of this. I certainly was not. My office certainly was not.

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

Will FOWLES: I certainly was not. I cannot confirm or deny is all I said; I do not know whether they were or not. I am not a party to those discussions. On that basis, I move:

That the house now adjourns.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Unfortunately, member for Ringwood, you cannot contribute and then call that the house be adjourned. Member for Ringwood, for the benefit of the Chair, can you repeat the words that you said at the end of your contribution?

Will FOWLES: I move:

That the house now adjourns.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: You cannot move that the house adjourns.

Will FOWLES: I move:

That the house be adjourned.

That is all I am trying to achieve. Perhaps I could have some guidance, Chair. The intention of what I am saying is that we move to adjourn and deal with this matter tomorrow – that the debate be adjourned.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: You can, with the assistance of the house, move that the debate be adjourned.

Will FOWLES: Then I move:

That debate be adjourned.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (20): Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Noes (50): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, 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, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (20:16): The only reason I am on my feet is because the member for Frankston decided to get onto his feet. Instead of just calling time on the discussion on the amendments from the Legislative Council regarding the Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Bill 2025 and it just going through to the keeper and us getting on with the adjournment debate and carrying on, the member for Frankston decided to stand up and contribute to the debate. I thought I would give it a whirl as well, so here I am.

At the start of an election year, at the start of this year, on the very first day of Parliament, an article of faith has been broken. There was no assurance given. There was no notice given to the opposition that these amendments from the Council would be brought forward now. In fact explicitly –

Belinda Wilson: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, this is a very narrow debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask the member for Sandringham to continue on the amendments.

Brad ROWSWELL: These are the amendments before the house. They have come to us from the Legislative Council, having been debated in that chamber at some point prior to them arriving in this chamber, whether it was last year or –

Matthew Guy: How did they get here?

Brad ROWSWELL: Well, the parliamentary staff are outstanding in transferring the amendments from one chamber to the next, member for Bulleen. I do not wish to reflect upon their efforts at all. What I do want to say is this: if this is the way that the government treats this chamber, how can the Victorian people trust them at all at the start of an election year, if in fact at all? It is just such a basic thing. If you cannot manage this chamber properly, if you cannot respect the members of this –

Sonya Kilkenny: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would ask that you ask the member to come back to the very narrow debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Sandringham, on the amendments, to continue.

Brad ROWSWELL: Indeed the amendments before the house, brought here without notice, are being debated without the courtesy of notice. In the interests of every member in this place and in the interests of the conduct of this chamber, I desire to move:

That the question be now put.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Sandringham, I have the feeling that the Greens party would like to contribute, so it is a bit early to put the question. Do you want to contribute further?

Brad ROWSWELL: No.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (20:20): I will speak on the amendments. The Greens agree that our planning laws need updating. They need reforming. They are overly complex. They are not fit for purpose for modern challenges like the housing crisis and climate change. When this bill was first introduced we had some serious concerns, and we shared those with stakeholders and community members. But through negotiations with the government we have secured some really important amendments that the government is replicating tonight to pass in the lower house.

Most significantly, the Greens have secured a new head of power that finally allows state and local governments to force developers to include affordable public and community housing in new private developments. We are in a housing affordability crisis. Leaving housing to the market has completely failed us, so governments now need to actively step in. This finally gives them the power to do so, and it would not have happened without the Greens. We also ensured that this power comes into effect immediately, meaning that the government can now mandate a quota of genuinely affordable housing in new developments, including in the activity centres. The responsibility now lies with the government to actually use it.

We also secured a commitment to establishing a planning regulations advisory committee including the Municipal Association of Victoria, councils, planners and legal experts at the table, ensuring that those who implement the system also help to design it. We reinstated consideration of ecological processes in the act, critical for managing flooding and other climate impacts, and we stopped the government's undemocratic proposal that would have stripped the Parliament of its power to disallow planning permits, including for new coal and gas projects.

While these amendments do make some improvements and the bill as a whole does improve the planning system, there are many concerning planning changes that are happening outside of this bill. Communities will live with these decisions for decades. We need planning that delivers affordable, climate-resilient, livable communities, and the government must work harder to achieve that.

Motion agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: A message will be sent to the Legislative Council requesting their agreement.

Business of the house

Postponement

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (20:23): I move:

That the consideration of remaining business be postponed.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Eildon electorate road safety

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (20:24): (1489) I have a matter for the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, and the action I seek is for the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC to commit to funding the installation of high fencing or nets at the Kinglake Memorial Reserve oval to prevent footballs bouncing onto the busy Whittlesea-Kinglake Road. I request this be done through the Transport Accident Commission's road safety sponsorships program, given their longstanding partnership with AFL Victoria, as referenced on page 27 of their annual report. The Kinglake Football Netball Club have senior and junior teams, and too often the ball bounces over the fence and onto the Whittlesea-Kinglake Road. We see children and adults running on the road to collect the balls. This can be dangerous and poses a risk of those people being hit by a passing vehicle. I have had parents contact me about this, including visiting parents of juniors, and the club also see it as a significant risk because it happens too often. Additionally, cars travelling along that road may get hit by a ball and lose control. This is a busy main road. It has got a few bends in it, and it carries all manner of vehicles. Those familiar with Kinglake will know the weather conditions are unique and very often it is foggy or raining, making it difficult for drivers to see and for pedestrians to cross the road safely. Nets need to be installed before a preventable accident occurs and someone is seriously injured.

The reason I am looking to TAC and not community sport is the longstanding partnership with AFL Victoria, which supports grassroots clubs to promote road safety. The installation nets fit well within the TAC's promotion and the discussion of road safety for the club and the community. In the 2024 calendar year, according to the TAC annual report, 48 pedestrians died on our roads, which was an increase on the five-year average of 23 per cent. The club do need to install nets or fencing to prevent accidents from happening.

The club, the Lakers, are building strong numbers. They have senior teams, under-19s and junior teams, plus netball teams. They are the heart and soul of the Kinglake Ranges community. They have weekly dinners. They are a tight-knit community who work together in a bunch of different areas, such as raising mental health awareness, and they know that this could help promote road safety. This is the ideal time to install the nets as the ground is being resurfaced this year, and it would be great to have that done before the new season starts. The club have been proactive and worked with the City of Whittlesea and a turf curator to develop a 12-month maintenance schedule, and this really is the ideal time. I would love to see TAC get on board with this important road safety initiative.

Tobacco control

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (20:27): (1490) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. As you will be aware, our new tobacco licensing scheme has just come into effect this week on Sunday, and I ask the minister to provide an avenue for MPs to provide information directly to Tobacco Licensing Victoria to assist with the enforcement of these new laws and with the registration requirements for all tobacco retailers.

I am sure many MPs here in the chamber are in the same position in that we have had businesses and locations raised with us that are a source of concern to our communities because those businesses are selling illegal tobacco, they are selling illegal vapes and in some cases they are selling nitrous oxide canisters at the same time. We, certainly in Preston and Reservoir, in our work, have had a number of businesses raised with us over a long period of time now whilst doorknocking around Broadway, Edwardes Street, High Street, Preston, Reservoir East Primary School and other areas, and in some cases there have been allegations that these businesses are selling those unlawful tobacco products to children. It is obviously not the role of any of us as MPs to act as police, but I have visited most of these businesses. They claim, as you would imagine, to be doing the right thing, but given the new laws and given some of the specific information we have been provided with, we would appreciate the opportunity through the minister to pass that on to Tobacco Licensing Victoria to support their new enforcement and compliance role.

Obviously, everyone's main concern here is the selling of these harmful products in an unlawful way to people, but as many of us have seen, there is also concern around arson attacks. In fact we had one on Broadway last week. Of course that is of general concern to the community but particularly of concern to neighbours and businesses that are adjacent to these particular tobacco stores. Not only are there direct consequences for their safety, but some of them are facing very significant rises in their insurance premiums as a result.

There is obviously a bigger picture to this area, which is the very significant increase in tobacco excise by the federal government, certainly in my own lifetime. That has gone up very dramatically from the days when you could buy a packet of cigarettes, or at least a packet of 20, for less than \$10 to the \$50 amounts people are paying now –

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Nathan LAMBERT: Or \$52, the member for Narracan informs me, and he perhaps would know. But we do support that policy arrangement. It is good for public health. It has been incredibly critical in bringing down smoking rates, and of course it reflects the true cost of tobacco smoking to all of us. We are very pleased that the new licensing scheme is in place now here in Victoria. Obviously, with that increased excise there is an increased need for compliance and licensing. We are very grateful to the minister and his team for their work and look forward to supporting the inspections, enforcement and compliance of Tobacco Licensing Victoria.

Shepparton school bus services

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (20:30): (1491) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The action I seek is that the minister provides funding for a school bus review for the Shepparton district. I wish to raise serious concerns from families and schools across the Shepparton district regarding the lack of capacity on existing school routes and the expected increased capacity following the introduction of free public transport for children under 18. Whilst we welcome free transport, we need to ensure that there is a process for how this will be managed to ensure that students will be able to get a seat on their school bus. The Victorian government's official list of school bus network reviews for 2025 included Shepparton as an allocation planned for review. The school bus centre review program, you would think, should be a priority, particularly prior to the announcement of free bus transport, yet Shepparton is still waiting.

Parents are contacting my office deeply concerned that students are at risk of being left behind at bus stops once a bus is at full capacity. For working families and for students travelling from surrounding towns and rural areas there are often no other travel alternatives. I have spoken directly with Dysons bus services in Shepparton, who are also very concerned about the expected overflow and have raised their concerns with Public Transport Victoria. They have also been contacted by parents who are concerned that their children will be left on the side of the road and stranded. We simply cannot have a wait-and-see approach. We urgently need a school bus review.

The Shepparton electorate is a growing region and we are being let down broadly when it comes to transport services. It has been over 16 years since we have had a bus service review. During that time, we have had significant growth, new housing estates have emerged and existing estates have grown. We have many areas across my electorate with limited or no bus services. We still await the completion of our Shepparton line upgrade that was due to be completed in 2023 to increase the much-needed daily return Melbourne services from five to nine. We have had significant issues with overcrowding on the Shepparton line following the reduced travel fee. It is a clear example that you need to prepare and have the capacity needed to accommodate the patronage that is expected. We cannot have families concerned that their children will not get a seat on their school bus. I await the minister's response on this urgent matter.

South Melbourne police station

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (20:32): (1492) My question is for the Minister for Police. The action I seek is for the minister to join me to visit the site of the new \$53 million South Melbourne police station, currently under construction, to see the positive progression of this important investment in policing in my electorate. Once operational, the new state-of-the-art 24-hour facility will accommodate 73 police members, an increase from the 59 at the current South Melbourne police station. The new station will feature safer prison processing facilities, interview rooms and cell upgrades. It will also include new security infrastructure, improved air-conditioning systems and new energy-efficient amenities. The project is set to be completed in late 2026. Until then, the Bank Street location will remain operational and open to the public throughout construction. The Labor government has invested more than \$423 million to construct 19 new police stations and upgrade 15 more. This project is part of the government's record \$4.5 billion investment to recruit more than 3600 new sworn police officers and invest in cutting-edge intelligence systems and modern infrastructure.

South-West Coast electorate wind farms

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (20:33): (1493) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. I ask the minister to immediately pause further onshore and offshore wind approvals in the South-West Coast, to undertake a genuine face-to-face community consultation process and to provide a transparent and enforceable plan for turbine decommissioning and full land remediation before any further projects proceed.

This matter goes to the heart of a community that contributes enormously to this state yet continues to be taken for granted by this Allan Labor government. Our community recognise the importance of transitioning to a low-emissions future. However, for more than a decade our region has borne a disproportionate share of the renewable energy burden. Productive agricultural land has been increasingly blanketed by wind farms, often approved with inadequate consideration of the cumulative impacts on farming operations, local communities and the environment. Now the government is proposing to push even further, with offshore wind projects imposed on a community that has made its objections abundantly clear.

Let me be clear: this is not an opposition to renewable energy. My community supports environmentally responsible and well-planned renewable projects. What we do not support is reckless decision-making that places irreplaceable environmental assets at risk. The proposed offshore wind zone sits within a recognised whale migratory pathway and a nursery for the southern right whale, a species that was driven to the brink of extinction and now, remarkably, is returning in growing

numbers. There is nowhere else in the world where an offshore wind farm operates in active whale calving zones. The risks remain unknown, and when the risks are unknown, rushing ahead is the greatest danger of all. This government is rushing because it has failed Victorians on energy affordability and reliability. Instead of a credible, balanced energy plan, we see panic-driven targets and communities pushed aside. Consultation has become a box-ticking exercise, not genuine engagement. The proposed Garvoc wind farm is a perfect example. During a so-called 28-day consultation period over December and January, a farmer submitted questions only to be told the department was closed for the holiday period and the email would not be addressed. This is no voice, no choice. It is not consultation, it is contempt.

And it gets worse. Projects continue to be approved without any meaningful end-of-life planning. At Codrington, some of the first wind farms in the region are now being decommissioned. Because of government failure to plan, around 500 tonnes of concrete per turbine will be left buried in productive agricultural land. New turbines are far larger. We are now talking about hundreds of thousands of tonnes of concrete permanently entombed in prime soil. That is environmentally irresponsible by any measure. Our community deserves respect, transparency and honesty, not to be railroaded.

Public transport

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (20:36): (1494) My adjournment is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The action I seek is for the minister to visit the electorate of Thomastown to meet with residents about upcoming new and extended bus services for residents living in North Epping and Wollert. These services will provide public transport for the first time to homes north of Craigieburn Road East. There is so much interest from residents in these new services. Many residents have been advocating for bus services, particularly for their children to get to school, to play sport, to hang out at the Epping Plaza or to go to the movies. These services will not only be there for those children, but they will also get the benefit of Labor's new policy of free public transport for under 18-year-olds. That means, of course, more money in families' pockets, and less time doing the drop-offs. Similarly, older residents need these services to go shopping, attend appointments at the Northern Hospital or to catch the bus to the train. Young families with one car also need these buses to stay connected and get around.

It is exciting to announce that draft maps of the proposed bus routes have been made public and a consultation period seeking feedback on the routes is now open. Please let us know your ideas on the bus routes by going to the Engage Victoria website; the link is on my Facebook page. The consultation period is open until 8 March. Pop-up stores in selected shopping centres will also be available for residents to give their feedback. Thank you to all those who have advocated for the buses and campaigned successfully for our buses to now travel beyond Craigieburn Road East in coming times. Thank you, of course, to the Labor government for providing these services where they are much needed.

Narracan electorate roads

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (20:38): (1495) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The action I seek is that the minister take immediate action to accelerate the road study and design into the Warragul and Drouin road networks. I have been in this chamber many times talking about the issues of infrastructure delivery across West Gippsland. Following the bipartisan Liberal and Labor commitments at the federal election, Victoria has been gifted \$3 million to undertake this study. The Transport Victoria website has been updated and has left the community concerned about just what this study will achieve. It states:

Planning work is expected to begin in 2026 and will run over several years.

The problem I have is that it took eight years to get the money. Now it is going to take another three years to do the study. That is well over a decade. As I have said before in this chamber, Warragul and Drouin are the fastest growing towns in Australia over the last 10 years.

The traffic congestion in my electorate is absolutely ridiculous. To take another three years to get this study completed is paralysis by analysis, and my electorate is paralysed with traffic congestion. Just a few of the intersections that need upgrading right now are Weebar Road in Drouin, Howitt Street and Burke Street in Warragul, the Lardner intersection, where we are still waiting for our new hospital – it still has not been started – Buln Buln Road, Balfour Road and Main South Road in Drouin, just adjacent to where a new social housing development is going to occur, which is 45 units and only 27 car parks at a major bus interchange. That intersection has to be upgraded with the infrastructure that is going in there. Then if I go into Cardinia, I have problems at the intersection with Princes Highway at Tynong, Garfield, Bunyip, Gumbuya World, Nar Nar Goon and Longwarry and Bunyip-Modella Road in Bunyip as well.

This community has suffered enough. We have to get this right. It is growing at a very, very fast rate, and it continues to grow because housing is affordable in my electorate. But the fact of the matter is that it will take three years to do the design and study. In that time there are probably going to be another 4500 people at minimum moving to that area, causing more congestion worries for my community. I urge the minister: prioritise this study, do the consultation, get the projects planned and costed and get on with funding these essential upgrades before my community grinds to a halt.

Norlane RSL

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (20:41): (1496) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Veterans, and the action that I seek is for the minister to visit the Norlane RSL and see the incredible work that they are doing in supporting the local veterans community in and around Norlane. The Norlane RSL is a fantastic local RSL, and its committee and members work extremely hard to build a safe and welcoming space for everyone. Their Friday night raffles and dinners are a local highlight, where volunteers take turns to cook for the night and members gather together to catch up, creating a fun, warm and engaging evening for everyone. It is an RSL full of history, with so many historic and commemorative items on display inside. In fact the suburb name, Norlane, is named after Norman Lane, a local resident and Ford factory worker who served his country in the Second World War and died as a prisoner of war on the Thai–Burma Railway. Recently the Norlane RSL have been working on an installation to commemorate service men and women. This installation will see soldier silhouettes made out of metal installed at the RSL as an important reminder of the service and sacrifice of veterans. I look forward to welcoming the minister to the Norlane RSL.

Burwood Road–Church Street, Hawthorn

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (20:42): (1497) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit the intersection of Burwood Road and Church Street in Hawthorn with me to inspect the damaged pedestrian safety barrier at that location and provide a solution. Burwood Road and Church Street in Hawthorn is one of the busiest and most complex intersections in my electorate. It sits at the centre of Hawthorn's retail and transport precinct, adjacent to tram stops, local businesses and residential streets, and is used every day by students attending Hawthorn West Primary School, older residents, parents with prams and people with mobility challenges. I myself travel through this intersection almost every day, and I see the obvious hazards. It is an intersection where pedestrian safety is not optional, it is essential. For some time now the pedestrian safety barrier at this intersection has been damaged and left in a severely compromised state. That barrier plays a critical role in guiding pedestrian movements, discouraging unsafe crossings and providing a physical separation between people on foot and fast-moving traffic. When it is damaged, the risks are obvious and immediate.

My office has raised this issue repeatedly on behalf of local residents. Despite my constituents raising this matter with the department, our community is yet to see visible progress on repairs. In the meantime, pedestrians are left navigating a less protected environment at a location where traffic volumes are high and driver behaviour can be unpredictable. My Hawthorn community quite reasonably expects that damaged safety infrastructure at a major arterial intersection will be treated as

a priority. Leaving a known hazard unresolved undermines confidence in the system and unnecessarily exposes pedestrians to risk. That is why I raise this matter with the minister tonight, so that the condition of the pedestrian safety barrier at Burwood Road and Church Street is properly acknowledged and addressed and the safety of pedestrians in Hawthorn is restored without further delay.

Transport infrastructure

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (20:45): (1498) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport and Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is an update on how the big switch and the Metro Tunnel additional services benefit communities on the Frankston train line, particularly in the cities of Kingston and Greater Dandenong. This has been a massive change for our local community. We have seen significant investments in our community to support communities and residents in Kingston and Greater Dandenong to get home safer and sooner to the people they love. It all started with level crossing removals under this government, with Chelsea, Edithvale, Parkdale, Mentone and Cheltenham level crossings removed and new stations built, with Mordialloc under construction now and Aspendale not far away. The Mordialloc Freeway has transformed our community, taking trucks off local roads and getting you home safe and sooner, because we know time saved – even 10 minutes saved – is 10 minutes sooner with the people that you love and care about.

The Metro Tunnel was described by so many political opponents – people who wanted to talk down this project – as a hoax. It has been one of the biggest transformations since the city loop. There are extra services on the Cranbourne–Pakenham line, and, guess what, the Frankston train line is returning to the city loop. That is right, something that was thought to not be possible has happened. It is back into Parliament, Melbourne Central, through to Flagstaff station and out to Southern Cross and Flinders Street. These are the transformations that matter. It is not just the building of projects; it is the saving of time. It is getting you home to the people that you love and care about sooner, because time is a cost to people's lives, and time is everything when we want to be with our kids and the ones that we care about. By 2029 we will make the Frankston train line level crossing free.

And then we think about a policy only supported by this Labor government: work from home, which will transform the support for families, saving time and saving money. There are the transport infrastructure projects and the compassionate policies that only a Labor government delivers. They all come together to ease the cost of living on Victorian families and also to support that critical time that they need for the people they love and care about. So the city loop returning means you can get to Parkdale through to Chelsea sooner. I am really excited to hear from the minister for public transport and transport infrastructure how the big switch of those services, the additional rail patronage, the removal of level crossings by midyear in Mordialloc and the return to a dual line service will up services in our area and support our local communities in Kingston and Greater Dandenong into the future. I cannot wait to hear that feedback as we get on and build the projects in our community supporting Kingston and Greater Dandenong residents.

Responses

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (20:48): It is my pleasure to refer the following matters. The member for Eildon raised a matter for the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC in relation to Kinglake Football Netball Club. The member for Preston raised the matter for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation in relation to providing the community opportunities to contribute to the enforcement of illegal tobacco sales. The member for Shepparton raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport seeking a review of bus services for school students in her electorate. The member for Albert Park raised a matter for the Minister for Police to visit the new state-of-the-art South Melbourne police station. The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Energy and Resources in relation to renewable energy projects in her electorate. The

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member for Thomastown raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport to visit the community to discuss new and extended bus services in her electorate. The member for Narracan raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure seeking the speeding up of a traffic study in his electorate. The member for Lara raised a matter for the Minister for Veterans to visit the Norlane RSL to see their extraordinary work. The member for Hawthorn raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to visit Burwood Road and Church Street to understand the pedestrian implications at that intersection. And the wonderful member for Mordialloc raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it relates to how the big switch helps residents in his electorate of Kingston and Greater Dandenong in terms of access to the Melbourne CBD and other areas of Melbourne. I will refer all these to the relevant ministers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 8:49 pm.