Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Tuesday 3 February 2026

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Bev McArthur (from 18 November 2025)
David Davis (from 27 December 2024)
Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)
Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew[1]	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nick	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaelle	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira[2]	Western Metropolitan	FFV	Ratnam, Samantha[5]	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem[6]	Northern Metropolitan	Ind
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Gray-Barberio, Anasina[3]	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee[8]	Northern Victoria	ON
Limbrick, David[4]	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Welch, Richard[7]	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

[1] Resigned 7 Dec 2023
[2] Lib from 26 Nov 2022 until 28 Mar 2023;
IndLib from 28 Mar 2023 until 27 Dec 2024;
Lib from 27 Dec 2024 until 28 Jul 2026;
Ind from 28 Jul 2026 until 6 Sep 2026
[3] Appointed 14 Nov 2024
[4] LDP until 26 Jul 2023
[5] Resigned 8 Nov 2024
[6] DLP until 25 Mar 2024
[7] Appointed 7 Feb 2024
[8] PHON until 3 Aug 2026

Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;
FFV – Family First Victoria; Greens – Australian Greens; Ind – independent; IndLib – Independent Liberal;
LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria; LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia;
LP – Libertarian Party; Nat – National Party of Australia; ON – One Nation Victoria;
PHON – Pauline Hanson's One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party

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Tuesday 3 February 2026

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 12:02 pm, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Announcements

Photography in chamber

The PRESIDENT (12:04): Can I just alert members that we have got a photographer engaged by the Parliament taking photos of the chamber.

Business of the house

Standing and sessional orders

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:04): I move, by leave:

> That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to the extent necessary today to immediately allow:
>
> (1) a minister to move, without leave or notice, two separate motions of condolence for:
>
> (a) the 14 December 2025 Bondi Beach shootings;
>
> (b) the 2026 bushfires;
>
> (2) at the conclusion of the debate on each motion, the President to ask members to signify their agreement to the motion by rising in their places for 1 minute's silence;
>
> (3) at the conclusion of the minute's silence following the second motion, unless otherwise ordered, the house to suspend its proceedings for 1 hour; and
>
> (4) at the resumption of proceedings following this suspension, the house will follow the order of business for a Tuesday as set out in standing orders.

Motion agreed to.

Condolences

Bondi Beach attack

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:05): 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;
>
> (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.

I would like to commence as the government's first speaker on the motion. On 14 December what should have been a joyful, light-filled celebration on the first night of Hanukkah at Bondi quickly

turned to terror-filled atrocity. Families and relatives coming together on the beach during summer, a timeless Australian tradition, should have been able to celebrate in peace and, more importantly, to go home together. Instead 15 precious lives were lost, needlessly killed under the banner of hate and antisemitism. One of those precious lives I would like to pay tribute to is hero and Melbourne grandfather Reuven Morrison, for choosing to protect his loved ones by distracting the gunman and paying the ultimate price for his sacrifice. Reuven, like all those murdered on that fateful day, will never be forgotten. The courage and heroism on display is a strong reminder to me that the horrors of the day were and are aberrations and not at all reflective of Australian values, a shared understanding that hatred never triumphs and that 'never again' means exactly that – never again.

As we continue this journey of healing I would like to reaffirm that Jewish Victorians belong here. You have the right to practise your faith freely without fear. This government will continue to protect your ability to freely participate in society, as we have committed to do for all Victorians, because the fabric of social cohesion and multiculturalism in our great state is just so, so precious, and it is incumbent upon every single one of us here in Parliament and outside to cherish this, to guard it jealously against those seeking to divide and stoke hatred amongst us. It is not the Victorian way; it is not the Australian way. As my good friend Rabbi Gabi Kaltmann reminded me last week, Hanukkah is ultimately the victory of light over darkness. I think it is a timeless message and, frankly, one that resonates with all walks of life. To our Jewish Victorians: we grieve with you, we will heal with you and we will honour those lost in Bondi. We stand with you shoulder to shoulder, because an attack on one of us is an attack on all of us, knowing that the strength of our community is found in the everyday interactions we have with one another – listening, learning, openness and understanding – and I wholeheartedly believe that light will always triumph over darkness.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:09): I am pleased, but saddened too, to join in this motion today. I thank the Leader of the Government for bringing this motion to the chamber. It points to the loss at Bondi, the terrible loss of life at Bondi, on 14 December – the 15 innocent people murdered at Bondi Beach. It condemns the atrocity. It condemns the evil of antisemitism. It honours the courage and composure of those who acted quickly. And who can forget those who actually tackled the gunmen in the scene at the time? It acknowledges the trauma of the men and women injured physically and psychologically, and it affirms the fundamental right of the Jewish community in Victoria to live safely.

I think it is important to put on record the names of those 15 Bondi victims: Rabbi Eli Schlanger, Dan Elkayam, Alexander Kleytman, Boris and Sofia Gurman, Peter Meagher, Reuven Morrison, Rabbi Yaakov Levitan, Tibor Weitzen, Marika Pogany, Edith Brutman, Boris Tetleroyd, Adam Smyth, Tania Tretiak and 10-year-old Matilda. All of us remember those images of Matilda. All of us remember the images of individuals who were killed in this incident and, I might add, those that were injured as well. It is appropriate that we acknowledge this.

My electorate, Ms Crozier's electorate and others in this chamber whose electorate is Southern Metro know it has a very significant Jewish community. On that night I was having dinner – a Christmas dinner, but with a very close Jewish friend. We began well; we had beautiful food and a celebration with a family that I have known for 30 or 35 years – a long, long time – and then the news came through. We were transfixed by the television as those terrible images came through. The response of – I will not say the name – my Jewish friend was, 'This is Australia. This should not be happening here in our country.' And I think he was right.

I do think it is also right that the response was not strong enough after 7 October. I do think it is correct that the state government and the federal government were not clear and strong enough in their response from that period forward. I do think that there was too much tolerance of antisemitism through that period. There were questions we asked in this chamber about universities, questions we asked in this chamber about the bombing of the synagogue – the Adass synagogue – questions we asked in this chamber about the writings on walls in educational institutions and elsewhere and questions we asked in this chamber about a range of antisemitic incidents. Josh Burns's office being

burnt was shocking. I raised that at the time in the chamber because I, like many others, was very concerned. I do not think the government did enough. I do not think the government responded strongly enough.

I think we as a community have to be clear that we will not tolerate this clear antisemitism, because it has licensed what occurred. The terrible, terrible incident that occurred is something that cannot be put away now easily. It cannot be just swept aside. It is something that has had an effect on the Australian community. It has had a shocking effect on the Jewish community. In my electorate the community is very shocked by what has happened. Many pointed out that these things could happen, but it is still very different when an incident of this type happens. There is a lesson here for us. We do have to be clear. Government cannot – and indeed the opposition or anyone else cannot – allow the slightest tolerance for this antisemitism that has tried to take root in our community. I have to point at the rallies and say the rallies were part of licensing this view that antisemitism could be tolerated or had some legitimacy. I do not believe it has any legitimacy, and I believe that we need the strongest possible response on this. So I do thank the Leader of the Government for bringing this important motion. As I say, I was shocked on that night and remain shocked, as do so many people in my region.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:15): I rise to offer my support for the condolence motion for the 15 innocent people murdered at Bondi Beach on 14 December 2025 and acknowledge a hurt that I do not think my words can adequately hold. That day was meant to be one of celebration for the Australian Jewish community as a festival of light, Hanukkah, began. Instead it was a day of profound hurt and hateful violence, where people were murdered simply for practising their faith, celebrating in a place and in a way that is all too relatable for so many of us: summer at the beachside with friends and family. The shattering of the sense of peace and joy is something I felt on that day, and I know so many others did too. I want to offer my deepest condolences to the families, friends and loved ones of the victims. I cannot fathom the pain you must be feeling and the grief that must have consumed the last two months. Nothing can ease the pain of losing someone you love through such senseless violence. My thoughts are with those who survived and who witnessed what happened. I know the trauma will stay with you and that your lives have been changed forever. To the first responders, the healthcare workers and the civilians who ran towards chaos and terror and did everything they could to save lives and stop further harm, we are eternally grateful. They showed the best of what humanity has to offer.

I also want to note that while condolence motions are really important to acknowledge the pain and pay tribute to those we lost, words are simply not enough. Moments like these test who we are as a people. How we respond matters. This means taking the time to respond thoroughly and thoughtfully, being open to sitting with each other in the pain and uncertainty and being prepared to make space for difficult and nuanced conversations. We must ensure that the legacy of this tragedy is not more fear or hate but a resolve to build a society where such violence has no place. Hate thrives in division, so we must come together to prevent anything like this ever happening again. We owe it to those who were killed and to those who continue to live with the consequences of the day.

We must confront and end antisemitism and all forms of hate. We must address the conditions that allow violent extremism to grow. Increasingly, people in our communities are being attacked verbally and physically because of their ethnicity, because they choose to dress in accordance with their faith, because they are First Nations, because they are gathering to practise their faith, and those who are perpetrating this violence and hatred are doing so with increasing boldness and impunity, and people are frightened. It should not take the devastation of the Bondi massacre to shake us out of complacency. We cannot accept the conditions that have allowed this fear to flourish or, worse, become normalised. The safety of all people in Australia cannot be conditional on who they are or what they believe in. Today is an opportunity to grieve together, to stand with communities who are hurting and to remember those whose lives were taken too soon. We stand in solidarity with Jewish members of our community and offer our deepest sympathies to those who are hurting.

Hate and violence, like that which happened at Bondi, are not welcome in Australia. It is not who we are, and we must do everything possible to build an Australia where people can live, gather and worship without fear. Vale to those who lost their lives, who should have been safe to celebrate their faith. To the loved ones, who will hurt long after this motion has passed, I cannot begin to understand what you are going through, but we promise to honour you by continuing to fight hatred and division in all its forms.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (12:19): On 14 December last year our nation was rocked by the sickening antisemitic terrorist attack on Bondi Beach. Members of Sydney's Jewish community had gathered on the first night of Hanukkah to come together in the celebration of their faith. It was supposed to be a special time of peace, of family and of love. Instead they were faced with a nightmare, and 15 innocent people were murdered and so many more injured and traumatised: rabbis, mothers, daughters, Jewish and non-Jewish, people from all walks of life – Australians.

We have all read the accounts that when the first shots rang out, people looked up expecting fireworks. It did not take long for realisation to set in: the worst fears of the Jewish community had been realised. Jewish Australians gathered on Bondi Beach were targeted by a cruel and hateful act of terrorist violence. It was an attack that deliberately violated everything that we hold dear in this country: the freedom to celebrate culture and practise faith peacefully, free from fear. It was these values that led to remarkable acts of heroism by ordinary Australians – police officers, lifesavers, passers-by – from all backgrounds and all walks of life. It was these values that were exemplified in the days and weeks following the attack, as multicultural and multifaith communities came together in support of our Jewish community, to reject hate and condemn violence and to pay their deepest respects to those killed, injured and impacted. It is this support that reflects the very best of our multicultural community here in Victoria, a symbol of unity and kindness despite the terror and the fear of the attack on 14 December.

We continue to stand united in our grief. My heart is broken for the victims, their families and their friends. To those in our Jewish community who are in pain, who are angry and who are justifiably scared, we stand united against hate, against division, against antisemitism and against all acts of terror. In the days and weeks following this attack, I stood with the Premier in outlining our clear priorities: to wrap Victoria's arms around our Jewish community to help them to feel safe and to feel supported; to combat antisemitism and hate through our laws, through education and through community support; and to reaffirm that Jewish Victorians have the fundamental right to live, work, learn and worship in Victoria safely and proudly.

We must do more, and we will do more. We will do it for every Australian who was murdered in this attack. We will do it for every Jewish Victorian who deserves to live their life free from intimidation, harassment and fear, and we will do it for every Victorian, no matter their background, religion or political beliefs, because everyone deserves to be protected from hate. Today it is the right thing, together in this chamber across the political divide, to recognise and to pay our deepest respects and condolences to all those who were killed, injured and impacted by this hateful act of violence.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:23): I rise to also support the government's motion on the horrific attack that occurred in Bondi on 14 December 2025. I, like the vast majority of Australians, was absolutely shocked and horrified by what occurred at what was supposed to be a peaceful and joyful Hanukkah festival for the Jewish community. At the time I said I felt that the attack and the murder of 15 innocent people had changed our country forever. It was the deadliest terrorist attack Australia has ever experienced, and it was the biggest loss of Jewish life following the 7 October terrorist attack on Jewish lives in 2023.

I have to reflect on the words and leadership of former Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, who said, 'You have failed us.' He was referring to leaders in this country and the lack of action that Mr Davis alluded

to since 7 October. Far too many members of the Jewish community, not only in our electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region but right around this state and right around this country, have felt failed by the lack of leadership to stamp out antisemitism. To have seen what unfolded on that night of 14 December – it is something I have spoken to the Jewish community at length about. People have spoken to me. I have been there with them. They feel let down. I think Josh Frydenberg showed leadership when he was asking for a royal commission. He had been asking, he had done documentaries and he had been spelling it out for many, many months – in fact years – and it finally took so much pressure from leaders right around this country to force a royal commission. While we cannot bring back the lives that were lost on that dreadful, fateful evening, we owe it to those people. We owe it to them to stamp out this hate and division. These people deserve the utmost respect from every level of government. All of us have an obligation and duty. As the minister said, hate and division have no place in this – they do not.

I want to put on record that my thoughts are with those who lost their family members and those who sustained horrific injuries. And I want to also acknowledge the bravery of those who did the most remarkable things in the most horrific of circumstances and who put themselves in danger to protect the lives of others. We have seen the vision of people who were trying to protect the lives of innocent Australians. They should be commended for what they did. They should be recognised for the actions that they bravely took.

I place on record again my condolences to all those that have been affected by this horrific terrorist attack that should never, ever have occurred.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:27): Most of us will always remember what we were doing on the evening of 14 December 2025. I was driving home with my partner when his phone rang. It was one of his staff who grew up in Sydney's Jewish community. She said, 'There are shots being fired right now at Bondi Beach, and it's right near the Hanukkah event.' She was receiving messages in real time from people at the scene who were hiding, scared for their lives. He was frantic. I told him that he was overreacting and that I was sure it was nothing, but he knew better. As someone who loves a Jewish person and has quietly observed their world over the past two years, I should have known better too.

Antisemitism is one thing to understand conceptually, often viewed through the lens of the Holocaust, as this ancient, almost mythical hatred that the world left behind last century. For many, the scale of suffering inflicted upon Jewish people was so immense that it feels completely inconceivable that it could ever repeat. Only through being with Josh did I begin to truly understand the way that antisemitism simply just mutates, the way that it adapts, the way that it hides behind conspiracy theories, the way in which it transcends all parts of the political spectrum and the way it becomes normalised in both the public discourse and the views that people hold in private. Living below the surface, it slowly erodes our social fabric, perpetuating a dehumanisation of Jewish people, sending a message that racism and violence against them is somehow justified. I see it in his daily reality, in his messages, in his emails and in comments made directly to me, and I see the way that it is denied and the way that it is justified – even when his office was set alight and horns, an old antisemitic trope, were drawn onto a picture of his head. His experience is certainly not unique, but it is one that is perhaps more visible because Josh is of course also the federal member for Macnamara, the electorate with the largest Jewish population in Victoria and the second-largest in Australia.

For Josh, like so many Jewish people, his community is his family. It is his home. For almost two years I have watched as he has carried the weight of responsibility to fix a growing problem while also being personally impacted by it himself. There is no clearer example of this clashing of the political and the personal than the first phone call Josh made when we were notified of the attack. It was not to a colleague, it was not to the Prime Minister's office, it was to his mum, who was about to take his seven-year-old daughter to the Melbourne event. In that terrifying moment his priority was to make sure that his own family was going to be safe.

But it is not just his story that I know; it is also those of my Jewish friends. With patience and with kindness many have shared with me the real and genuine fear that they have held over the last few years. They have shared with me their stories of hiding their identity, of feeling they no longer belong in the places they once loved: their workplaces, their sporting clubs, their schools, their friendship groups. The response from wider society has demonstrated the lack of understanding of antisemitism in this country. After all, Australia is different – Jews are safe here. And to be honest, this was a view that I once shared too. But even when we have recognised the rise of antisemitism, there has been a fear of calling it out. I know that because I have experienced that fear too – a fear of also being ostracised and isolated by association, a fear of the assumption from others that somehow by supporting our Jewish community at home we are condoning the actions of a foreign government, a fear that by acknowledging the suffering of one community we are denying the suffering of another.

But I have learned that we can and we should be able to hold two truths at the same time, because when antisemitism goes unrecognised and unchallenged it escalates, and when it escalates people die – like 10-year-old Matilda, who loved animals and who will always be remembered for her beautiful smile, perhaps best encapsulated in a photo of her with a dolphin painted on her face; like Boris and Sofia Gurman, who heroically confronted one of the shooters in a final act of bravery; like Dan Elkayam, a French engineer who loved playing soccer and celebrating his Jewish faith; like Rabbi Eli Schlanger, who was remembered as one of the purest people by those who knew him; like Tania Tretiak, who devoted her life to helping others as a community assistant worker; like Edith Brutman, who served as vice-president of an advocacy organisation where she worked to confront prejudice and discrimination through education; and like Reuven Morrison, who moved to Australia believing it would be one of the safest places in the world. These are just some of the stories of the 15 people killed that day. May their memories be a blessing.

Amidst all of the heartbreak we also heard tales of heroism – like Jessica Rozen, a pregnant woman who used her body to shield a stranger's child during the massacre; like Jackson Doolan, a lifeguard who ran towards danger carrying critical medical supplies; like 14-year-old Chaya Dadon, who was shot in the leg after she rushed from a bench she had been hiding under to protect two children younger than her from the gunfire; and of course like Ahmed Al Ahmed, who disarmed one of the shooters and in doing so saved countless lives.

In the days following the attack I watched once again as Josh showed leadership and compassion. He visited Bondi on the Wednesday of that week, and just two days later our daughter Lilah Poppy came into the world, two and a half weeks early. As people across the country lit candles for Bondi, she became our own light in the darkness. When we announced her arrival, Josh said:

> Our country has given me the most wonderful gifts, and I am determined to raise my daughters to be proud of their Jewish heritage and to express it openly in Australia.

That is something that I am determined for too. I hope for a future where Lilah and every Jewish person is safe to be who they are – a future where my daughter can attend Hanukkah celebrations and I can think of the fun that she will have, not the danger that she could be in – and in the aftermath of Bondi we must all reflect on our collective responsibility to make that a reality.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:34): I rise to add my words of condolence, grief, anguish and determination to the contributions that have been made around this Parliament and indeed around parliaments across Australia and the world. Darkness came to Bondi on 14 December, and it took the worst of all possible forms. Jews were all of a sudden unable to feel safe at a time of celebration, a time when the symbolic importance of light triumphing over darkness could not have been further from the reality that was being experienced. On that day we watched around Australia and around the world with horror, in disbelief at what was unfolding. We could not quite believe what was appearing before us in a country where we pride ourselves on multicultural inclusion, on the importance of Australia being better for the many voices, languages, histories, cultures and

experiences of the people who we are proud to call Australians. We watched as darkness enveloped Bondi. We saw at the same time light triumph over darkness time and time and time again, where people put themselves in danger, shielding others, supporting strangers, making sure that people had what little succour could be offered to them in a time of greatest distress and anguish. We saw these very acts of human kindness and compassion that reinforced that light remains present.

As in the days and weeks that followed, in the months and years to come we need to make sure that we hold fast to that light in the actions that we take as governments, in the words that we use actively and proactively to make sure that Jews are supported not to make themselves small; that they are welcomed, included and celebrated; that matters of faith and culture are embraced; and indeed that nobody has at the heart of a decision to participate in an event, a festival or a celebration any kind of fear about whether they will be able to make it home safely after that has concluded.

The stories should be told and should continue to be told from here not just about what happened in that darkness, not just about what happened in the presence of light in those darkest of times, but about what happens from here in that healing, in those smallest acts that made sure that people had every bit of what little comfort and succour could be provided in the course of what occurred on 14 December. My words will be added to the canon of words in this Parliament and around Australia and the world of our horror, our dismay and our anguish. But our words also need to translate into determination to make sure that where we go from here acknowledges that pain, that loss and that devastation but also recommits to the triumph of light over darkness. My condolences to everybody who continues to reel from what has occurred, and my determination alongside those in this Parliament, those with a voice, is to make sure that we do everything possible to make and keep members of our Jewish community safe, celebrated and included.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:38): I rise on behalf of the Nationals to add my voice to honour the memory of the 15 innocent people murdered at the Bondi Beach shooting on 14 December last year. The gunmen launched into innocent victims, people there to enjoy each other's company, to celebrate Hanukkah, to be in the moment, to share with friends and family and to be both Jewish and in Australia. It was an act of antisemitism and hatred that we cannot tolerate, should not tolerate. We must seek out those that wish to do these things and act upon them with the greatest of will and the deepest of action. There is a Bible saying that I think many people will know, and I am sure if I delved into the Jewish religion and other religions there would be similar ones: greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friend. I think we saw that in spades on that day. We saw that with 10-year-old Matilda Britvan's mother, who was separated from her at the time of the shooting. When the shooting began, Matilda's mother laid over the top of another child and protected her. She saw horrific things and she protected that child with her own physical body. She would have given her life for that child. We have heard – and I thank the members in this house for sharing their insights – of many, many others, and we saw them and we watched them on the television over and over again. The bravery and the dedication – whether they be just individual people there on the day or whether they be police officers or first responders, paramedics and the like, they ran toward that danger, and that is hugely significant in the character that I believe is Australian. We thank all of those medics and the various doctors and nurses et cetera that cared for those who went to hospital. We think of the police officers who are recovering from that time.

As I said, antisemitism has no place. I want to just think about us as a nation. I attended and celebrated many citizenship ceremonies, as many of us did, over the last month. You welcome our multicultural community into Australia and you say, 'Welcome. Thank you for joining us. Thank you for becoming Australians. Thank you for bringing your talents and your gifts to our nation.' We think about Australia. We have one of the longest continuous Indigenous cultures. We have one of the oldest democratic institutions in the world. We have one of the most multicultural societies, and we are, I believe, very much a peace-loving nation.

Life is a long journey. We need to be reading and learning about all cultures and religions, and one person that I have read on is Sir John Monash. At the time of the end of the First World War he was a

national hero. He was a national hero not because he went to war and what he did or the war per se but because of how he operated. He was ingenious and strategic in his wisdom and his courage, but he also cared about the individual, and when he came back he continued to care about the individual and did many great things in our country. One of his statements, and he spoke often of it, was that the best hope for Australia is at the ballot box and good education – this Jewish Victorian. Those words compel us to look to those democratic values that we all hold dear, to look to leadership both at the very top and all the way down in society.

I believe what we saw at Bondi was that Australian spirit. It was courage, endurance, mateship and sacrifice, and we must hold onto that spirit now. We have to reaffirm every day that Jewish Australians – Jewish Victorians – have an unmistakable, unshakable right to live like I do as a seventh generation Australian: to practise their religion, to live their lives, to worship, to learn, to work and to be safe. Finally, may the memories of those 15 lives that were taken forever reside in the hearts of us and of their loved ones as a blessing. May their families feel not only our compassion today but our actions well into the future – not just words, but actions from leaders. May we honour the sacrifice and stand against hatred. I thank this house for the opportunity to reflect.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:44): Jewish people have a saying for times of tragedy: 'May their memory be a blessing.' It gives us a small insight into Jewish resilience and how they find light in the darkest of circumstances. I did not personally know the victims of Bondi, except for the stories and video from that terrible day in December, and yet their memory can be a blessing. Recently I met with my friend Dr Isaac Balbin, who helped me see it this way when he told me he would like politicians to talk less about being sad and more about the acts of courage on that day. There was nobody braver than Isaac's cousin Reuven Morrison. You probably remember him as the guy who distracted the gunmen by throwing a piece of brick at one of them. But if you look at the footage before this, you can see him standing unarmed and staring down the gunmen for several seconds.

What is a terrorist who cannot cause terror? They are a failure, and several other things that I probably could not say here. But not to worry: Isaac tells me that Reuven told them these things that I would like to say, and he undoubtedly said them even better. He had a razor-sharp wit, and witnesses say that one of the last things the gunmen ever heard was not a religious incantation but a withering hail of creative insults from a 61-year-old Jewish man. At this point the terrorists must have wondered who was really under fire. Now, that memory is a blessing. Reuven was shot, but he kept advancing. He eventually took 11 bullets before he was stopped. But it is clear that he was in control. He decided very early on to take those bullets so that others would not have to. He forced the gunmen to do exactly what he wanted. Terrorists have one job, and that is to scare you, and Reuven made them fail. Of course this was just one of several acts of bravery on that day. The courage of Ahmed Al Ahmed is rightly world famous. Let us not also forget 69-year-old Boris and 61-year-old Sofia Gurman. They were the first people on the scene. They recognised evil immediately, and they were having none of it. These memories should not just be a blessing; they should also be a lesson for us.

There is a stark contrast between the courage we saw at Bondi and the political response. Our political class has been afraid to talk about the problem of Islamic extremism. Antisemitism festers behind a cloak held up by useful idiots across the political spectrum, but this event clearly demonstrated the acute danger arising from jihadists, who have been perpetrators of the worst terrorist incidents for years. Instead of naming the problem, we get an endless stream of deflections and platitudes. The most overused phrase surely is that there is no place for antisemitism. This must sound ridiculous to Jewish people, who see places for antisemitism all around them.

According to the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, there were 552 antisemitic incidents reported in Victoria last year, including 42 assaults, 80 incidents at synagogues and 39 incidents targeting schools and children. Not only is there a place for antisemitism in Victoria, there is a time and place. That place is the State Library Victoria at noon every Sunday, where antisemites and people

who claim to just be their friends meet for a protest. We are meant to believe it is just a coincidence that the only world conflict they care about is the one that antisemites care about.

Enough with the platitudes. If we believe there is no place for antisemitism, we could start by calling out the people who openly support Hamas on the streets of the CBD in this city. We should ask why these people are supporting a foreign terror group and who is influencing and funding them. And if we really think there is no place for antisemitism in Victoria, we should demand a migration program that diligently selects people according to compatibility with Australian values, the kinds of values that are already spelt out in our citizenship pledge. It is absurd that this needs to be said, but a migration program that imports people who want to kill us is a failed migration program. The politicians and bureaucrats who have overseen this made Australia a place for antisemitism.

I do not know why people are afraid to even name the problem. Maybe they are worried about the political consequences or there might be negative comments on social media, or maybe they are afraid a friend might call them a 'phobia' or call them a name. Compare that to the courage of Reuven Morrison. He showed us how we defeat terrorism: you recognise it, you stare back at it and you refuse to be afraid. He showed us that terrorism is pointless when you refuse to be terrified. Political courage is nothing by comparison. May Reuven's memory and the memories of all those that died at Bondi on Hanukkah always be a blessing.

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:49): I rise to support the condolence motion moved by the Leader of the Government Jaclyn Symes, and I extend my deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of those who lost their lives as a result of the 14 December Bondi terror attack. While this violence occurred beyond our state borders, its impact has been felt deeply here in Victoria and again as recently as last night with the *Four Corners* program, part 1, on the Bondi attack. Victoria is home, as we have heard from others today, to one of the largest and most vibrant Jewish communities in the nation. The ripple effect of hatred and violence does not recognise state boundaries. No community anywhere in Australia should ever feel targeted, unsafe or unwelcome because of their faith, identity or heritage, and we affirm that antisemitism has no place in our state; nor do hatred, extremism or violence in any form. We condemn antisemitism and all forms of racism, and we will continue to work to stamp it out.

This was an act of calculated and planned violence targeting the Jewish community at an event celebrating one of Judaism's most important days. It was dark and it was horrific, and we know that we saw true heroism shining through. I pay tribute to the first responders who risked their lives to run towards danger – police, paramedics and other emergency health services, including lifeguards, who stopped the attackers and saved so many lives – and to the doctors and nurses who saved lives and tended to the wounded. I also pay tribute to and acknowledge the many community members who stepped in and intervened to protect other people at great risks to themselves. Ahmed Al Ahmed, born in Syria, saved countless lives when he disarmed one of the attackers. He showed immense courage and bravery, nearly losing his own life to save others. When asked about his decision to intervene, he said, 'My soul asked me to do that.' Last week, on 26 January, he became the first ever recipient of the City of Canterbury Bankstown's Key to the City award, an award recognising his selflessness and bravery. I think we are all moved by his heroism and the heroism of others who all risked or lost their lives to protect others on that day.

This is the strength of our multicultural Australia. We have a diverse, proud and strong society, and when tragedy strikes, we do band together. An attack on one community is an attack on the values that bind us together. An attack on one community anywhere in Australia is a challenge to the values we uphold everywhere. We stand in solidarity with the Jewish community in New South Wales, in Victoria and right across this nation. We reaffirm Victoria's commitment to religious freedom, multiculturalism and mutual respect. Victoria's strength is its diversity. May the memory of those who lost their lives be honoured with compassion, dignity and resolve.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:53): I thank the Leader of the Government for bringing forward this motion. It is hard to think of a more Australian occurrence than a religious community gathering together at one of the most iconic beaches in Australia on a warm summer's day. There were children playing, there was face painting and there were family and friends having a good time together as they worshipped. I think I would be on pretty safe ground saying that many of us as members of Parliament have been to similar types of events with lots of different multicultural communities, which makes it so difficult to believe what occurred and makes what occurred so unfathomable. We consider the beach the most Australian of places – the sunburnt summers and the relaxed idyll that is the centre of our national identity.

We are a country where the right to worship freely has never been contested and where Australians of all faiths contribute to our strong and prosperous society. It is for these reasons that the terrorist attack on the Jewish community in Sydney on 14 December, as they celebrated Hanukkah, shook Australia to its core. Fifteen lives were lost, and I want to take a moment to say their names: Matilda, Edith Brutman, Dan Elkayam, Boris and Sofia Gurman, Alexander Kleytman, Rabbi Yaakov Levitan, Peter Meagher, Reuven Morrison, Marika Pogany, Rabbi Eli Schlanger, Adam Smyth, Boris Tetleroyd, Tania Tretiak, Tibor Weitzen. Each of these lives lost is a tragedy. As a parent of three young children and as a grandson of migrants to this country, I particularly shed a tear for the loss of 10-year-old Matilda, whose parents, Michael Britvan and Valentyna Poltavchenko, named her that because, to quote Michael, 'Matilda was the most Australian name that could ever exist.' There is no doubt that they loved this country. They loved this country so much and loved the community that they were in and that they were part of. We remember Matilda and each of the victims of this attack and their families.

The following day I joined Leader of the Opposition Jess Wilson, David Southwick and many other colleagues at the Caulfield Hebrew Congregation to meet with community leaders. Victoria has a significant Jewish community, as does Sydney, but relative to other communities it is not a huge community. It is more like, as I think Ms Purcell said, a family. It is a community where everyone knows each other, so even though this event happened in Sydney, it has deeply affected the Jewish community in this state. Jewish Australians are our neighbours, our friends, our colleagues and our family. Their religious celebrations deserve respect. They should be free to worship and not have to hide their faith while doing so. Since the First Fleet, Jewish Australians have been an integral part of Australia's society. Our first Australian-born Governor-General, Sir Isaac Isaacs, and our greatest citizen soldier, General Sir John Monash, are among tens of thousands of Jewish Australians who have built and served this country.

Our focus should rightly be on the victims and survivors of this attack, but I do want to reflect on the cause. Antisemitism is the world's oldest hatred. It is an inexplicable, insidious, rotten hatred which poisons societies and minds alike. It is a cruel hatred because it is based on one's birth, not one's actions, and it is immune to any logic or argument. It has no place in this country. These tragedies do not exist in a bubble. They happen with acceptance of hatred and in some cases encouragement of hateful ideology. I come from a position in the northern suburbs where there is a very large multicultural community of overwhelmingly fantastic citizens and proud patriots of Australia. But as members of Parliament it is our duty to know where the line is. We in the opposition continue to await details of the government's announced social cohesion pledge and think that would be a good thing.

The following are comments preached by a sheikh in the northern suburbs to congregations and broadcast online where I think that social cohesion has been breached. This is not me saying this:

> Oh Allah, cast terror into the hearts of the Zionists and shake the ground beneath their feet.
>
> Oh Allah, take away from them the blessings of security, scatter their gatherings, and tear apart their unity.

And:

> … I've always believed that … Zionists are not normal … They are bloodsucking human beings…They're scavengers. They are not humans, I swear by Allah.

We certainly on the opposition side do not believe that organisations whose leaders have expressed such hatred should be worthy of taxpayer funds, as has happened under this government. We certainly do not believe these kinds of individuals should be given relevance or endorsements by way of multiple ministerial visits and multiple government MP visits, as has happened in recent years under this government.

Hatred like this should never, ever be tolerated. Tragedies like this do not happen out of nowhere. They begin with hateful bile like this. The Liberals and Nationals know where the line is, and you will never see us associating with so-called leaders who have spewed such hatred and, I would say, incitement about our Jewish community here in this state. If we do not know where the line is and we do not take a stand and call it out for what it is, because it might be politically inconvenient, we are not serving our duty as elected leaders and we will end up with more Bondis.

Human instinct is to run from danger, to protect oneself and one's family in the face of unspeakable tragedy. But what we saw was the best of humanity responding. To Ahmed Al Ahmed, Yanky Super, Gefen Bitton and the many brave first responders, I want to say thank you. Hanukkah is a happy occasion, the Festival of Lights, where a miracle is said to be the oil which lasted for eight nights and allowed the menorah to stay lit. The light of the menorah has sustained the Jewish people for thousands of years and it will sustain them for thousands more, even in the face of the terror and tragedy that was forced upon them on 14 December. Our country was changed forever by this event, but we will not be defined by it. We will continue to be a country and a state where people can worship freely and safely. We will stay vigilant against antisemitism, and above all, we will remember the victims of Bondi.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (13:02): I want to make sure that it is clear that this is from me, not from my party. On 14 December 2025 I was watching TV. We were celebrating the first night of Hanukkah, lighting the first candle. I am a goy, but I am part of the Jewish community just by virtue of marrying a Jew. When it started my first reaction was, 'Oh no, here it goes.' The initial death toll – and I use the word 'only' in context – was only one or two. But it kept on going and it kept on going. At this stage my daughter, who was five at the time, we put her to bed, because we knew this was getting bigger and bigger and bigger and we did not need her to see this. The downside to it was my mother-in-law, who is a Holocaust baby, was watching it with us. She was born in Poland in 1943, and she knows antisemitism. It is Jew hatred. I really do not like the term 'antisemitism', because I think it was just said before that it is one of the oldest hatreds. You can call it antisemitism, anti-Zionism, whatever you want – it is the hatred of Jews. It had raised its ugly head in Australia in – the word 'spectacular' is not right – a spectacular fashion.

But this did not happen in a vacuum. This has been happening time and time again. I have had to sit here every sitting week and listen to antisemitism sprout from my left. That is why I say – and that is as far as I am getting into the politics – that this does not happen in a vacuum. The Jewish people of Australia have been feeling this for a long, long time. The Jewish people of Australia even have I think it is the CSG, the community security group. What other religion needs guards? What other religion needs guards with guns outside a school?

This shows that we still have a long way to go as a country. We saw the worst of Australia, and I am not talking about migrants and I am surely not talking about Muslims, because I talked to Muslims after that and they are as hurt as anyone else. One of the terrorists was born in Australia. This is not about that. This is about evil intent. But it is also about the people who ran towards the danger. We had a Syrian Muslim get shot helping people. We had Jewish people who took 11 bullets to stop other people getting shot. We had police running towards the danger, not knowing what it was. We had civilians running towards the danger not knowing what was going on except that it was danger. This is a watershed moment for Australia and for Victoria.

When I look at where we are going as a country, in a lot of ways I just do not feel it is great. The political fallout from this incident was, in a word, disgusting. The blame-shifting was next level, Olympic level, and yet no-one's still trying to get to the bottom of the problems. We will see what

comes up. We will see what comes with the royal commission. I have seen enough royal commissions in my time to know not to be holding my breath while waiting for a reasonable result. That is up to the royal commission to sort out.

I am going to finish with two things. I remember looking at the picture of Matilda and thinking, 'That could be my daughter.' And why? Because she is Jewish; she was born that way. It is incumbent upon us to remember that we are meant to protect our kids, and a lot of people clearly gave their lives to try to help and protect people. But we cannot allow this to continue. The Jews use a phrase that we have mentioned before: never again. Well, 'never again' is right now. What that means now is that if we are not careful, the world will slide into something a lot worse. I will do my utmost, as the proud father of a Jewish girl and the proud husband of a Jewish wife, to do my best to make sure that does not happen. As I said, this is my personal reflection on this, not my political reflection, but this did not happen in a vacuum. May their memories be a blessing.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (13:07): I rise today to give my contribution to this condolence motion and with that pay tribute and my deepest condolences to the victims and communities that have been affected by this attack. Dates in history are usually just markers of time, but occasionally they become scars. Sunday 14 December is now such a date. It will forever remain in our nation's memory not just as a day of loss and sorrow but as a day when the very best of us was tested by the very worst of us. To understand what was taken, we must remember what that day was meant to be. It was the first day of Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights. It was a festival of renewal, reminding us that even in the darkest times hope can be rekindled.

Hundreds of people gathered by the sea at one of our national icons, Bondi Beach, a place of gathering and joy during what should have been a time of celebration and renewal. It became the backdrop for an act of unfathomable violence and hate. It was not a random tragedy. It was an evil act of antisemitism and terror. It was an act designed to turn a festival of light into a day of darkness. It targeted Jewish Australians and it struck at the very heart of our national character and values. Fifteen innocent lives were stolen that day and so many more were changed forever. I will read out their names because they deserve to be heard many times: Rabbi Yaakov Levitan, Rabbi Eli Schlanger, Boris and Sofia Gurman, Edith Brutman, Dan Elkayam, Alex Kleytman, Peter Meagher, Reuven Morrison, Marika Pogany, Adam Smyth, Boris Tetleroyd, Tania Tretiak, Tibor Weitzen and young Matilda, all of whom were murdered, and hundreds more were targeted because of their faith.

What struck me was that only a few days earlier, on Human Rights Day, I was at the anti-hate summit. I was joined by Jewish community leaders, by faith leaders and by advocates for peace from across our society. We sat together to reaffirm that hate has no place here, that division has no place here and that antisemitism has no place here or anywhere. To have that challenged so brutally and so soon afterwards is a source of profound anguish not just for our Jewish community but for all of us. But we must not forget that amidst the chaos and the violence, and in that moment of darkness, light revealed itself. We saw it in the first responders who ran towards the danger. We saw it in the paramedics, the nurses and the doctors who worked through the night and the following days to save every life they could. We saw it in the surf lifesavers who immediately turned their attention to providing first aid on the beach. We saw it in the thousands of people right across the country who lined up to donate blood. And we saw it in individual acts of extraordinary heroism. Where there was the worst of evil and hatred there was also the best of courage and unity. It is that unity that is the only way through this. Terror seeks to drive a wedge between communities – between us – but we must prove that our bond is stronger than their hate. Looking out for one another and being together, not fragmented, is the only way that hate can never win.

To the families and the loved ones of the 15 people whose lives who were so cruelly taken, we mourn with you. To everyone who has been touched by what happened on that awful day, we grieve with you. We cannot take away your pain, but we promise you that you will not carry it alone. To the Jewish community of Victoria and Australia, we stand with you against this darkness and against the evils of

antisemitism today, tomorrow and always. I commend the motion and thank you for the opportunity to speak to it.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (13:12): I also rise to commend this motion, and I thank the government for putting it to the house. I especially want to start by commending Ms Purcell for her words, which truly struck and resonated with me. I too have over the past few years been coming to grips with the fact that the horrors of the Holocaust are not something that just were so bad they would never be repeated. The fact is that there is a massive antisemitism – Jew-hating – problem in Australia. It must have been there under the surface. It must have been there for a long time. For a lot of us it was a moment of shock when we realised just how bad and just how widespread it was after 7 October. Seeing people brazenly do Nazi salutes on the steps of Parliament, people wave around Hamas flags and people call for the genocide of Jews and seeing the government really only rage against one of those two types of antisemitism was absolutely devastating.

I would like to commend Mr Limbrick for his words and for the beautiful way that he honoured the victims. I would like to reiterate the words of my colleague Mr Mulholland that taxpayer funds should not be going to people who call for direct violence and who support terrorism.

Like all of you, that was a day that I will never forget. I actually was talking on my phone and watching it on X – the whole thing. Isn't it a horrible period of time when you can watch something like that live? But I could not tear my eyes away. In fact we were both pretty miserable because we thought, 'This is going to be another horrendous tragedy where people don't react properly – where the governments just try and whitewash it, they try and ignore the real problem.' Sadly, in many cases that was true. We have been watching for the last few years the absolute failure of hate speech laws – not being applied when they should have been and being applied selectively. But there are no wars in Australia. We are not going to have jihad in Australia. We are not going to have people wage their foreign wars on Australian soil. Jewish people, along with every single person in this country, should be safe. We should not be turning guns on each other in Australia. Our police should not be outgunned. Watching those people pinned down, defenceless on open ground, shielding each other with their bodies, was one of the most horrific scenes imaginable, and it happened not in a history book, not in another country, but in Australia.

I also would like to say what an honour it has been to be involved with the Jewish community recently and to see the beautiful way that they deal with this grief that is entwined with their entire history. Here at Parliament House we had a beautiful bipartisan remembrance event MCed by Peta Credlin. Those of us who were there might remember the beautiful singing that they blessed all of us with. They did not respond with hate. They did not lash out. They did reject the offer of more funding for security, because they, like the rest of us, would like to see the laws and the police that we already have used to do something about this disgraceful vilification and incitement to violence against our citizens.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (13:16): I rise today to speak on the condolence motion for the Bondi terrorist attack. On behalf of One Nation Victoria, I express my sincerest condolences to the families of those lost and to the Australian Jewish community, and I want them to know that we stand with them. On 14 December 2025 Australia changed forever. Fifteen innocent people were gunned down in a horrific act of terror. Forty innocent people, including children, were seriously injured in this attack. The Chanukah by the Sea festival was deliberately targeted. Jewish people celebrating one of their most sacred times were targeted simply for their beliefs. At home with my children I watched this atrocity unfold before my very eyes. Seeing that our beautiful country had come to this, my heart broke for the families, for the friends, for the communities, for the country I love. The hatred on display on 14 December was despicable and intolerable.

But I was reminded of a line spoken by someone much wiser than I: look for the helpers. That is where you find the very best of Australian values – the images of the Bondi lifesaver running barefoot towards danger with medical equipment; the pregnant mum who covered a lost little girl with her own body to shield her from the flying bullets; Ahmed Al Ahmed, who tackled and disarmed one of the gunmen

with no regard for his own safety; and the police officers and paramedics who ran towards danger in order to save many more lives. In this time of darkness these brave souls were the light we needed.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (13:18): I rise to lend my voice to this motion of condolence and to add to this reflection of the cherished memories of those who were murdered at Bondi on 14 December. To Rabbi Eli Schlanger; Rabbi Yaakov Levitan; Alex Kleytman, a Holocaust survivor; Peter Meagher; Boris and Sofia Gurman; Edith Brutman; Dan Elkayam; Reuven Morrison; Marika Pogany; Adam Smyth; Boris Tetleroyd; Tania Tretiak; Tibor Weitzen; and Matilda, may your memories be a blessing. They gathered at Bondi to celebrate, to express their culture at that most sacred of Australian places, the beach, to celebrate the first night of Hanukkah, a gathering that symbolises community, joy and cultural tradition. It was interrupted by hatred, interrupted by terror, interrupted by antisemitism and interrupted by death – all targeted at the Jewish community by vile people who tried to tear down what our country holds dear: love, respect and tolerance. It was a dark moment at a time when we were trying to bring light to darkness, but we saw, on that night and in the days following, acts of courage and heroism that saved lives. We saw profound grief. We saw a shattering of many of the things that as a nation we hold dear. I want to extend my thanks to everyone who has showed compassion, everyone who has showed love, particularly to those who either ran to the scene or were there to participate in the celebrations and put their bodies on the line, who gave their lives to save others; to the first responders who turned up and did what they could to stop the carnage; to those who helped save more lives by treating the injured and the wounded; and to those assisting those still recovering from what occurred not yet two months ago.

The Jewish community here in Melbourne is so intimately connected to the Jewish community in Sydney – like one. In the days that followed 14 December I spoke with members of the community, community leaders, constituents and friends, who all spoke of who they knew, who they had been speaking to who was there that night, what it had meant to them, the way that those events shattered their sense of security – shattered the sense for so many that Australia had become a place of sanctuary, particularly after the Holocaust, with Melbourne being home to the largest per capita number of Holocaust survivors outside of Israel – what it meant to be here and the consequences of the shattering of that sense of sanctuary and security that the events at Bondi on 14 December meant. There have been some particular reflections for Alex Kleytman, who had survived the horror of World War II only to have his own life taken by a horrendous act of terror on a beach in a country that had provided him sanctuary for so many years.

We have now I think, as leaders of our community, both a task to understand what motivated and caused the events that led to this act of terror and a responsibility to come together and figure out how we can take collective action so that the causes of that harm and the mechanisms that were used to enact it cannot happen again. There will be time, I hope, for this place to debate the measures that we think are further necessary. I do not think now is the time for us to engage in that, but it will come. I hope that on those occasions the words that have echoed around the chamber today reverberate through the ears of those of us who get to cast a vote on the things that we all have to do collectively to make sure that our community is safer.

In conclusion I say to my dear friends in the Jewish community: you belong here, your culture belongs here. It is not just that you have got a right to express who you are, but I want to see you express who you are. I want to join with you. I want to sit in those synagogues and hear them filled with joyous singing and prayer. I want to smell the sweet smells of those honey cakes at Rosh Hashana, to join you breaking challah at Shabbat. And next year, on the first night of Hanukkah, I want to join you in lighting a candle to bring light to this darkness. At the state vigil held recently, the dean of the Anglican Church, the diocese, quoted the words from St Francis that 'All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle.' I think that what the Jewish community has showed and what we collectively have showed as Australians is that acts of terror will not extinguish that light, and we will remember those who died that day and honour their memories in the future.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:26): I rise to express my deep sorrow at the tragic loss of life in this recent attack at Bondi, and I extend my deepest condolences to the Jewish community, to the families who have lost loved ones and to the many that have been injured as a result. We send our blessings to all of them. On 14 December Chanukah by the Sea was being celebrated at Sydney's Bondi Beach. It was going to involve over a thousand attendees. Hanukkah, a festival of miracle and hope; Hanukkah, a festival that celebrates light over darkness; Hanukkah, a festival that celebrates the freedom to worship God.

I am very privileged to have studied with, worked with and befriended many members of the Jewish community over the years at school, at work and in life. I have enjoyed Passover in the home of Jewish friends. I have been to synagogue and enjoyed the Purim celebration. I have always been struck both at school and at work and throughout my life by the hard work, the talent, the resilience, the love and the dedication to family, faith and community that my friends in the Jewish community share with all of us in Australia. It is such a profound tragedy to have seen Jewish lives lost in this nation in such a terrorist attack.

With three years only in Parliament, from the very beginning I was hearing from the Jewish community about their fear of an attack, their fear about the anti-Jewish sentiments that were being spoken in universities, on streets and in schools. They spoke about their fear about the behaviour of others and the words that were being used. They explained that when people say certain comments in different protests, they are actually talking about the complete annihilation of a land of Jewish people. It is simply incomprehensible to have known and to continue to know survivors from the Holocaust and their descendants and to think that they came here to be safe and to enjoy life in this country, only to find that through negligence, through oversight and through ignorance, people have allowed us to get to this situation where we have a tragedy such as this on the shores of one of Australia's most famous beaches. The effects of this devastating massacre have been felt not just by all of us here but by all Australians. People in Australia being massacred for celebrating their faith and culture, being massacred because of who they are as a race of people or being massacred because they are also standing and enjoying that celebration with this community – it should never happen. It must never happen again.

I also want to thank all the courageous Australians – those that were shielding people from bullets, those who went in to be proactive in trying to stop what was happening and those who were emergency services workers and special individuals. So many people showed great bravery that day. In their bravery in the midst of that, in spite of the darkness that was taking place at the start of Hanukkah, these people showed that light can overcome darkness. They showed that you can have a miracle and hope in the most evil of times.

We have to learn lessons from the past. It is there for every Australian to learn from. The Holocaust is no secret. It is taught in schools, and so it should be. As we stand in solidarity in Parliament, may we remember the importance of the responsibility that we have to keep Victorians safe from religious, cultural and racial persecution and free from violent extremism, so that we can see light genuinely overcome darkness and all Victorians and Australians may remain safe.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:32): I rise to offer my condolences to the people of Bondi, to Australia's Jewish community and to all those affected by December's terror attack, particularly the loved ones of the victims. What happened on that evening of 14 December 2025 shocked people across Australia. Here in Melbourne, far from where the bullets were flying, the Jewish community were not just terrified for their own friends and family in danger in Sydney, they were also terrified of a similar attack that might happen here as well. The sense of terror that was felt throughout the Jewish community and throughout the whole of Australian society has not completely subsided. Today in February the raw emotional impact which that event had on the national psyche has not gone away, and I suspect it will carry with us for a long time to come. That is because 15 people were gunned down in the worst terror attack on Australian soil in our history: 15 people at a Hanukkah festival at a time when young and old came out to celebrate an ancient holiday by the sea; 15 people

at a time which was supposed to symbolise the victory of light over darkness; 15 people, each death its own individual tragedy, from 10-year-old Matilda, whose parents gave her the name because it reminded them of Australia, to Rabbi Eli Schlanger, who was a pillar of Sydney's Jewish community and Chabad movement, who was remembered for his endless capacity for empathy, compassion and service to others, and to Alexander Kleytman, the 87-year-old Holocaust survivor who died while attempting to shield his wife from the bullets. We should all find it deeply unsettling that a man who witnessed and survived the horrors of the Holocaust at the start of his life all those decades ago would, decades on, have the same violent and deadly antisemitism chase him all the way across the world to Australia.

It is significant because it is important that all Australians remember that antisemitism did not face its final defeat in 1945, nor did it lie dormant and quiet until December last year. The Jewish community knew that antisemitism was alive and posing a direct threat to their way of life long before December 2025. On 6 December 2024 in the early hours of the morning the Adass Israel Synagogue was burnt down in an attack which was found to be sponsored by the government of Iran. The message that perpetrators sought to leave was the same that the shooters in Bondi sought to leave: they want Jewish people to live in fear, to feel they do not belong, to feel that Australia will no longer be the place of safety, security and peace which it has been for decades.

Many members of the Jewish community fled violence, persecution and genocide to come to Australia. Australia has the highest number of Holocaust survivors per capita outside Israel. Terrorists want to shatter that very idea of Australia being a safe haven for Jewish people and for any other group of people who want to come here as refugees. That is the test which has come before our country. We will maintain our status as a safe haven, a place where people can leave behind the worst of what history has inflicted upon the human race, the worst of what man made, to come to live in a society which is peaceful, safe, secure and stable, a society in which coexistence, multiculturalism and religious freedom are taken as highly regarded virtues of the nation instead of being toxic impurities and scapegoat fodder. Protecting that vision and reality of Australia must come from a new national mission. We must protect it, we can protect it and we will protect it.

We here in this chamber are taking a few moments out of our sitting day to dedicate our thoughts and our words to the victims of the Bondi attack and their families, but the true dedication will not take place within these walls of this Parliament House. It takes place in the response we saw in the broader Australian society, from which we know that we are locked in a struggle against hate and extremism; in the strength shown by the Jewish community in the days and weeks following the attack; in the heroism of Ahmed Al Ahmed; and in the unity and solidarity which came from every sector of Australian society, from members of every faith. That strength, that heroism and that unity is how we will win against the hate and how a nation may thus deliver itself from the evil which we witnessed on 14 December.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (13:37): 14 December 2025 was the saddest day in our nation in my lifetime. The Bondi terror attack demands courageous scrutiny and unapologetic reform. This is not a time for words. It is not a time for deflection. It is a time for real leadership. It is time for us to get real. Experts warned that Bondi did not happen in a vacuum. It followed two years of textbook antisemitic escalation, textbook antisemitism that led to the murder of Tibor, Tania, Boris, Adam, Rabbi Eli – who I had the pleasure of meeting – Marika, Reuven, Peter, Rabbi Yaakov, Alexander, Boris and Sofia, Dan, Edith and the face that we all have in our minds, little Matilda.

The day after the biggest loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust, which was 7 October, should have been a time when people came together and unified. It should have been a time when we all stood together and said no to hate. But instead we witnessed chants of 'Gas the Jews' outside the Sydney Opera House on the day after 7 October, then weekly rallies across our capital cities that called for intifada and the annihilation of Israel. Far from condemning this, many senior figures either turned a blind eye or, even worse, joined in. We heard people saying that antisemitism had absolutely no place in the state of Victoria – they are the words we heard – but what we actually saw was antisemitism

given a stage, a platform and sometimes a megaphone every single Sunday afternoon in this state. I believe that we saw antisemitism become a politically correct form of hatred, a socially acceptable form of hatred, which was then called political expression. I cannot imagine the frustration that Jewish Australians must have felt when they saw groups with extremist links remain operating unscrutinised; Hizb ut-Tahrir's call for the destruction of the State of Israel and the establishment of an Islamic caliphate with the government dragging their feet to proscribe them as a terror organisation; or what is worse, the government's failure to adopt the full recommendations of the special envoy to combat antisemitism.

After the largest terror attack in the world targeting Jews since October 7 happening here on our shores in Australia, for the nation that claims to be the most successful multicultural nation on earth there must be a reckoning. The reality is Australia was the furthest place from Europe when they were experiencing the biggest uprise of antisemitism in the 1940s. People fled here because it was the place furthest away from the hate that they were experiencing. Yet it was here, on 14 December, that a Holocaust survivor was murdered in cold blood on a day at the beach.

There has to be stronger leadership, not just nationally but here in the state of Victoria – the state of Victoria that is now the capital of protests in the world, the state where hatred has been spewed and it has been called political expression, the state where people like Mohamed Mohideen, who praised Hamas after 7 October and praised the Islamic regime after they were murdering their own citizens, was allowed to keep his place on the Victorian Multicultural Commission board. Not only that, this man, after praising Hamas and their actions, was praised at the Premier's multicultural dinner.

I want to tell the story of what happened recently when I was at an event with Mohamed Mohideen. I went to leave, and he came to me and started to talk about how apparently the Liberals, the Nationals and the Labor Party were causing Islamophobia. I listened to him rant and rave for quite a while until I had had enough, and I said, 'The Liberal Party, Mohamed, is not causing Islamophobia. The National Party is not.' And I hated to give you guys a free kick, but I said, 'The Labor Party is not causing Islamophobia.' I said, 'You are, because you are failing to draw a line between good, peace-loving Muslims that are here to contribute to this society and groups like Hamas and the Iranian regime.' We have to draw a division between those two types of people, because they are completely different. If we do not take leadership and we do not draw a line between those two groups, let me tell you, there will be hate and there will be destruction in this city.

I bring that up because, I tell you what, on the inside of every human heart there is a line – we know that terrorism is wrong. We saw that with the Muslim man who tackled that gunman. We saw that with him. We saw that with the lifeguards that ran towards danger. We saw that with the woman who lay her body over somebody else's child to protect her. And we saw that in the Jewish man who threw a brick at one of those terrorists but sadly lost his life. We have to stop playing games, I believe, and we need to call out hatred wherever we see it, because there has to be a coming together. It does not matter what race, religion, ethnicity or any of those points of difference you have or you are. We have to call out hatred when we see it. Terrorism crossed into our territory on 14 December, and it must be called out. We must stand together against it, and we must stand together for unity in this state.

I want to pay tribute to the amazing people whose families are absolutely shattered today because of the loss of their loved ones: Tibor, Tania, Boris, Adam, Rabbi Eli, Marika, Reuven, Peter, Rabbi Yaakov, Alexander, Boris and Sofia, Dan, Edith and Matilda. We pray that your memory will be a blessing.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:44): It is with a heavy heart that I rise to add my voice to the condolence motion before us today. It is still incomprehensible to think that a peaceful event celebrating Hanukkah on an Australian beach was so cruelly and maliciously targeted just a few weeks ago. Hundreds of people had gathered in peace, in goodwill and in harmony, in much the same way as countless other Australians do each and every day, to observe their faith and to connect with community. On what should have been an ordinary, joyous day, 15 innocent people lost their lives, 39

were seriously injured and hundreds upon hundreds were traumatised. This attack has torn at the heart of Australia.

It has been mentioned a few times, but one of the things that has haunted me most in the aftermath of these attacks has been a reflection on the Holocaust. After the evil atrocities inflicted upon the Jewish people, Australia did become home to the largest number of Holocaust survivors outside of Israel – Melbourne, as we all know, in particular, but Sydney with large numbers too. They came here because it was distant from Europe, and they came here because it was safe. It is a fact which makes this attack all the more shocking. In particular it makes the loss of Alex Kleytman, a Holocaust survivor, that bit more painful. This country has been a safe place for Jewish people, especially those who fled the Holocaust. It was not on 14 December. It can be and it must be again. Too many Jewish Australians are feeling unsafe. I am grateful to those who have felt comfortable to share their experiences with me, both in my professional and my personal life, in the aftermath of the attack, from the stories of people whose friends and relatives were involved and caught up in the attack to the story of family friends who but for the fate of circumstance would have been on the beach in Bondi that evening.

Antisemitism is an ancient hatred, one that discounts a person's humanity and diminishes us all by its presence. As elected representatives we all have a responsibility to call out this and every case of racial and religious hatred when we see it. I want to commend the efforts of all communities across our nation who have come together in support of Jewish Australians and the heroes who committed outstanding acts of bravery to save the lives of others. I acknowledge the need for all of us to do whatever more we can do to support our Jewish Australians.

On the first night of Hanukkah a moment of light was snatched by darkness, but the light will always return. Australia is a place where Jews belong. Let us all combine to show them that, and let the memories of those 15 lives forever be a blessing.

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:47): I am grateful for the opportunity to offer my community's condolences for the 15 victims, including young Matilda, who lost their lives on 14 December. I also want to take the opportunity to thank all of those civilians, police and other emergency services, including the lifesavers, both the clubbies and the career lifesavers. They came from two clubs: North Bondi and Bondi Surf Bathers' Life Saving Club. That was one of my old clubs when I lived in Sydney for a short while between my political losses. They were perhaps the first I thought of, because I am most familiar with that club and that club is centred directly in front of where this act of unspeakable cowardice and evil occurred. Perhaps in our own minds that night we might have thought, as Mr Bourman alluded, that maybe this would be one or two fatalities at worst. Perhaps we hoped that. Sadly, it became unspeakably worse than that, and to a magnitude that I think none of us expected for a moment.

I offer my community's thoughts at this time to all of those people who at certain points in our history and more recent history in Australia have gone through other acts of terrorism. I need not remind those present here of the Bali bombing, where we lost 88 Australians; the Lindt cafe; and MH17 to name another. For those people affected by those acts of terrorism, this must be an occasion where they are horribly reminded of the evil that mankind can do to themselves and to each other.

I also want to make special mention of Reuven Morrison, as has been done today, as he is a grandfather from Melbourne. I also want to join those in this room who have said today that the acts perpetrated that day were not consistent with our values. They constituted not just an act of violence and terrorism on Jewish people but on all Australians. It is perhaps one small semblance of hope that we appear to be unified on this, if nothing else. I suppose we must also – and it has been mentioned today – make reference to that mantra of 'never again', but sadly, it seems to be somewhat hollow. I am already sick, in my lifetime, of visiting places like Kigali, Birkenau and Phnom Penh. The list is seemingly endless, and it continues to grow every day, every week and every month. I suppose that brings me to perhaps the most salient point, and I will finish on this: we will ultimately not be judged by our words but by our actions or our inactions.

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (13:51): I also rise to support the condolence motion and honour the 15 innocent lives that were taken in the terrorist attack at Bondi Beach – an attack that struck at the heart of Australia's Jewish community. This was not random violence. It was not senseless chaos. This was an act of antisemitic terror. Jewish Australians were targeted because of who they are – because of their faith, their identity and their place in our community. Families gathering to celebrate Hanukkah in one of Australia's most iconic places should have been safe, but instead they were met with hatred and brutality. We must speak plainly: antisemitism is real, it is present and it is deadly. We mourn the lives that were stolen – lives of faith, family, contribution and love. We grieve with parents who lost children, with children who lost parents and with families whose lives were shattered in a moment of unimaginable cruelty. To the Jewish community in Bondi, across New South Wales and Victoria and across our nation, you are not alone. Your grief is our grief.

At moments like this fear can spread well beyond the immediate victims. I know in my electorate of Northern Metropolitan we have the largest Iraqi and Syrian communities in this state. Many of them fled similar types of terrorism; they escaped and came to Australia to start new lives. But in the time afterwards it was clear – from the many conversations and time I spent with the community, in fact most recently on Australia Day, which I spent with Victoria's Iraqi community – that this incident has reopened wounds for many, revived memories of instability and fear and challenged a sense of safety in our country, a country where they thought they would be free to practise their faith and their culture. Their voices remind us that violence does not stop at the scene. It reverberates across communities and generations.

To our Jewish community – and the point has already been made by many speakers before me – your contribution to our state is immense, whether in medicine, law, education, business, or cultural and public life. Their contributions are too many to go through; John Monash is just one example. They have done all this while carrying the long memory of persecution and a deep commitment to resilience, dignity and community. An attack on the Jewish community is an attack on all of us – on all Australians and all Victorians. I do want to express my deep gratitude, because in the aftermath of the atrocity we did see extraordinary courage from Ahmed Al Ahmed, first responders and community members who just protected one another, and we heard Mr Bourman share one of those examples.

Jewish leaders themselves and the whole community leadership responded not with hatred but with strength, faith and resolve – light over darkness. The National Day of Mourning recognised a fundamental truth: this was not only a tragedy for one community but a wound to the whole nation. I know this because even from across the Middle East people were calling me: 'What's happening in Australia?' These kinds of terrorist incidents are unfortunately all too common in parts of the Middle East. They are not common in our country. We caught international attention for the wrong reasons. As lawmakers we carry responsibilities that go beyond words. We must confront antisemitism wherever it happens – whether it is in our streets, in our institutions or in our public discourse. We must ensure Jewish Australians can practise their faith, gather in public and live their lives without fear. We must never equivocate when hatred reveals itself. Today is about remembrance, but it is also about moral clarity. We remember those who were murdered, we honour the strength of a community that refuses to be broken and we affirm unequivocally that Jewish life in Australia matters. May we bless the memories of those that were lost, may their families find comfort in the solidarity of this nation and may this Parliament stand firm against antisemitism, against terror and always for dignity, safety and justice for all. I commend this motion to the house.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) incorporated the following:

> I rise today, on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria, to express profound sorrow at the tragic loss of life in the killings at Bondi. I extend my deepest condolences to the families, friends and loved ones of those who were taken, and to all who continue to carry grief, trauma and fear as a result of this senseless act of violence.
>
> We all acknowledge the shock felt by the community when a place of gathering and celebration was transformed into a scene of horror.

We all also honour the courage and compassion of first responders, health workers and community members who acted swiftly and selflessly, and who ran toward danger, who gave comfort, and who reminded us that courage and compassion still live among us.

As we mourn, we must also recognise the broader context in which this tragedy has occurred.

We must speak plainly about the moment we are living through.

For more than two years, the world has watched relentless civilian suffering in Gaza – mass displacement, widespread death, families shattered, and communities reduced to rubble. This has been broadcast into our homes day after day. For many Australians, it is not distant. It is deeply personal and it is traumatic.

Let me be clear: nothing justifies violence here. Nothing justifies the genocide in Gaza. Nothing excuses the targeting of civilians anywhere.

That said, we must recognise that sustained trauma does not stay neatly "over there." It has spilled into our streets, our schools, our workplaces, and our politics – fuelling anger, fear, dog-whistling and the propensity to turn neighbours into enemies.

When people are pushed to choose sides rather than see human beings, when grief becomes a weapon, when rhetoric paints whole communities as guilty, the risk of violence rises and social trust collapses.

If I may quote from a recent petition by the Jewish Council of Australia:

"We urge you to stand strong against those who are weaponising the Bondi massacre to push bigotry, hatred and division.

Jewish safety and the safety of every other marginalised group go hand in hand.

Pitting Jewish safety against Palestinians, Muslims and migrant communities, and eroding all of our civil liberties, doesn't make Jews safer. It makes the real fight against antisemitism harder.

We cannot allow our collective grief and fear to be used as a political weapon to attack the Palestine solidarity movement or any other democratic movement.

We need to strengthen connections between communities and cultivate grassroots efforts to tackle racism and antisemitism at its core.

… The path to safety is democratic and rooted in our shared community."[1]

When grief is compounded by global trauma, the responsibility on leaders and institutions to act with restraint, care and moral seriousness is heightened.

What this tragedy demands is that moral seriousness: empathy that is not selective, condemnation of dehumanisation in every form, and leadership that lowers the temperature rather than inflames it.

We must protect community safety, defend social cohesion, and insist that every Australian – of any faith, ethnicity, or background – can live without fear.

We best honour the dead by committing ourselves to these goals.

[1] Join the call for unity | ADD YOUR NAME We will not be divided after Bondi

The PRESIDENT: I ask members to signify their assent by rising in their places for 1 minute's silence.

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

Bushfires

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (13:56): I move:

That this house:

(1) extends its condolences and deepest sympathy to the Victorian communities affected by the recent and 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

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

I begin my contribution by expressing our collective thanks and deepest gratitude to everyone that has been involved in the response to the devastating fires that have impacted so many corners of our state. We also acknowledge and grieve for those who have lost homes, sheds, businesses and stock, cattle, pets and wildlife. I would also like to deeply acknowledge farmer Mr Maxwell Hobson of Terip Terip, who lost his life in the Longwood bushfire, and I extend my deepest sympathies to his family and all who knew him.

There is widespread devastation across northern Victoria, in my electorate and those that share it in this place. There are so many heartbreaking stories of loss, but alongside there are inspiring examples of towns and properties that were saved. One of the first people that I spoke to in early January was Matt Fowles. His retelling the story of the fierce, fast and ferocious fires that led to the heartbreaking loss of his family home, livestock and treasured vineyard was extraordinary. He came so very, very close to saving his house, but cruelly, this was a fire that was persistent. It was ongoing, and ember attacks ultimately took his home too. To hear him talk of how grateful he was that his family were safe and that the winery facility had successfully been protected by the CFA was wonderful, and he has reflected on the enormous generosity of hundreds if not thousands of people that have reached out to him to help. There was similar sentiment in Alexandra about the humble CFA volunteers. They shared with me how they saved their town. They were so very disappointed that they could not save all the houses in the area, but this was not a fire where this was possible. But what they did for the township was truly incredible. To captain Chris Lynch, deputy Haydn Simpson and surrounding brigades and strike teams, you should be so proud. Executing the plan of sector commander Jay Williams, they held their line and they faced the monster.

It is an incredibly difficult time for so many local communities. I know many have been out there visiting, and it is just so heartening because in the face of disaster you see the very best of people. The enormous community activation has of course been unsurprising. We expect this from our communities, but it is also phenomenal. Members from impacted communities were joined by neighbouring communities and supported by local councils and endless agencies, fuelled by volunteer power and an unwavering pursuit of helping those in need. I have seen people rolling up their sleeves to tackle the challenges at hand, whether preparing meals for our incredible volunteers, repairing fences or helping neighbours to get back on their feet.

I want to acknowledge the wonderful Longwood Football Netball Club president Rick Shiner, committee members, team members and the locals. The club there has always been an anchor for support and advice, but in this time of need it really got going. It was a hub of activation, the point of donations. They were coming right across the state, with big representation from large centres, particularly Shepparton. A shout-out to Azem Elmaz, well-known humanitarian and tireless community champion, who is now known in Longwood as 'our chef'. Can I personally thank Bec and Myra from the Kilmore hospital, who filled my car with items in response to a community call for specific supplies. To those who worked day and night from Jean's kitchen, 'Thank you' does not feel enough.

I have seen so many tired and exhausted faces, yet everyone tells you it is just what you do. The Ruffy community has come together during this incredibly difficult time as one of the most impacted communities. The community hall overflowed with supplies for those that have lost everything. Special thanks to remarkable individuals like Anne Douglas, Colleen Furlanetto and Felicity Sloman, all of whom have shown outstanding leadership, among others. In Ruffy I spoke to Captain George Noye. He told an incredible story about how he fought that night to save his own house and others in Ruffy whilst he drove across multiple properties to get to another CFA volunteer who was stuck. This was local knowledge – going through back paddocks in the safest way to get to those in need. His actions ensured that people were brought back to safety. And then they went back out again on their trucks – just such dedication to their role in the CFA.

From the earliest days there were those at relief centres, so many council reps, volunteers from near and far and those prepared to drop everything to help with the rawest of loss, comfort those experiencing trauma and uncertainty and step in to assist with some of the individual needs of every

person who came through the doors, even those with pet dingoes, as I saw in Seymour. Thank you to Sam Hicks, the Fawcett Hall president, and her team. They are the champions of community-led recovery, ensuring those impacted areas in Murrindindi are heard, connected and supported based on what people say they actually need, not what it is assumed they need. The mantra at Fawcett Hall is 'Small community, big heart, strong as ever' – wonderful humans looking out for one another. There are countless communities and stories such as this from Corryong to Yea, from Harcourt to Streatham.

As the relief transitions to recovery, we have dedicated hubs and recovery centres to ensure people can get the tailored assistance that they need – housing options, mental health services, financial support, insurance help. These are the best places, alongside the helpline, to get the latest advice on the support measures that have been announced by the government. That is providing $370 million of funding – costs shared with the Commonwealth government, and I thank them for their assistance. This ensures that people can clean up, that they can get temporary accommodation and that their mental health and financial needs are met. This cannot remove the trauma. It cannot immediately rebuild burnt homes, but it can offer valuable support to people at their greatest time of need.

I am also pleased that the government has been able to step in for the Harcourt coolstore. Those of you that have been to Harcourt know you cannot miss this facility. It is an amazing facility, and they will rebuild. There is a $500,000 allocation to assist with the co-op. The destruction of that facility has impacted so many small producers and so many people that I have met in my time, particularly as agriculture minister, including winemakers and just amazing produce producers. And of course, if you are able to, make sure you support some of the impacted businesses through purchases of stock online or other avenues; they would surely appreciate it.

I will take the opportunity to acknowledge that so many local members have been out and about. Ministers have been to every impacted area, and I make a particular acknowledgement of our Minister for Emergency Services Vicki Ward. As someone who has previously been in the role, I know the demands of the role. What she faced is significantly more than I did in my time, and she did not stop, so I thank her for that. I know, and I know many of you who have experienced natural disasters in your electorates know, one of the best things you can do is turn up. You learn way more on the ground when you are talking to impacted people about what they need and how they are feeling and making sure that you are directing them to the right places to navigate the services that are available. Listening and understanding is just integral for these communities.

For those whose electorates were directly impacted, we saw their MPs stand up next to the unpaid community members, using their connections and platforms to help agitate to get things moving quicker. I particularly point to Euroa MP Annabelle Cleeland, who has lost so much herself but was there every day with her community. Kim O'Keeffe used her years of community service to work with the Shepparton mayor and locals to mobilise an enormous food drive. Maree Edwards has so many impacted friends, those that she has known for many years in Harcourt, and I know her support will continue. And I know there are many other MPs that have been ensuring that they are there for their communities.

I found the contribution today incredibly difficult to write. I put down a pen last night about midnight when I could have kept going because there are so many stories and there are so many people to acknowledge. I give a commitment that I will not stop talking about this event. Recovery has a long tail, and there will be many opportunities to acknowledge people long after the last donation is made. We will stand there with communities. We will keep talking about them. This is a journey that government understands is lengthy, and we will continue to be with those in their recovery every step of the way.

On that note, there are a couple of further individuals I will note. I have definitely missed people, which is why I have committed to come back, but I do want to particularly acknowledge Greg Murphy. He is known to many. I met him in his role as Emergency Management Victoria's manager of aviation and logistics. He was the man that would meet me at the airport and point out the aircraft that were

secured each year to assist with our firefighting efforts. He is a long-time Kilmore CFA volunteer, so he is local to me as well. But in January this year he became known for his work in the incident control centre. His actions and his words undoubtedly saved lives. As the catastrophic conditions were bearing down on the communities in the area, he used his voice and people listened. They appreciated his direct and honest communication. He stood in the Seymour relief centre speaking to hundreds of people in person and online to deliver what people needed to hear. I will read a direct quote from what he said:

> Despite our best efforts today, we were not able to control this fire. Tomorrow, we've got no chance.
>
> Our job is to help people. Tomorrow, we might not be able to.

His words and warning were heeded – people left. He is undoubtedly the reason that we did not lose more lives.

I also take the opportunity to thank our wonderful emergency services leaders for their contribution to the fire response: Jason Heffernan, Tim Wiebusch, Chris Hardman, Gavin Freeman and Alistair Drayton and their amazing teams across the state in control centres, in incident control centres and in local brigades, units and ground teams in many areas of the state. Hundreds of CFA volunteers came to help. We had reinforcements from Canada and interstate. They all came down to help, and I thank them for that. I met in particular some of the Northern Territory firefighters in Longwood. This was the first time that Northern Territory had been activated to come to assist in Victoria. As I was thanking them for their appearance and their assistance, they were thanking me for the opportunity. They were so grateful to be here, so grateful to be standing next to others in a mammoth task of supporting communities.

Of course we know that CFA people are amazing volunteers, and I want to thank them immensely for their efforts. I am deeply grateful for their continued hard work and dedicated service. I particularly want to acknowledge that many CFA volunteers actually lost their own homes whilst fighting the fires as well. I also want to acknowledge, encourage and really appreciate those that are considering joining the CFA. Following the Get Fire Ready campaign in October, and this is when the messages were starting to come through that the experts knew that this season was going to be one of the worst since Black Saturday, over 600 people put in expressions of interest in joining the CFA. We know that these events often generate more and more interest. In a time when people are time-poor and have difficulty in being able to volunteer, seeing these numbers come through, seeing the interest in joining the CFA, I am just so pleased and thank those people for considering putting their hand up to offer their time to protect their community.

Last night at 10 pm I received a text message from Minister Ward's office advising that the Longwood and Walwa fires are both officially contained. Whilst we can all have a collective sigh of relief, hopefully that is not short-lived. We know that there is much more of summer to go. I thank all of those that have stepped up, I thank all of those that will continue to step up and my efforts and the government's efforts will be there in the long days, months and years of recovery.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:12): I begin by thanking the Leader of the Government for bringing this motion to the house today and for the opportunity it gives us as a Parliament to extend our deepest sympathy to the Victorian communities affected by the recent and ongoing bushfires. As ever, these fires are not a distant or remote story, a headline or a statistic. Many of us have our own stories to tell, and the impact of past bushfires has echoed through generations of our history. My own grandfather was burnt to death while sheltering in a culvert during a bushfire near Darlington in western Victoria many decades ago, and to this day that place is still known locally as Murchs Corner. It is a reminder that fire leaves its mark not just on the land but on families and memories too. These fires are the latest in a long and painful history but nonetheless devastating for that.

There is no doubt of the shocking scale of the fires. These figures will continue to grow, sadly. But to date, early assessments show sheep farmers have suffered the heaviest losses, with just under

32,000 sheep killed. In total, livestock deaths now exceed 41,000 animals, including poultry, beef cattle, bees, goats and horses. More than 110,000 hectares of farmland have been affected. With that has gone pasture, fencing, machinery and sheds but also high-value horticulture crops and forest plantations. One estimate places livestock losses alone at around $20 million, but even that does not capture the real damage. We know in many cases this is not simply a financial loss. Sometimes generations and many decades of breeding have disappeared overnight.

Over recent weeks I have attended community fire recovery meetings in Beaufort, Streatham and Skipton. They were, unsurprisingly, packed. People were there not to give or to listen to speeches but to look for practical answers and often to support themselves and to offer support for others. In particular the topics that mattered most were clean drinking water for their families and for livestock, insurance issues, fencing, livestock care, mental health, power, roads and what support would still be there in six months time. Those meetings were a real reminder that when the flames go out the real work for recovery is only just beginning. Communities are grateful for immediate help, but they are particularly asking for support that lasts.

It was in that context that, with Liberal leader Jess Wilson and my colleague Joe McCracken, I went to visit Streatham, Carranballac and Skipton. We stood in scorched paddocks and walked past blackened fence lines. I am particularly grateful to the Faye family for showing us the impact on their farm and their family. Thankfully, they were able to save most of their property, but they explained the massive strain they now face in restoring their farming operation.

In Carranballac we saw the remains of the cricket clubrooms. In fact sheets of metal were flying off it as we stood there. In a city or a suburb that might sound like just another building, but in a small rural town it might be all there is in a community and for the community. It is where people meet, where fundraisers are held, where children celebrate, where neighbours gather and where people play sport. In places like Carranballac there is not a choice of places – there is one. When it is gone, the community feels that loss incredibly keenly.

The motion before us rightly praises emergency services personnel, and I add my voice to that. We thank our brave firefighters and emergency services workers for their courage on behalf of all Victorians affected by this crisis. Every volunteer and every emergency services worker on the front line put their lives and the wellbeing of others ahead of their own. Many did so while their own homes and families were at risk. Some were even burnt to ground while those volunteers were at the end of a hose elsewhere. In Carranballac we heard from Westmere brigade captain Pat Millear about the extraordinary contribution made by hundreds of private firefighting units largely owned and operated by farmers – not happy, I might add, with having the burden of another tax imposed on them.

Here I should also mention that one evening in Colac I was able to thank Peter Marshall's United Firefighters Union members, whose taskforce supported the effort in the Otway fires and in many other fire-affected hotspots across Victoria. On one occasion, when the volunteers in one area were so exhausted, I rang Peter asking for extra help, and within minutes it was offered.

This fire season has brought out some of the best in people. We have seen our country's values of bravery and selflessness on full display. The great Australian tradition of volunteerism was inspiring. The generosity was flowing. The kindness seemed unending. In fact on our tour at times it felt almost awkward to be accepting incredibly generous hospitality from the very people who were struggling as a result of the fires. but that is how incredibly good-hearted people are.

I want to add on recovery that in Skipton the burden is heavier again. This is a town that has already endured flooding. Recovery was already underway when fire arrived. Recovery piled on top of recovery is harder. It stretches families, local governments and services further each time, and across my region of Western Victoria these fires and floods have come on top of farmers and communities enduring drought of the worst kind since 1900. At community meetings in Beaufort, Streatham and Skipton, people particularly noted what follows the fires. Cash flow was a constant concern. Stories

on insurance payouts were mixed. Some people have already been helped, others are still waiting, some are discovering gaps they did not know existed. For farmers and small businesses, months without income can be as damaging as the fire itself. The cash required to replace fencing and machinery, to fund replanting and to gather in new breeding stock and the associated inputs is a huge barrier to overcome before they can start earning one dollar again.

I should say here that we heard positive stories too. Local councils have worked together in ways that deserve recognition. Corangamite, Pyrenees and Ararat councils shared information and resources and worked closely together to help their communities. In Skipton, the Corangamite Shire Council hosted a packed community information centre that brought agencies and residents together in one place. It made a real difference. Jess, Joe and I also greatly appreciated a briefing from the Corangamite shire about what is now needed so desperately in that community. We also heard positive feedback about Powercor's response in parts of the region, which is something that deserves to be noted.

Community recovery groups have also been vital. Megan Read and Deb Bain have been tireless advocates in the Skipton–Streatham area, helping families navigate complex systems often made harder by bureaucracy that should be streamlined, and they are making sure that people do not fall through the cracks, constantly ringing up members of their community daily to see that they are still okay. I also want to acknowledge Susie Marro, a farmer from the Ripon area who has been helping to move livestock and deliver provisions to fire-affected families. She did it because someone needed help. That spirit has been everywhere in these communities. We also had honest conversations about issues like roadside vegetation and fuel management. Councils told us they had raised ongoing concerns about the condition of roadsides and the difficulty of managing them under the current bureaucratic, overburdensome rules. These are not abstract issues when you are standing beside a burnt-out fence along a public road.

In conclusion, this motion rightly does four things: it extends our condolences to those who have suffered, it acknowledges the courage of our emergency services personnel, it thanks the volunteers and neighbours who stepped forward and it commits this house to stand with communities through recovery. Those are not abstract sentiments. For Victorians across our state they are a test of whether Parliament will remain present long after the smoke has cleared. In particular we honour the thousands of volunteers – CFA, SES, service clubs, BlazeAid, recovery groups and ordinary neighbours – who put others ahead of themselves. I also want to mention the farmers from far and wide across Victoria and even interstate who have donated desperately needed fodder for starving livestock that are left on burnt fields. Utes with one or two bales of hay along with B-doubles have been travelling in convoy to farms with not a blade of grass left but with hungry mouths to feed. We must also remember those who have lost so much, and especially cattle farmer Max Hobson, who is believed to have bravely stayed to defend his property and livestock but who tragically died in the Longwood fire near Seymour.

Finally, what I heard – and heard again and again – is that recovery is not a moment but a long process measured in months and years. This house and this motion cannot undo what has been lost, but we can honour those affected by ensuring that our sympathy today is matched by sustained support tomorrow and into the future. For that reason I support the motion.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:25): I rise to offer condolences to all of those impacted by the devastating bushfires that have been raging across Victoria for weeks now. For the loss of Max Hobson, the cattle farmer who died in fires in central Victoria, I offer my deep sympathies to his loved ones. For the over 340 people who have lost their homes and hundreds more who have lost their farms and livelihoods, for the entire towns who have lost everything, for the tens of thousands of farm animals killed, for the countless native animals and hundreds of hectares of habitat decimated once again, for the thousands of Victorians who were displaced, who suffered health impacts from the smoke and stress, who experienced fear and uncertainty and whose previous trauma from fires was triggered, the losses are immense and the road to recovery will be a very long one, as has been acknowledged. The threat of fires is not over yet, with out-of-control fires still burning in different parts of the state, including in the Otways in my electorate, and the peak of the bushfire season is yet to come.

It is an absolute credit to emergency services, CFA volunteers, councils and local communities that the losses have not been greater. Firefighters have worked tirelessly, putting their lives on the line to save the lives and property of others, as they have so many times before and inevitably will have to do again. I have also been fortunate to witness the incredible way people have come together to support those who have lost everything – the couple who filled a fridge with sandwiches at the Colac relief centre, the many community members who put together care packs for CFA firefighters, the farmers who shifted fodder around to those who needed it, the people who offered up their homes for those who needed somewhere to stay, the wildlife rescuers who cared for countless horrifically injured animals. The generosity and compassion that people showed have been so heartening.

But these fires were not an accident. We cannot acknowledge the immense losses of the fires without also acknowledging the role of climate change. We are now living with the consequences of unmitigated burning of fossil fuels – consequences we have long been warned about. Fires have always been a feature of Australia, but these fires were different. The scale of these fires was immense and on par with some of the most devastating bushfires we have seen, with many first responders characterising the speed and ferocity of these fires as unlike anything they had ever experienced. They came off the back of a prolonged dry spell, and in many areas drought, and were preceded by one of the worst heatwaves ever.

In the past two decades Victoria has had some of the most devastating fires on record. In the past 10 years we have experienced the 10 hottest years for the planet since global records began. Yet in the week between the start of the fires and those apocalyptic flash flooding events along the Surf Coast in Wye River, there was an approval by the federal government of an expansion of a coalmine in Queensland. Just before Christmas, state and federal governments approved new oil and gas projects in the Otway Basin, right across from communities who would in the coming weeks experience devastating fires and floods. For so many people in these communities who I have spoken to in the aftermath, the disconnect of governments is difficult to fathom and only adds to their distress.

We cannot accept fires of this magnitude becoming the new normal. 50-degree days were unthinkable in my childhood summers, as I imagine they were for everyone here. It is devastating to think that unless something changes dramatically days this hot and fires of this intensity and worse will become a regular feature of my children's summers. Our forests and grasslands have a remarkable capacity to regenerate and in fact have always needed fire to do this, but our ecosystems are struggling to recover from repeated fires of this scale and intensity, and climate change is fuelling and accelerating the biodiversity crisis. We should not have to keep asking firefighters and volunteers to risk their lives in increasingly dangerous conditions, and our communities should not have to keep shouldering the cost in loss of lives, loss of wildlife and nature, loss of homes and livelihoods, skyrocketing insurance, displacement, healthcare costs and more, all because governments keep gifting the land and waters of this country to fossil fuel corporations and failing to make them clean up the climate damage that they are causing.

Vale, Max Hobson. My deepest sympathies go to all of those who have lost so much. We owe it to you who have lost so much to do everything we can to stop it from happening again.

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (14:30): I rise today to extend my deepest condolences and sympathy to all Victorian communities affected by the devastating January 2026 bushfires. I also recognise the fact that in terms of Western Victoria we had the long tail of a drought and then we had the most recent fires, then we had the floods and then we had the fires again, and we are only in the early days of February, so we are all bracing ourselves in terms of what the next series of events might be in Western Victoria. But it was not just Western Victoria that was impacted as a result of bushfires. In terms of central Victorian fires around Wodonga and Albury there were also significant issues. Of course Longwood, Harcourt and Ravenswood have been hit hard, as were Rocklands, Ruffy and Natimuk, which we will hear a little bit more about in Ms Ermacora's contribution. Also impacted were Grass Flat, Underbool, Streatham, Mount Mercer, Skipton, Lismore and Lara Lee north of Camperdown, and there were the fires around Carlisle River

in the Otways, including Kennedys Creek, Gellibrand, Kawarren and other small communities. So there were a lot of communities impacted as a result of bushfires in the most recent weeks. Families, farms, businesses and communities right across these areas have been profoundly disrupted, and they will continue to be disrupted for a significant period of time. I also would like to join with others in the chamber as we mourn the loss of Mr Maxwell Hobson, and I extend my sincere condolences to his family and friends. There are no words that can ease such a loss, but this Parliament stands with you in your grief. To those who have been injured while defending homes and properties and livelihoods, I wish you a very swift recovery.

Damage right across Victoria is still being assessed, and that will take time. There are still areas that are on fire. The fires have been classified as contained, but there is still fire under the ground. We know that, particularly with Western Victoria, because of the peat that is in our soil fires sometimes go for many months, and we have had occasions when that has happened reasonably recently. The estimates at the moment indicate that 400,000 hectares of land has been impacted and around 43,000 stock have been lost. Countless numbers of native wildlife have also been affected, and more than 1500 buildings have been destroyed. For farming families, these losses represent years of work, generations of stewardship and of course deep personal grief.

The other thing that I just want to mention is the fact that while we talk about land being impacted and homes being impacted, the impact on mental health is incredibly significant. For those that have not been in fires but have seen it on your TV screens, you see the flames and you see what the fire has left, but in terms of actually being in a fire, no-one can underestimate a number of things. Firstly, there is just the unknown – not knowing which way the wind is going to turn, the force of that wind and what the repercussions are going to be. You cannot plan for too much, but you can prepare a hell of a lot to try and deal with the situation that is potentially heading your way. The other thing is just knowing that fires are different at any given time. It could be a very, very, very fast grassfire that takes your breath away in so many ways that you cannot count. Also there is that thundering roar of a fire that scares the bejesus out of you as you know it is coming towards you but you cannot necessarily see it because it is tucked in a valley from behind. These are the things. It is not just the property loss and the monetary loss. It is those things that you have gone through in a fire that will be with you for a long, long time. It is absolutely incumbent on people to speak up and to have those issues dealt with.

I want to pay tribute to the firefighters and the agencies right across Victoria who have been involved in supporting the broader emergency management sector. They have worked around the clock. We know that they have been on rosters. We know that we have had support from overseas and interstate, but no-one can fathom the dislocation that all of that has caused to the families that have been supporting those that have been helping out.

I also pay tribute to the local incident control centres and the way that local government has really worked incredibly well in their connection with the local ICCs. I have not heard one person yet say that the whole situation has not been handled well or that the response to the bushfires has not been really good. There might be some in days to come that might say 'Gayle, hang on', but the fact of the matter is, regardless of where people have come from or their political persuasion or their personal circumstances, that has been the feedback that I have received, and it has come without any prodding. It has come very easily.

I acknowledge the tireless efforts of Fire Rescue Victoria. I will call out the individual organisations. Victoria Police has been amazing. The CFA has been outstanding. The SES has been unbelievable. VicEmergency and emergency recovery hotline staff – I cannot praise them enough. Of course Agriculture Victoria has been out there, boots and all, providing advice and assistance. To all the other departmental staff that have not just been out there on farms and in communities but also on the desk making sure that people are okay, thank you for the work that you have done.

I equally want to express my profound gratitude to the organic volunteers, some of whom have never volunteered before but just wanted to be involved and help other people in their community; the

charitable and community organisations who stepped up without hesitation – it was absolutely amazing to see; and of course some of the evacuation centres that I attended, all of which were different but were providing the necessary supports that were required. The last one I went to had 150 people, and that was just prior to being told that some of those communities could return. The Colac Showgrounds were very popular because people could house their cherished pets and their livestock, and we saw anything from horses to sheep to golden pheasants at that location. It was great, and it was very powerful to see a reminder of what community really looks like when it is under enormous pressure. I want to also do a call-out to the Colac Lions Club, who did an amazing job; Sikh Volunteers Australia, who provided free food; and the Salvation Army, who staffed many of the relief centres and fed people. They checked on neighbours and cared for animals. Organisations like these are the glue that holds our communities together.

I also want to acknowledge the generosity of Victorians who donated goods, money, time and expertise and who have shown deep concern and care for people who they have never met. Victorians always show their very best in times like this. As others have mentioned, recovery will take time, it absolutely will take time. But the fact of the matter is I think all of us are absolutely committed to making sure that we stay strong and continue to work together through the adverse conditions that people now are under and that many will continue to deal with.

It is pleasing to note that the Albanese and Allan governments are standing with communities that have been impacted by the bushfires, recently delivering a further $160 million in support, building on more than $210 million that has already been announced. That includes relief drinking water for those who rely on tanks, emergency recovery support, accommodation assistance, support for fire-affected businesses, funding to rebuild critical local facilities, repairs to public land and waterways, prolonged power outage payments and up to $1500 in water tank cleaning rebates along with mental health and wellbeing support. The Victorian Farmers Federation, in partnership with Agriculture Victoria and water corporations, has enacted an emergency fodder support program to ensure surviving livestock can also be fed. These measures reflect a shared commitment that no community faces recovery alone. Finally, the Victorian Emergency Relief and Recovery Foundation has launched the January 2026 Victorian Bushfire Appeal, and goods and services can also be donated through GIVIT. I encourage those who can contribute to do so.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you to every single person who has stepped up during these challenging times. This government pledges it will continue to work with communities to support and rebuild fire-affected communities. We will be on the ground listening and responding and standing with Victorians for the long recovery journey ahead. And finally, to those who have been so badly affected, please stay strong. It is tough, but we need to stay strong and we are with you. We want to stay with you as we work through the issues that confront your communities.

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (14:42): I concur with all the well wishes and the positive sentiment that has happened so far. I rise to talk on this motion about the fires over the summer months, and I want to particularly focus on my electorate of Western Victoria. Firstly, I will touch on the Otway fires. As a former mayor of the Colac Otway shire, I feel like I know the Otways pretty well. These were largely bushfires as opposed to open plain grassfires. I was talking to one of my former teaching colleagues from the school I used to work at the other day, and her brother and her sister-in-law had lost their home. It just struck me – how would any of us in here react if our home was there one day and the next day it was a pile of rubble? What would you do with all your things? Where would you go? What would you do? How do you rebuild a life like that? That is the challenge that they are facing. But they did not lose their lives and they did not lose the lives of their children. Their story is not an uncommon one throughout the Otways.

One of my former council colleagues on the Colac Otway Shire Council Chris Smith and his family stayed to protect their property and indeed the property of adjoining neighbours as well. It was not easy, and Chris was posting regularly on social media about all the things that he was up to. He had long, long, long days and very deeply challenging situations that he was dealing with, and sometimes

the smoke was so bad that he just could not see what was going on. But I have got to say the outpouring of support, both on social media and indeed in person, was just phenomenal. To Chris and Maree, your family and many others, I want to say we stand with you now, not just in the adversity that you have faced but also on the long road to recovery as well. Chris and Maree are just one example of the stories of courage, bravery and community spirit on display throughout the Otways region.

The fires in Skipton, Streatham and Carranballac were indeed more of the flavour of grassfires. They spread quickly, they went fast, fuelled largely by wind, and they deeply impacted the communities surrounding them. Yes, those communities might be small in number, but they are huge in stature and they stand together proudly. I am proud to stand with them too. I visited many residents in the area with my colleague here Mrs McArthur and also Leader of the Opposition Jess Wilson. We listened, we heard and we understood the immense strain and toll that people are experiencing, and it is huge.

In these times we see the best of humanity come to the forefront. One of my good friends, who was mentioned before, Susanne Marro, a farmer near Waubra – which, to be fair, is a fair distance away from Skipton – out of the goodness of her own heart organised food and bedding to be donated and then took it upon herself to deliver it all the way down to the Skipton recovery centre. I want to say a huge thankyou to Susie and people like Susie that have gone above and beyond just to make a difference. There are many more people like Susie that stand shoulder to shoulder with fire-affected communities, and they do it because they want to support their fellow community members. There is nothing in it for them whatsoever other than to give back. When you think about all the challenges that our farmers have been through recently, to give back when you do not have much in the tank to give is truly remarkable.

I want to pay tribute to all first responders and volunteers. Many of them have been faced with incredibly difficult situations and confronted with situations I would have found incredibly difficult to deal with, but they have responded efficiently, quickly and with great care and compassion. To those who have suffered loss, know that you are not standing alone. We stand with you. Do not be afraid to reach out if there is ever any need that you find that you might have. Country people always stand together – we always have and we always will.

I do want to put on notice insurance companies. I have been watching very carefully, and I expect to see fair treatment of anyone making claims. I have heard mixed reports. I think in a crisis like this our insurance companies have an obligation to treat people with absolute respect but also absolute fairness. I will be watching and raising concerns as they arise and as they are given to me.

The risk of fire is nothing new in country Victoria, and over the years country people remember fires almost like battle scars. We in this place have an obligation to do all that we can to manage those risks, be it supporting and properly resourcing our first responders, whether it is conducting planned burns or simple things like reducing fuel loads. These are critical in minimising risk and reducing potential loss of life, because at the end of the day, this place – this Parliament – is about people: the people that we serve, the people who are out there who have been fighting fires and gaining battle scars, the people in harm's way, many of whom themselves, in their own personal circumstances, face tremendous loss and have indeed experienced that loss. We cannot let these circumstances go by without acknowledging that more can be done, that change is needed to support our volunteers and first responders. It is not an 'if'; it should be a 'must' and a 'when'. I commend this motion to the house and I support it fully, and my heart goes out to every single Victorian that has experienced loss throughout these bushfires.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:50): I too would like to rise and pause to reflect on the devastating bushfires in our state. The impact of these fires on our local communities, on wildlife, on farmers and on businesses is beyond comprehension. We are especially thinking of the loved ones of farmer Max Hobson, who lost his life in these devastating fires.

Bushfires are destructive and fierce, and this January we saw blazes tear through over 400,000 hectares across this state. I too have seen some of my dear friends lose everything in the Longwood fire, including their property, which has been in their family for generations – six generations, I believe – and the devastation that they are experiencing they cannot even speak to right now. It was a property that has been not only part of their generations but part of their make-up in their community for a very long time.

On behalf of my colleague David Ettershank and everyone at Legalise Cannabis Victoria, I want to honour the fact that the mental and emotional impact of losing your home and your livelihood cannot be overstated. It is also a very triggering time for people who have survived other bushfires, and we want you to know that we are thinking of you. I especially want to acknowledge the collective power and resilience of community, who have come together to support one another, from volunteering to provide food and shelter and to help with clean-up efforts – and it is a massive clean-up effort – and fundraising and rolling up your sleeves to deliver hay bales for livestock through to those who rescue and rehabilitate our native wildlife.

There will be time for discussions about climate change. They are important discussions to have. There will be time for discussions about fire readiness and adequate funding – again, imperative discussions to have – and we will be fulfilling our duty as crossbenchers to ask those questions of the government and seek resolution on some of those questions. But for now we simply send our love to all affected and an enormous thanks to the many volunteers and firies who have showed up, even when many themselves are devastated and exhausted. Your commitment to your community and your bravery in the face of adversity are unwavering. I am relieved to hear that some of these fires are under control, but we are in the middle of summer and hot summer days are to continue, and we all must take care and follow all of the emergency advice. We must look out for each other and for our wildlife. Stay safe, and please reach out for help when you need it.

Sitting suspended 2:54 pm until 3:13 pm.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:13): I rise also to offer my contribution on the motion in relation to the Victorian bushfires so far this summer. We knew it was going to be a challenging summer bushfire wise, and that has definitely been the case. I also wish to extend my deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Mr Max Hobson, a cattle farmer who tragically lost his life in the Longwood fire near Seymour in central Victoria.

I also want to acknowledge the contributions so far in the chamber and in particular those who acknowledged the history of fire trauma in families. People close to me have experienced the same. It is very thoughtful to acknowledge that people who have experienced previous fire are re-traumatised during this time and that the loss of someone like Max so suddenly and unexpectedly is devastating for a whole community, not just family and friends. The fires that swept across our state this summer were truly terrible, and their impact will be felt for a very long time. For my region of Western Victoria multiple areas were impacted – the Otways, as Minister Tierney mentioned; also Skipton, Streatham, Foxhow, Lismore and Natimuk, which includes Grass Flat and Quantong. A large number of other small communities – I have not named them – were also impacted by the fires.

I did visit Natimuk with the Premier a few days after the fire went through. There was still smoke coming from logs on the roadside as we arrived. That is where we saw the trauma and the loss. It is very easy to see the losses in Natimuk – you only need to drive down the main street and get to the western end and you will see houses just burnt to the ground – but also the resilience. Residents spoke to us about how terrifying the fires were and how quickly the fires moved through the landscape. In this case it is a grassy landscape or a cropping landscape, so it categorises as grass from a fire perspective. At Natimuk it took less than an hour for the blaze to traverse 10 kilometres, tearing through the land like a fire torch. One person mentioned to me that they believed it was 15 minutes between ignition and structures starting to burn. It was so windy. It was a blisteringly hot wind. The subsequent winds after the fires have also blown topsoil away, presenting ongoing challenges for

farmers. Those blistering gale-force winds starting as north-easterlies inevitably swung around – randomly to northerly, then north-easterly, then westerly, then south-westerly and then sometimes southerly – depending on the particular circumstances on the day and in fact the particular weather conditions that hour. Sometimes that swing-around happened within minutes; other times that swing-around took a few hours. Not knowing how or when the fire would turn was quite unbearable for communities facing a smoky plume on the horizon and, worse still, near their area. Overall these fires claimed the life of Max Hobson, caused many injuries and resulted in immense loss of property, livestock and wildlife.

I want to focus my contribution on volunteers and volunteer firefighters in this condolence motion as well. Volunteers are spread across the CFA and the SES, whether they are catering, whether they are transferring equipment or whether they are involved in incident control centres and other areas within the fire response. Many volunteers leave their own communities, their own jobs and their own farms to conduct themselves to do this volunteering. I think it is really easy for our broader community sometimes to assume that nothing would have happened had they not volunteered, in their businesses or on their farms, but that is not actually true. There are people from farming backgrounds in this chamber, and they will know what I am about to say. Many urban-based members of the Victorian community see farming landscapes but do not often see the daily work – morning, noon and night – that goes into managing those farming enterprises and therefore they could not possibly know the extent of the cost and the impact that volunteering and being absent from your business, sometimes for up to six weeks on and off, can have. I have seen that not just with these fires but with the fires in the Grampians last year and the Grampians the year before as well. Many routine tasks like water infrastructure being checked are perhaps not done while farmers are away, fences are not fixed, bills are not paid and fodder is not distributed. Crop-sowing timelines are often delayed. Animal health treatments like drenching are delayed. Application of fertiliser and other soil management actions are delayed.

All of these tasks, plus many others, would have been completed on these properties had there not been fires, so I want to acknowledge and say thank you to volunteers who give up so much of their time and their energy and to acknowledge not only the risks they take but also the impact on their businesses and the cost of being involved in volunteering for their communities. They are out fighting fires, not knowing if their own homes will still be there when they return. We know that it is not an uncommon experience for volunteers to return and discover that their homes have been lost.

In closing, I want to say thank you to volunteers for their local knowledge and for their dedication to community safety. I am very honoured to have had this opportunity to say thank you while speaking in support of this motion.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (15:22): I appreciate the opportunity to stand with the Nationals and support this motion following the bushfires that impacted communities across Victoria. Amid warnings of a catastrophic day, I started the day in the early hours of the morning, packing suitcases with photo albums for safekeeping. The wind was howling and the heat was intense. The watch zone on the VicEmergency app started to ping. There were two fires, one in Harcourt, the other in Axe Creek nearby. My phone continued to ping, this time with texts from close friends offering a place for us to stay if we needed it. We had dinner in town, in Bendigo, with our dog and caught up with Jen, a close friend of our daughter's. Her home was in Harcourt, and at the time she did not know if it was okay or not. What followed was a sleepless night at a friend's place, looking for updates and hearing news from local residents and friends on the ground with the CFA. We heard the sad news: confirmation that Jen's family home had been destroyed. Others we knew who had been away at the beach in just board shorts and thongs had lost everything.

At the recovery hub in Castlemaine I saw some familiar faces. It was Tyrone, a CFA volunteer for nearly 50 years, and his wife Raewyn, who is also part of the CFA. They were out fighting fires when their family home was destroyed. The sacrifice of CFA volunteers is incredible. Local brigades stepped up to support one another, sometimes facing smoke so thick that they could not see their truck

just metres away, going from working a full day in their business to facing a 12-hour shift or more. Their dedication not just during the fires but in responding to car accidents and medical incidents and attending training throughout the year is to be commended. They do not do it for the pay packet; there is none. They do it because they are part of the community and they want to protect it.

I went to a local CFA station to hear members debrief and heard about the issues they faced with radio communication, with trees exploding above them and with cabs too small for the crew to fit in – just a fire blanket on the back to shield them when the fire rolls over. It is these issues and many more that I hope this Parliament will address, because the impact of these fires is felt by the community not just for days or weeks but for years. The Coolstore cafe, where I dropped in just weeks before, was destroyed alongside coolstores that were the lifeline of businesses in the region, storing produce worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. They were no more.

The nightmare continued. I was speaking with residents without drinking water – their tanks had melted and were full of holes. Livestock were in desperate need of water and feed. These needs on a local level were multiplied across the state. I spoke with Aksal, a young man who was out fighting fires in Yarck, who spoke of the devastation surrounding Alexandra. I particularly want to acknowledge my colleagues, especially Annabelle, who has been dedicated to serving the local community despite facing her own challenges as fires destroyed their farm and damaged their home. A farmer in the highlands told me about the challenges of road barriers and feeling cut off from support and the challenge he faced alongside neighbours dealing with hundreds of dead livestock. Our hearts go out to the family and friends of those who lost their life, including cattle farmer Max Hobson, who passed away near Seymour.

In the midst of the shock and the pain of the loss, the response and generosity of individuals, organisations and businesses have been amazing. At the Harcourt bushfire donation centre in Castlemaine I saw an empty shed filled with donations in a single day as people came from near and far bringing quality goods, gift cards and food supplies. I acknowledge members of the Harcourt Progress Association and volunteers like Tania, whose phone did not stop; Stacey, who coordinated the hay and feed deliveries of the Victorian Miniature Railway; Trevor and the team from Rotary, who kept the barbecues going to feed the local community; Lyn and Stan from BlazeAid, who set up camp along with a team of volunteers replacing fencing – the generosity of so many businesses, organisations and individuals who gave services, finances, food and supplies to support those in need. There are too many to mention, but one donation did stand out. Last week I dropped by the donation centre again and a lady turned up. It appeared at first glance that she certainly did not have much, but she handed over a box of pantry items packed full of pasta and wraps, and she kept apologising that she could not give more. But she gave all that she could. It is people like that lady with the big heart that reflect the best of Australia and its people.

Just yesterday I dropped by a farm that had lost over 150 acres just near Mount Alexander, who are starting the big task of cleaning up trees and replacing fencing. Brad and his wife Nat spoke about their connection with family, friends and neighbours, of sharing meals together and neighbours that dropped by. It reminded me of Remy, who owned the Coolstore cafe that was destroyed in Harcourt. I dropped by last year and was so impressed not just by the great venue, hospitality and quality food, but by his passion for the community of Harcourt. Like so many homes and businesses impacted by the fires right across northern Victoria, the Coolstore cafe was destroyed. Despite their own personal loss, people like Remy and so many others have continued to serve their local communities.

I am reminded of Proverbs 11:25:

> A generous person will prosper;
> whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.

To all those who have given and continue to give whatever you have to support those in need – your time, supplies, finances, skills and services – thank you. Summer is not over and the work continues. For many, the toughest times come after the stories have disappeared from the news headlines. To all

those impacted either directly or indirectly, support is available, so please do not do it alone. Please reach out.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (15:29): I will make a short contribution to this motion. First of all, I want to give my condolences to the family, friends and community of Max Hobson, who was tragically killed during the recent bushfires. But I want to thank all those that helped out. Of course there was the CFA, FRV, Forest Fire Management Victoria, the police, the ambos and SES. There were also a whole lot of community volunteers. There are a lot of people that belong to nothing that were out there giving everyone a hand, and they are just as important as the organisations and the – I will not call them professional volunteers – ones that have an organisation above them. I also got some help from Accidental Health & Safety, who gave me a cracking deal on some stuff for Sikh Volunteers Australia.

Sikh Volunteers Australia have always been there when needed. Most of them do not speak very good English, as I found out, but apparently you do not need to know English to be good people – I do not know how to break that to some people in the community. They were so happy to be able to help, and they were so happy to have us as a state pitch in and help. They had so much stuff. But if there is an upside to these things, it is the fact that people put aside their politics and people put aside their differences and they pitch in. There is always plenty of time, with an election coming up at the end of this year, for us to do that, but in the meantime I think we should celebrate what we have in common.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (15:31): I rise to join everyone in the chamber in expressing our condolences and sympathy to all Victorians who have been affected by fire in this fire season, but especially those in the north and the west of the state. I want to follow on from Minister Tierney's comments earlier, and expressed by many others, about the mental health impacts on Eastern Victoria, where fortunately most of the fires have been confined away from people's property on public land and bush.

Visiting the incident control centre in Heyfield, hearing about the Dargo fire and visiting Orbost and the fires to the east out to Mallacoota, when you have a fire at Dargo moving something like 58 kilometres in 6 hours, it produces a lot of smoke. Of course in Mallacoota, even though the fire did not directly impact the town as it turned out, there was that smoke across the water that affected people. I have been chatting to Minister Shing over subsequent weeks about the previous trauma that was experienced in East Gippsland with 350 homes lost, so having this smoke in the vicinity was very triggering for people in East Gippsland. But of course all our thoughts are with those in the north and the west, who have experienced the brunt of the property losses, losing houses and farms, and as Mrs McArthur talked about, community groups and sports groups have lost facilities and assets that may have been the only assets they had in their town.

Obviously, as we have all said, everyone has worked together in the response and coordinated, whether that be paid staff or whether that be volunteers giving up their time to protect their communities across the CFA, Forest Fire Management Victoria and Victoria Police or the unknown volunteers who we are never going to put a name to who are driving hay or who are fixing fences. We have heard stories of people coming out with plates of sandwiches and just being supportive. Various levels of government have combined to enable volunteers to be present and to enable people to have places to stay. Local governments have been setting up relief centres. Obviously state and federal governments need to provide support to enable volunteers and support to occur. As a lot of members here have touched on, that support will need to occur for a long time.

Financial counsellors are going to need to provide support. Mr McCracken talked about insurance companies being on notice. There were a lot of heads nodding in agreement with that comment. All of us here, as we have expressed so far through our motion and contributions, and indeed all Victorians, know we are a geographically smaller state, we are connected and we will support each other, as I said before, whether that is by shipping feed from one side to the other for stock that do not have feed to eat, to keep people going and get them back on their feet. There have been, as we have heard, tens of

thousands of stock losses. We have had farmers and vets out caring for and euthanising livestock and indeed wildlife through so much of our public land.

I think it is imperative for all of us to support the rebuild and, when it is safe to do so, as we have done in past fires, get out and spend money in these local economies. Go with an empty esky and support whether it is farmers or whether it is our regional tourism. It is so important for all of us as Victorians, for the agricultural product and for everything that comes out of these regions to support them in these really difficult times. I again give my condolences and sympathy. I will leave my contribution there.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (15:35): I rise to join this condolence motion today. We knew that this year was going to be a summer of extreme fire risk, and it has indeed turned out to be a horrific fire season. However, I do not think that any of us could possibly have imagined just how bad it would be. As we speak, there are still fires that are burning in the Upper Murray and the Otways, and we are nowhere near the end of this fire season.

Fires during the summer are not something I am unfamiliar with. During my 24 years in this place, fires have been a constant summer threat and a way-too-frequent occurrence. My career started with fires up around Mitta Mitta in the summer of 2002–03. We then had the great alpine fires in 2006. There were fires in the Macedon Ranges in October 2015 and January 2016 and fires in the Indigo shire in 2016. The Black Summer fires entered the north-east of Victoria on 30 December 2019 and burnt throughout January 2020. These are, of course, only the major fires, and there have been plenty of other incidents over the years. And now, in January 2026, my electorate has once again been ablaze with not one but four major fires: the Longwood, Walwa, Harcourt and Yarroweyah fires.

My heart goes out to all Victorians affected by the fires – those who have lost homes, properties, pets and livestock – and of course, most of all, to the family and friends of Max Hobson, who lost his life when fire engulfed his property at Terip Terip, which is part of the fireground more commonly known as the Longwood fire. In particular I extend my condolences to Max's wife Julie Ann, his sons Miles and Campbell, their wives Catherine and Saskia, his five grandsons, his sister Jill and his brother Ian. No words can express the depth of my sorrow for what they are going through. I would also like to acknowledge that we had one other death during the fire that, although not directly fire related, was in the fire-ravaged community of Harcourt. I know that had a huge impact on the family and the entire community. I extend my deepest condolences to the deceased's family, friends and the community.

I want to put on record my sincere thanks to the volunteers of the CFA, who once again risked their own lives and left their own properties to fight these fires. They did so without thought for themselves or their properties, and several volunteers actually lost their own homes and properties while they fought to protect someone else's property. Our CFA volunteers are true heroes, and I cannot thank them enough. I also want to thank all other volunteers, including the SES, the search-and-rescue squads, the Red Cross, the Sikh community, Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, BlazeAid, football and netball clubs and so many other organisations as well as individuals who gave their time to assist those in need. It is always dangerous to name one person or one organisation, as you cannot name everyone, but I want those who helped to know that their assistance is valued. I am grateful even if I have not named them.

The volunteer efforts in all shires have been outstanding, and we saw locals stand up to immediately feed, clothe and house people, to organise feed for livestock and also, unfortunately, to euthanise livestock. It is in times like these that we see communities at their best. I also want to acknowledge the efforts of our local governments: the mayors, councillors, CEOs and officers at the Shire of Strathbogie, Murrindindi shire, Mitchell shire, Mansfield shire, Towong shire, Mount Alexander shire and the administrators at the Moira shire. You have all been amazing with the leadership you have shown in your communities.

I want to read out some of the stats for the fires to give some context to the extent and the size of these fires and the extent of the devastation. These are just initial stats; I expect they will increase as we gain

further information. The Longwood fire, which burnt across the Strathbogie, Murrindindi, Mansfield and Mitchell shires, claimed quite a lot of property. It was the fire that got the most publicity during the couple of weeks that we had the major fires. Strathbogie seemed to be the face of that – Longwood is obviously in Strathbogie and they were very, very severely impacted. But I think Murrindindi shire is equally impacted, and that has gone under the radar a little bit.

In Strathbogie we lost 110 houses, 272 structures have been destroyed and 144,000 hectares have been burnt. 36,000 is the statewide livestock losses that have been reported to date, but the majority of those are in Strathbogie. Eighteen culverts and 14 bridges have been damaged and more than 200 kilometres of road remain unsafe or closed. In Murrindindi 190 houses have been destroyed, 519 sheds, 5112 livestock have been lost, 389 beehives lost, 14,000 hectares of farmland burnt, 2000 kilometres of fencing damaged or destroyed, 6341 tonnes of hay or silage have been lost and 7399 hectares of grazing pasture lost. Murrindindi shire advises that their losses represent 45 per cent of the total number of structures destroyed across the state.

Mitchell shire lost three houses, four sheds, 4203 hectares of farmland was fire affected, 2000 hectares of hardwood plantation has been lost, 1647 hectares of grazing pasture has been lost, 100 kilometres of fencing damaged or destroyed and 4759 sheep were impacted. In Mansfield they lost five homes, seven sheds or outbuildings were lost, 1000 livestock have been lost, 52 tonnes of hay and silage, 100 hectares of crops lost, 2000 hectares of grazing pasture lost. A survey of over 100 businesses in mid-January also reported an average loss of 70 per cent in income for businesses. Something we have not seen any support for yet is business or tourism. These fires have had an enormous impact on businesses and tourism, as well as on those people who have directly lost homes and on our farming community.

In the Harcourt fires, which were in Mount Alexander shire, there were 54 houses lost, 10 sheds lost and at least 80 farms were impacted. 1200 hectares of grazing property was burnt; 12 hectares of apple orchards lost or impacted; 9 hectares of wine grapes lost, 300 livestock lost, mostly sheep and some poultry; and 158 kilometres of fencing has been lost. Mrs Broad talked about the loss of the coolstore in Harcourt. That has impacted around 100 businesses that shared that facility, and this is going to have an enormous impact on that community. I am pleased that the federal and state government have stepped up and provided funding for that facility to be rebuilt, but it will not replace the produce that has been lost in the fire and it will be some time before it is rebuilt. That fire even had an impact on me, because Blackjack winery store their wines in there and it just happens to be my favourite shiraz. I bought some directly from the winery and I have also been searching online for some of the older years to build up my wine reserves. I encourage all of you to also go out and spend some money in the fire areas and support those businesses that have been impacted.

In the Moira shire we had a fire at Yarroweyah. It was a rather small fire in the scheme of the fires that went on across the state; it only burnt for about 12 kilometres. It was a narrow fire along Benalla-Tocumwal Road, but it was a major fire. It impacted 50 properties, 13 homes were destroyed, 30 structures were destroyed, 950 hectares were burnt and 71 kilometres of fencing destroyed, fortunately no livestock were affected.

The Towong shire, where the Walwa fires are, have lost 16 homes. They think that only eight to 10 might be primary residences, but there are still 16 homes gone. There were up to 100 sheds; 30 other structures, including silos and water tanks; and over 120,000 hectares burnt. 17,000 hectares of that was rural land, 10,000 hectares was pine plantations and the rest was in state and national parks. Of course those fires are still burning. The livestock losses have not yet been counted, because they are still having difficulty accessing some of the properties. The major tourism attraction of the Towong shire is the rail trail, and that has been significantly impacted. They have lost nearly all of the trestle bridges on the rail trail, and these will need to be replaced. These are the things that we need to be looking at now. How can we support these communities going forward?

In addition to the direct losses, in all shires we witnessed the fragility of our power and telecommunication networks, the vulnerability of our road networks and the impact of the fires on business and the tourism industry, which is also widespread. The fires will be extensive, and it will be a long recovery. This motion pledges that the government will continue to work with communities to support and rebuild fire-affected communities. I hope this is a genuine pledge and that victims and communities receive adequate support to rebuild their lives and communities.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (15:47): I too rise today to offer my heartfelt condolences to all of those who have been affected by the devastating 2026 bushfires. As we have heard tragically already, one person has died and more than 430,000 hectares have been lost, just 20,000 hectares short of the Black Saturday fires of 2009, which claimed 173 lives and killed an estimated 1 million animals. We must also remember the Black Summer of 2019 and 2020, where tens of millions of hectares were lost, billions of animals were killed and over 400 human lives were lost from smoke inhalation across the country. The trauma, the loss and the heartbreak of these events linger in our communities still to this day. We have known for a long time that bushfires are not one-off events. This is a reality that experts have been warning us of, yet we are here once again facing the unbearable toll of extreme weather on our community, on our wildlife and on our land.

Vast parts of my electorate of Northern Victoria have been affected by this disaster, and my office has been working around the clock to support the community despite the fact that my office manager was themself also affected by the fires. This includes individuals who run wildlife shelters, such as Red Box Wildlife Shelter and Animal Abbey in the Mount Alexander shire area, where I was more than happy to travel to in the days after the fires and drop off almost 100 kilos of fruit for the bats and other animals that have come into care since the events, and communities like Harcourt, where homes and businesses have also been decimated. My heart goes out to these people, whose lives have been changed forever and who are now facing the long, exhausting task of rebuilding after immense personal, financial and emotional loss.

We are grateful for organisations such as Vets for Compassion, Animals Australia and Humane World for Animals, which provided urgent disaster relief to affected animals and carers following the fires. We are also grateful to our local wildlife carers, who managed to safely rescue a family of four kangaroos that had bad burns on their feet and smoke inhalation complications. These kangaroos will only survive because of the people who put their lives on the line to help them, and their story is an outlier. It is in stark contrast to the countless euthanasia cases that wildlife rescuers continue to attend day after day in the aftermath – kangaroos with necrotic, rotten feet from hopping on fireground; possums that have inhaled smoke; and other animals that are dying from dehydration.

Further to the east of my electorate, I send my condolences to Dr Robin Coy of Tarcombe Wildlife Shelter, which was destroyed in the Longwood fires. Robin watched as flames surrounded her animals, and she was forced to leave with only her dog, six joeys and a doe. She took shelter in a dam while she watched her entire property burn with the remaining animals trapped inside.

This only scratches the surface of what our community has endured this bushfire season. With more extreme heat and high fire danger periods on the way through February and March, I want to acknowledge and thank the volunteer CFA crews who continue to put themselves in harm's way to defend the communities that we all call home. Together we grieve for what has been lost. We stand with those in mourning, and we know we must act urgently to prevent these events from continuing in the future.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (15:51): I rise today to express my heartfelt condolences to every Victorian impacted by the recent and ongoing bushfires this summer. These bushfires have brought tremendous devastation to the communities that have been affected by them. I would like to extend my deepest condolences to the family, friends and community of Max Hobson, who died in the Longwood fire. Furthermore, the loss of townships, of livelihoods and of family homes is deeply

tragic, and we mark that today. But within these tragic stories we truly do see the best of Victorians on display – displays of courage, of generosity and of resilience.

I have had the unique privilege of travelling across our state to listen to the stories of those affected by the bushfires, as have many other members here in this chamber, and it is truly heartening to see how these communities have rallied together to support each other. I would like to acknowledge our emergency services, who I know have been tirelessly working over the last little while. There are those that stepped up to protect the communities they know and love and then there are those that flew in to help pay their respects, and to those I say thank you. To the teams made up of department staff and agencies, those at the relief centres and the incident control centres – wherever you were – and the small not-for-profits that popped up to support communities, can I just thank you very, very much for all that you have done.

There are those that are just really struggling with the enormity of this, and I have had conversations with so many of those community members. Can I also acknowledge the Red Cross, which have been running the relief centres, providing displaced Victorians with a hot meal and a place to sleep and, importantly, assisting them through their relationships with other organisations at these centres in those important first steps of rebuilding their lives. It is those volunteers representing those organisations that matter so very much: St John Ambulance, the Salvation Army, Lifeline, Foodshare, the pastoral care and the faith-based leaders. The list of organisations that have stepped up and the people that make them real is just so incredible that I cannot find the proper words to thank them.

What I want to do is highlight two organisations that have particularly struck me this season. One is called Gnarly Neighbours, up in Seymour. You might not have ever heard of them. They are a youth group that provides skateboarding lessons for young people. They decided that they should take a break and focus their efforts on organising to support their community. They have been critical in organising and distributing countless donations that they have received to those that need them most. The operation up there in Seymour is truly a sight to behold., To Gnarly Neighbours and all those folks up in Seymour that have made that happen, my thanks to you. One that was mentioned by Mr Bourman but I think we could do with mentioning again is Sikh Volunteers Australia, who have a dedicated team and a couple of vans. They have distributed thousands of free hot meals at relief centres right across the state. As Mr Bourman said, they are good people.

I would like to also take some time to acknowledge and extend a special thankyou to the elected councillors, council employees and mayors right across the state who have taken the time to meet with me and share their concerns, big and small. To Strathbogie Shire Council, Murrindindi Shire Council and Mitchell Shire Council, thanks for sharing your stories from your local communities – the stories of farmers struggling to euthanise their dying livestock, stories of lost treasured homes and properties and livelihoods and the big questions that remain over the future of their communities, the urgent needs both in the short term and the long term. But most profoundly you spoke about the people and the urgent need for on-the-ground mental health support. It just so happened that later on that afternoon Minister Stitt was popping up to talk about our very generous package to support mental health in the community. So I was very happy to report the upcoming visit of Minister Stitt to talk about the vital work of mental health professionals in these communities, ones that we learned so many lessons from after Black Saturday, and I know they are very vital and central to our efforts in recovery. I want to say to every bushfire-affected community across the state that we certainly do hear you and we understand it is not just about the loss of buildings, it is not just about the loss of land; it is also about the loss of family memories, livestock, pets, native animals and community, and sometimes it is about the loss of life. I reaffirm that members of this place will stand with you every step of the way in the recovery in the weeks, months and years ahead. I commend this motion to the chamber.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (15:56): I also rise to extend my condolences and deepest sympathies to the Victorian communities affected by the recent and ongoing bushfires, especially Max Hobson and his family. I was reflecting back on the experience that I had in a fire. My family were stuck in Marysville in the Black Saturday fires. I had a one-year-old baby. We were at a

camp with some university friends, and we started hearing the explosion of gas bottles and seeing the smoke in the distance. We were all told to help pack everybody up and leave, but on our way to the rendezvous point the smoke was so black and so thick that we took a wrong turn somewhere and accidentally went deeper into the fires. I have not thought back to that memory for so long, until today, and even now it is filling me with adrenaline because it was so, so terrifying being there with my baby in the black smoke.

I also really want to praise our emergency services personnel for their courage and sacrifice in fighting fires and protecting our communities. These are the people that run towards danger, and not just danger but some of the most nightmarish danger that we face in this state. For me personally, I think dying by fire is one of the scariest things that could happen to a person. Recently I was at my local fire station, which is a combined one with the CFA and the FRV. They get along very well there. Hats off to the captain there, Joe. They let me put on the uniform and the equipment. I could barely stand; I could barely breathe. They put me in a dark room. It was very hard not to be panicky. It is just phenomenal, the job that they do. I was also privileged to see them work on a road spill clean-up, and they really did operate like an elite military unit. These people are just so, so professional and so highly skilled. We are really privileged to have such amazing people on call for us when we are in danger.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to the many volunteers and community members who have supported friends, neighbours and everyone else in need. When we did make it to our rendezvous point in the Black Saturday fires, I still remember how the community and the volunteers turned up with sandwiches. They turned up with a portacot for my baby. The schoolteachers and everyone there, who were probably losing their property, turned up to help us, a bunch of strangers from the city who had just turned up on the worst day of their lives. So thank you to the CFA and all the other volunteers. I have been really encouraged to see yet again how everyone has come together and brought food and supplies for each other. It is really encouraging to see that side of our community, especially as the previous condolence motion was about something so sad. Obviously all of us here today pledge to continue to work with all of those communities across all levels of government to support and rebuild our fire-affected communities. It cannot go unsaid that you are doing these good deeds under the most difficult of circumstances, and I cannot wait to help fix that for you.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (16:00): I rise today to speak on the bushfire condolence motion. On behalf of One Nation Victoria I wish to extend our sincerest condolences to those affected by the January 2026 bushfires. Over the past few weeks there has been so much tragedy and heartbreak in Victoria. With over 400,000 hectares of land currently burnt, thousands of livestock and wildlife lost, around 340 homes destroyed and, sadly, one life lost, parts of the state look like a war zone. I wish to acknowledge and extend my deepest appreciation to the CFA and SES volunteers, Fire Rescue Victoria and Forest Fire Management Victoria, who ran towards the infernos without hesitation. In this disaster I have found so many shining lights: the communities that have rallied together to support and help each other have shown the very best in Australian values; people who themselves have lost everything running around to organise food and supplies for others who have also lost everything, supporting each other with dinners, clothes, fodder for their animals and even just a shoulder to lean on. These bushfires have shown the very best of our communities: the charities too numerous to name individually who sprang into action as soon as the first siren sounded; the ones who delivered food, water, hay and countless other supplies needed to sustain these fire-affected communities; the people who donated goods and funds to those affected by fires; and those who were simply there to help. The Australian spirit has been there and is still there on display for all to see. So many times I heard the words 'There is someone who's worse off than me. I don't need help,' when in reality they needed as much help and support as their neighbours – proud Australian farmers. Behind the rough and tough exterior you could see the heartbreak and devastation. I am so proud of everyone involved during these devastating bushfires. I stand with all those trying to rebuild their lives, homes and livelihoods.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (16:02): I rise to speak to this motion on the ongoing bushfires burning across the state. I would like to first offer my deepest condolences to the victims of this terrible ongoing disaster. As of today, my understanding is that over 1300 standing structures have been destroyed by fires and over 4000 hectares have been burnt. This includes approximately 400 homes which have been destroyed by fires, impacting hundreds of families across the state. That is before we look at how many homes and communities are still on the front lines of these bushfires, where those who have evacuated are still unable to return. The state of disaster is still in effect, as our brave CFA firefighters and other community volunteers work around the clock to keep these fires under control. Thousands of Victorians have seen their communities on the front line of these bushfires, and so many, unfortunately, have returned to their homes to find them destroyed by these fires. For these families everything they have built up over their lives has been devastated by these bushfires in one of the hottest summers on record. In the past few weeks, even though temperatures have now cooled down, regional Victoria saw temperatures pushing close to 50 degrees in parts of the state. Over these weeks hundreds of families have had to evacuate as the front lines have reached their towns and homes. Many of them have still not been able to return. Tragically, we have seen a lost life in these bushfires, and my deepest condolences go to the family of that loved one.

The brave volunteers in the CFA and the various other emergency relief and support organisations such as the SES have put themselves on the front line to protect Victorians in this difficult time. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for their bravery and their ongoing efforts. None of this would have been possible without these brave, devoted and hardworking volunteers. While temperatures may now be cooling, the fires are still raging in parts of Victoria. More families will, in the coming days and weeks, be returning to their towns to either find how close a call it was or find their homes destroyed. While disaster relief support is available from the state government, for many the devastation is simply too great.

I want to give a shout-out to the Colac relief centre at the showgrounds there. My father-in-law and mother-in-law spent four nights there, given that they evacuated because of the bushfires in the Colac region. They were undoubtedly very grateful for the amount of support that they were given. I could not speak highly enough of the people down there making sure that they were looked after, given they are in their early 80s, and it is not easy for people at that age to find themselves without a roof over their head. No doubt there is still an impact of these fires that will stay with these communities for the rest of their lives, and it will permanently have changed the faces of these communities with the traumatic impact, the physical damage and the repair and the clean-up underway.

I would also like to take a moment to let people know about the ongoing recovery efforts, as clean-up supports for people who are uninsured or under-insured are free of charge. Farmers and other primary producers are eligible for support, with grants available to aid them with their clean-up and removal of debris, damaged goods and other fencing materials. Over 15,000 livestock are estimated to have died with these bushfires, which is devastating for our farmers and other regional communities. Landholders concerned about their livestock welfare can contact Agriculture Victoria with any concerns as part of their recovery.

There is no question that the damage done to our farming community will take a long time to recover from, especially in primary farming communities in rural Victoria. While support payments for farmers, small businesses and underinsured Victorians and their homes may be available, little can comfort these families in times like this. I join everybody in this chamber in sending our sincere condolences to families whose livelihoods have been devastated, to their communities and to their loved ones, who now more than ever need help from their fellow Victorians. With that, I conclude my remarks.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:06): I rise to add my voice and condolences in relation to the 2026 bushfires and also place on record my heartfelt sorrow for the family of Mr Maxwell Hobson. What a stoic person he must have been, trying to defend his farm and family home. Our thoughts continue to be with all loved ones who have lost family members and community members in the fires.

Our state is one of the most fire-prone states in the nation. Our country has evolved with fire in the landscape. Our eucalypt species are there because of this fire moving through the landscape over thousands of years. It has been managed in the past with traditional owners, but it also is a tinderbox when the right conditions are there, and indeed the conditions are there when lightning strikes. Speaking to the incident controller – the regional controller that sits above me – before Christmas, one of the things that is their enemy, of course, is lightning. Of course the other one is human error – human intervention. Some fires are caused by ignorance, by having a fire lit and not put out as a camper, but other things can occur such as vehicles travelling along a road that has high grass and dry grass on the side and all the way in between.

Indeed our state has had many fires. I was speaking with many of the old-timers about the 1939 fires. I was around for the Ash Wednesday fires, when 75 people lost their lives. That date is still coming in our calendar – 16 February is the anniversary of that in 1983, and indeed not many decades pass without a major fire incident in one location or another. Only over the weekend we will mark the anniversary of the Black Saturday fires, and indeed travelling through my electorate over the summer months, the memory of the Black Summer fires of 2019–20 sends a shiver and an adrenaline rush into the hearts and souls of people in East Gippsland. I also concur with the good people of Mallacoota who witnessed the fire over the water, and that must have scared the living daylights out of them. Thankfully that fire has remained relatively benign in Forrest.

If I can speak, as well as the various very interesting and poignant contributions by members in the house, to how we are indebted to our volunteers, indebted to our CFA and indebted to those who, when the pager goes, put on their boots, put on their heavy uniforms and out they go. They practise, they study, they train every week. They can come from any walk of life – the plumber, the builder, the accountant, the teacher, the hairdresser, the local government employee. Again, they work as a team, and right across 1200 stations our CFA brigades are dedicated to service. We in this place, in government, on all levels, owe them a debt that really cannot be paid, because to be paid would bankrupt our state if there was monetary funding of that. They volunteer because they care, because they are compassionate and because they are skilled. I extend my thanks and gratitude to SES volunteers and to the range of volunteers that we see. They are ably supported by the agencies, by Forest Fire Management Victoria crews, by Fire Rescue Victoria and by Parks Victoria teams. I know they live in their communities. The ones that still do live in their communities, that are still employed in our regions, care very deeply and work with community – the paramedics, police officers, local shires.

I would like to also mention some of the unsung heroes: those people that come out with heavy machinery – those feller bunches, those chainsaws, the excavators – that are highly skilled in our country regions, whether they be civil or ex-VicForests workers. They have the knowledge and they have the capacity, and they also should be applauded because they put themselves in very dangerous situations and at times, I think, do not receive the level and degree of gratitude that their skill and their commitment deserve. We pay it today, and so we certainly honour them. When you see those visuals of the flame height crowning 60 metres above the ground and fire in the crowns of our trees, and then you see these, by comparison, very small fire trucks heading to that fire danger, your heart is in your mouth. As I said, our gratitude is one that is really unable to be paid to these good people.

We also speak of the incident control centres, and it really is an army of people. Speaking to one that sits above me this last week, they said that they can mobilise a whole army of everybody working into fires, and I pay my thanks to them. One of the incredible sadnesses, of course, is the loss of homes that we have seen across our fair state, and I concur with members who have acknowledged various MPs. Everyone does their bit as they can and as they will. Some of them I know – Annabelle and Kim and Gaelle and Tim and Danny O'Brien and Emma Kealy and Cindy McLeish – have certainly been on the fireground, as have my good colleagues in the west as well, and Labor MPs. I want to put on record my congratulations to people stepping up in times of need.

When we think about the devastation, when we think about those farmers – coming off a farm I know how passionate my father was about animal husbandry, the care and nurturing of those animals – I

think it is completely heartbreaking. I think farmers can cope with the loss of machinery, even the loss of their homes, but the loss of stock is just absolutely devastating, because it is an investment. It is not only a financial investment but it is an investment of time, of genetics, of care, and no-one likes to see animals in pain. I also want to pay gratitude and thanks to the RSPCA, our local vets and our wildlife officers, who have to go and euthanise wildlife that have been compromised in these bushfires.

We look at the resurgence in times of need of people who come to the aid of BlazeAid, of the farmers, and we heard people donating fodder, a very important factor in all of this, the trucks that we saw moving through, people from right across our state devoting time and being generous and donating all that is needed there for the interim. And we have heard also from my colleagues about donations of fodder, of food, of clothes and of finances. Victorians are overwhelmingly not only stoic in the face of adversity but generous in the face of crisis, and we thank them for that. I could go through a list, but others have listed many of the towns and I put on record my thanks.

Speaking with the incident controller that sits above me in Traralgon, he said that the Wonnangatta–Dargo complex travelled from the north-west to the south-east – the length of it, some 50,000 hectares all over, but it spotted kilometres and kilometres – in 6 hours. Now, that could take six weeks, but it ran in 6 hours. So I put on record – today is not the day, and I concur with other members – that part of this rebuilding of fire-affected communities must be about rebuilding confidence. Greater depth of preparation, of prevention, of pre-planning and of mitigation of bushfires before they take hold and take off – that needs to be a focus as much as, and included in, the rebuilding of our communities' mental health, physical structures, infrastructure, homes and capability. In doing that, I also want to make the comment around respect, resourcing and fuel loads, and there will be more discussed there later.

Finally, if I can respond and say that we are at our best when we are in a crisis. But let us not have to test our resolve and the wonderful spirit of Victorians all the time. Let us work out ways to mitigate bushfires before they take hold. I deeply thank all those who have worked in fire-affected areas, and I deeply pay my condolences to those who have lost homes and lost so much.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:17): I join colleagues across the chamber in acknowledging all of the Victorians who are affected by the fires which took hold in our state on 7 January this year. Once again, Victorians have faced the devastating threat that fire poses to our state. We have seen incredible dedication and bravery once again from our volunteer firefighters. Those of us on the fringes of Melbourne have so far been spared from the major fire events this year, and we are grateful for it. But I know that my community and all Victorians are standing with those affected by these fires, including in particular the Longwood and Walwa blazes.

On and since 7 January this year I have not been able to help but to compare that day and the wicked menace it posed to another tragic fire event in our state's history: Black Saturday. Days like that have the potential to humble you like nothing else. The extreme heat and ferocious winds evoked an anxiety in me, and I am sure many others, that I had not personally felt for 17 years. It was perhaps best described by Minister Tierney, but it is the anxiety of the unknown – not knowing what would happen if, despite your best preparations, you were faced with the worst. Thousands of Victorians did face exactly that just a few weeks ago. Many lost properties and animals, and one very sadly lost their life.

Despite the shockingly vast areas of land burnt and the blistering speed at which the fire front moved, the fact that we did not experience a death toll this year anywhere close to the magnitude of that awful day in February 2009 is a remarkable thing to note. We have undoubtedly learned a lot since then in how we prepare for fire and in how we respond to it. For many, if not most, Victorians in fire-prone areas, the mantra of 'stay and defend' has been replaced with 'leave, and leave early'. What we have learned has evidently served us well, but it is of small comfort to the loved ones of Max Hobson, to the survivors who had a close call and to those who lost all their earthly belongings, their homes, their businesses and their animals.

I want to join with all colleagues in acknowledging the incredible efforts of our state's firefighters, who have once again shown the most remarkable bravery and dedication, putting themselves forward into danger. They have no doubt saved countless lives, saved property and saved so many more Victorians from the heartbreak that bushfires bring. To our CFA volunteers in particular, to Forest Fire Management Victoria and FRV firies, to the SES and all other agencies: we thank you and we thank your families as well. We are also greatly indebted to all those firefighters from afar who volunteered their time and came to help us in our time of need, coming from interstate and as far away as Alberta – it is an act of mateship that we will not forget – and the community heroes, the everyday people who leaned in, those who sheltered neighbours, worked in fire refuges and got support to where it was needed. I am also proud of the very many people in my electorate who lent a hand, including Sikh Volunteers Australia, who once again provided much-needed cooked meals to fire-affected communities.

As we mark this tragedy today, we must remember that this year's fire season is not over. As Victorians, we must continue to do everything that we can to be prepared and keep ourselves and our loved ones safe.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:20): I also rise on this condolence motion to extend my deepest condolences to the Victorian communities affected by the January 2026 bushfires. The scale and the severity of the fires have caused immense loss, disrupted lives and left many communities facing a long and very difficult recovery. I also, as many of my colleagues and people across the chamber have done, want to extend my sincere thanks to the volunteers and the emergency services personnel who have been on the ground making a difference, working extraordinarily long hours with courage and dedication and a commitment to community. This tireless effort is often made in very extreme and dangerous circumstances, and they have done it selflessly to protect lives, to protect property, to protect livelihood and to protect communities.

In 2023, when I had the portfolio of emergency services, I spent time driving around Victoria. At that time people were devastated by floods and were homeless. But later – and in times before as well – we saw the impact of bushfires. My daughter was trapped in a bushfire many years ago in Mallacoota, and I know the devastation that people feel and the trauma that they go through because I had the great privilege of being one of the counsellors during the Churchill fires. The one thing that sticks in my memory, as I was attached to a school, was how when the wind blew the children suffered trauma. It was not necessarily when it was a hot day, but when it was a warm day and the wind was howling. I thought when it was warm that they would all start running in to come and talk, but it was that howling wind that brought back the traumatic memories of the impact of bushfires.

We have seen so many lives taken over the years through bushfires. This fire took Max Hobson. I extend my sincere condolences and deepest sympathy to the family as they work to rebuild their lives from their great loss. It is so tragic when people are out giving their time and their effort as volunteers and they lose their homes or their lives while trying to protect others. I have heard so many tragic stories over the years, including where people sent their teenage son to help neighbours while they were defending their home, only to have their son taken while he was helping the neighbours. These events were in other fires in previous times, but I think the lesson to be learned here is that fire kills and we have to do more to protect our families, our communities and our volunteers.

I thank the CFA, the SES and the many local groups that step up at times like this and the individuals who give more and more and more. They continually serve, and I think it shows the resilience of the Australian spirit, that sense of mateship that has not disappeared and that sense of love for community, for our homes and for each other. I want to thank you and again extend my deepest sympathy to all those who have lost homes, who have lost businesses, who are still out there dealing with fires and the aftermath. The clean-up is going to take a long time, and I simply ask that in the future the government really considers what it can do to prevent these grand-scale fires that take out so many people's lives and devastate them.

Before I finish I want to end with this: many years ago, when I was young, my father was in the forests commission. I remember him going out and being in those towers and watching the fires and the stories he would come back with. I think we need to look at how we deal with the burn-off. We need to look at what is responsible, and we need to be fair to these communities and to these volunteers and help them out so that they can get back to their lives.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:26): I would like to thank Minister Symes for bringing this motion to the house, and it is one that I am proud to support. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the life of Maxwell Hobson, who tragically died in these fires. I honestly just want to send my love to his family and his friends. My thoughts are with them as they grieve during this time but also deal with the fallout and the clean-up and recovery from the recent fires. I also want to acknowledge those who were initially reported missing but were found safe. I want to say that there was a collective sigh of relief from people all over the nation who were praying and who were believing that those people would come back safely and be found safely. That was really an incredible moment when people that were missing were found. We are very thankful for that.

I want to acknowledge that the fires have burnt over 400,000 hectares of our land and that over 500 structures, including 179 homes, have been burnt. I want to send my love to families like that of Tenille and David, who are facing the incredible journey of rebuilding their homes. I know they are very thankful that they got out safe, but I cannot imagine what it would be like to lose all your earthly possessions and start from scratch. The journey ahead is going to be tough for thousands of people around our state, but I know that together we will get there.

Our hearts are with the families and farmers and communities that are dealing with significant stock loss, and I know a lot of people have spoken about that today. My colleague Melina Bath spoke about how losing homes and property is one thing, but the tragedy that is attached to losing livestock is another. Roughly 20,000 head of livestock have been lost, and our hearts go out to all of those people affected by the life, the animals, the land and all that has been lost.

I want to honour the extraordinary work of our volunteers – the courage and the selflessness of the volunteers of the emergency services. I honestly think that you are the best of us in Australia. I think of each of those people, and it is always a risk when you mention a few, but I think of Jungala, who I bumped into the other day, who looked absolutely exhausted. When I saw him he said he had been fighting the fires in Dargo for days out of a truck with no air conditioning in it, but he was driven by love for his community to continue to put his life in danger and to continue to fight. There are others, like Nathan, who for days split his time between caring for his elderly parents and their home, which was at risk, and fighting to protect the community. There are so many volunteers like this who continue to show incredible generosity, bravery, selflessness, courage and love for the community. I honestly think that you show the best of the Australian spirit, and I just want to say from the bottom of my heart, thank you for all that you do for us and for our community.

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:29): On behalf of my communities I too would like to give condolence to the family of Max Hobson – his wife Julie Ann, their children and grandchildren. In my capacity as Shadow Minister for Fire Rescue Victoria I also want to point out – and some of those in this chamber today have done this, and I thank them for that – that while we all support and thank our CFA volunteers, and they do an amazing job, they are also supported on occasion by our career firefighters in Fire Rescue Victoria, in addition to the fact that we have some 38 Greater Melbourne and regional FRV stations, including in locations like Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Warrnambool, Mildura, Traralgon, Portland, Ocean Grove, Morwell, Latrobe West, Wodonga, Wangaratta and Shepparton. They play an instrumental role and in fact did in these latest bushfires, which impacted in Colac, Gellibrand, the Otways and Longwood. They sent a number of teams on a number of occasions – on one occasion a strike team of five pumper tankers, albeit one of them never quite got there, because it broke down on the way. That is a story for another time and another day. Nonetheless they have my thanks and appreciation for the work they do in supporting our CFA volunteers and working side by side not only with the CFA volunteers but, as we know and as

has been mentioned, also with our SES volunteers, the Lions clubs, the Rotary clubs, the football clubs, the netball clubs – all of the clubs and community effort, including the Red Cross and of course Forest Fire Management Victoria.

The PRESIDENT: I ask members to signify their assent by rising in their places for 1 minute's silence.

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

The PRESIDENT: Proceedings will now be suspended for 1 hour as a further mark of respect.

Sitting suspended 4:32 pm until 5:34 pm.

Bills

Labour Hire Legislation Amendment (Licensing) Bill 2025

Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Bill 2025

Royal assent

The PRESIDENT (17:34): I have a message from the Governor, dated 16 December:

> The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Acts of the present Session presented to her by the Clerk of the Legislative Council:
>
> **57/2025** Labour Hire Legislation Amendment (Licensing) Act 2025
>
> **58/2025** Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Act 2025

Members

Ministry

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (17:36): Before we start question time today, I would like to inform the house of an updated ministerial allocation: Minister Stitt is now Minister for Prevention of Family Violence.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Country Fire Authority

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:36): (1189) My question is to the Treasurer. The Country Fire Authority's annual reports reveal that grants funding was cut by your government each and every year, from $351.6 million in 2020–21 to $339.5 million in 2023–24. On Sunday 18 January the government, through Premier Allan, said:

> There has been no cut to funding for the CFA, it has only increased year-on-year … to say otherwise is false …

Does the Treasurer acknowledge that $339.5 million is in fact $12.1 million less than $351.6 million?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (17:37): I thank Mrs McArthur for her question. At the outset I would confirm that the Premier's statements are entirely accurate, entirely true, and that funding for the CFA has increased year in, year out under this government.

What you failed to acknowledge, Mrs McArthur, is that grants funding is merely one line in several lines in a totality of funding for the CFA. In relation to grants funding, and I am stepping slightly outside of my remit of Treasurer, but because I have the fortunate honour of being the former Minister for Emergency Services I can assure you, Mrs McArthur – and I am happy to take you through this offline if you like – there are a number of funding streams that perhaps used to flow through the CFA direct to a funding recipient, whether it be FRV or Triple Zero Victoria, for example, which following

fire services reform have gone directly through DJCS, which would mean that it is just accounted for in a different line. But if you follow and see the totality of funding, which is really the relevant amount of funding because we are talking about funding that is provided to our CFA, you will see that it has increased year in, year out. In addition, Mrs McArthur, I am sure you are familiar with the VESEP grant program, for example. These are also grant programs which are not accounted for under the line item that you have identified, which again I would point out in the last budget was doubled –

Bev McArthur: On a point of order, President, it is very simple: is $339.5 million $12 million less than $351.6 million? Can you add up?

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: The preamble was part of the question, and I think the minister addressed that right from the start of her answer. She rejected the premise of your question right from the start.

Bev McArthur: Is $339.5 million $12 million less than $351.6 million? Is it? That is the question.

The PRESIDENT: If that was a question on its own, then that would be put to a maths teacher. You have got to take into account the preamble and what is relative to the question.

Bev McArthur: The preamble was totally relevant.

The PRESIDENT: Well, that is good, because I am saying that the minister is being relevant to the preamble in her answer.

Jaclyn SYMES: Mrs McArthur, I would draw your attention to page 74 of the annual report. As I said, I am more than happy to take you offline to explain how the funding all adds up to more funding for the CFA each and every year. What the annual report clearly shows, what the CFA board clearly came out and confirmed, is that under a Labor government there is more funding for volunteers, more equipment on the ground, more investment in the station and trucks and particularly support for the volunteers that we rely on.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:40): Treasurer, you would need to speak to all those people on the fire front about that. The 2025–26 budget update shows the new emergency services tax will raise $1.55 billion in the 2025–26 financial year, $520 million more than under the fire services levy the previous year. How much of this half-a-billion-dollar tax increase will actually go to the CFA?

The PRESIDENT: I am concerned that is a completely different question. It has gone from a question around previous budgets to a supplementary on –

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, both questions are relevant, referencing the CFA budget, so they are completely in line and the same.

The PRESIDENT: I will call the Treasurer.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (17:42): Mrs McArthur, as you know, every dollar raised by the ESVF goes to our emergency services. As I was the emergency services minister when we announced this, I was in a position to indicate that the ESVF would not only double VESEP grants but would allocate new trucks to areas, many of them in your electorate, and I think I have previously brought you through that. But what I can say is that because of more frequent, more severe and more damaging natural disasters the ESVF will raise money, with every single dollar going to those regions that are impacted. Everybody in Victoria knows how severe our natural disasters can be – as I said, every single dollar. I can confirm that will not be enough to fund all of our emergency services. We will continue to tap into consolidated revenue each and every year, which is something where I am not sure how you can defend an $11.1 billion black hole without having to cut funding from our emergency services.

Housing

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (17:43): (1190) My question is for the minister for housing. Last week Homes Victoria announced another tranche of towers slated for demolition. These seven towers, across Albert Park, Flemington, Kensington, North Melbourne, Prahran and St Kilda, are all dedicated homes for older residents aged 55 and over. A key recommendation from the parliamentary inquiry into the planned demolition of all 44 public housing towers was that the government halt all work until it provides condition reports for each building, feasibility reports into alternatives to demolition and a cost–benefit analysis for each site to demonstrate evidence that demolition is the best and only feasible option. Minister, will you release the condition reports, feasibility studies and cost–benefit analyses for each of these seven towers?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (17:44): Thank you, Dr Mansfield, for that question, and thank you for the opportunity to talk with you about the latest announcements on the high-rise towers redevelopment, which were part of a discussion last week that resulted in an announcement for the purpose of discussions with residents about the process that sits around this. From July this year we will begin the process of relocation of people who live in this latest tranche of towers. Around 70 per cent of the people living in the towers you have identified are aged 65 and above. Between July this year and February 2028 we will work really carefully with residents so that they have the information they need to make the decisions that are right for them as relocations continue. The rent settings they have in the homes to which they relocate will remain the same. Residents will have a right of return – of course where they remain eligible – to the area where we are developing the new housing. We will continue to provide them with support, including a dedicated relocations officer. Dr Mansfield, I know that your colleagues have been part of an extensive advocacy program to stop the development of the tower sites, these 39 hectares of land across inner Melbourne. I know you have joined with – by 'you' I do not mean you, Dr Mansfield, I mean your Greens colleagues – the coalition to vote against the development process on more than 60 occasions in the course of this particular –

Sarah Mansfield: On a point of order, President, my question was just about releasing reports and whether the government is going to release the reports. It was quite straightforward. I appreciate all the other information, but I am just hoping the minister might talk about the reports.

The PRESIDENT: I call the minister back to the question.

Harriet SHING: Thank you, Dr Mansfield. You have just said, 'I appreciate all of the other information.' Well, this information is necessary to counter the dis- and misinformation that has been put out there about claims that people will be evicted into homelessness, claims that people will not have a right of return, claims that people will have increased rent as a consequence, claims that people will not have protections under the Residential Tenancies Act. They are all incorrect assertions. They are scaremongering, they are fearmongering, and residents in these towers deserve better.

Anasina Gray-Barberio: On a point of order, President, can you just clarify whether the minister in her response was attacking the Greens? She is not answering what Dr Mansfield said about the report.

The PRESIDENT: I am happy to call the minister back to the question.

Harriet SHING: Dr Mansfield, I am very happy to furnish you and your colleague Ms Gray-Barberio perhaps with some further accurate information to help you to understand this process and then to share that information with communities. We will continue to rely on –

Sarah Mansfield: On a point of order, President, my question was about reports about the buildings. I understand that there is information about the process, and that is fine, but I have said nothing about a lot of the other subjects that have been raised. Even in my preamble I said nothing

about any of these things. It was simply about the reports about the buildings themselves and whether they are going to be released.

The PRESIDENT: I call the minister back to the question.

Harriet SHING: Dr Mansfield, we will continue with the program to develop and to replace the high-rise towers with modern, energy-efficient, fit-for-purpose housing that is accessible and that meets the needs of residents, including those older residents. These towers cannot fit a stretcher into the lifts. These towers do not give people their own laundries. These towers do not have doorway widths that meet disability requirements. These towers do not allow people to age in place. If you think that there is – *(Time expired)*

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (17:48): While I appreciate that there was some information about towers generally and the residents provided by the minister, the question was not answered about releasing the reports. If all of those issues with the towers that you have just cited exist, I am not quite sure why reports about that cannot be released. Labor wants to demolish towers that house older vulnerable Victorians, despite residents warning of the serious harm that forced relocations will cause them and despite experts stating that retaining and retrofitting towers could save hundreds of millions of dollars. Many of these residents have been living in their homes for decades. They are in their 80s or 90s, and in the middle of a housing crisis you want to move these residents away from their communities and their local supports. Can you confirm whether there is any independent evidence showing that demolition is the only viable option for each of these seven buildings?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (17:49): Thanks, Dr Mansfield. There is a fair bit in what you have just referred to there that I just want to respond to – a fair bit in your preamble. You are suggesting that the 70 per cent of people in these towers aged 65 and above should have housing that is not going to meet their needs as they age in place. You are saying that those people who call those towers home should not have access to homes that meet current standards and codes for compliance with everything from flood through to fire through to natural disaster through to natural light, ventilation and insulation. You are suggesting that these residents, who in many instances have called these towers home for decades, should have no opportunity to live in the housing that applies by the way of standards to everybody else, whether it is market, build-to-rent or indeed private ownership.

Sarah Mansfield: On a point of order, President, I did not make a single one of those claims that the minister just stated.

A member: She verballed you.

Sarah Mansfield: Yes. I asked for independent evidence. I asked about evidence and I asked about reports, not anything else that the minister has spoken to.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister was relevant towards the end of her contribution just then.

Harriet SHING: If you want independent evidence, Dr Mansfield, speak to the residents. Speak to those residents – more than 90 per cent of people who have moved out of Flemington and North Melbourne – about why it is that they want housing that meets their needs and provides them with dignity and pride of place. There is your independent evidence. And read the information that we have provided – *(Time expired)*

Ministers statements: ADHD services

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (17:51): Today I joined the Premier and the Minister for Health to announce that the Allan Labor government will make it easier and cheaper for Victorians to get the care they need for ADHD. We know that for too many Victorians

accessing a diagnosis and treatment for ADHD is challenging, with long wait times and high out-of-pocket costs. We were joined today by two mothers, Bronwyn and Justine, who shared their experiences of the impact that delays to diagnosis and treatment can have on families and in particular on children. Undiagnosed or untreated ADHD can have a significant effect on a person's life, whether it is at school, at work or in the home. Without diagnosis, patients are unable to receive mental health care treatment or the education and support required for them to thrive in their everyday lives. Our announcement today will change that, and we are getting on with this work immediately. This week we will kick off a targeted consultation process with key stakeholders to guide regulatory amendments to allow more GPs to prescribe ADHD medication. To support GPs to diagnose we will work with experts across the medical and mental health sectors to roll out accredited training to expand the scope of practice of GPs. An initial investment of $750,000 will support training for 150 GPs by September. These changes will help people get the critical ADHD care they need to support their mental health and tackle the challenges of living with ADHD. No child or family should be left behind because the system is too complex, too hard or too expensive. This is all part of Labor's plan to make health care work better for families, and I am very proud to get on with that work.

Country Fire Authority

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:53): (1191) My question is to the Treasurer. Page 62 of the CFA's 2023–24 annual report shows funding fell from $341.7 million in 2022–23 to $339.5 million in 2023–24, stating:

> Total grant income for the 2023–24 year declined by $2.3m from the previous year as the CFA continues to implement efficient and effective measures in line with the *More Efficient and Effective* Government initiative.

Treasurer, these comments in the annual report directly contradict the Premier's claim on 18 January that there has been a year-on-year funding increase. Why does the CFA have to pay the price for the government's inability to manage money?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (17:54): At the outset, Mrs McArthur, you are referring to the period of 2022–23. It would have actually been appropriate to put that question to me when I was the Minister for Emergency Services at that particular time, because as you would appreciate, these questions should be directed to the relevant minister. But you did reflect on comments that the Premier has made in relation to the increase of funding for the CFA each and every year. Mrs McArthur, respectfully, if you were able to read budget papers and tables in the annual report, it is there in black and white that there has been an increase in the totality of funding for the CFA each and every year. As I have explained to you in relation to particular inputs, it is just one line item of the totality of funding of the CFA. If you read the whole table – if you look at every revenue measure that was provided to the CFA – you will see in the annual report that it is clear, as was confirmed by the CFA board, that there has been an increase in funding to the CFA year in, year out. As you previously asked in your earlier question about the ESVF, the ESVF gives us greater certainty for sustainable funding for the CFA. It has enabled us to double VESEP grants, which means that more and more brigades are able to access funding for the equipment that they choose. Just this year alone the CFA received $22 million under that particular fund. This is going to be a very frustrating backwards and forwards, Mrs McArthur, if you continue to not accept the reality that is printed in some budget papers. I can continue to point you to the evidence that shows that there have been increases. I am not sure why you think that what is printed means something that it does not.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:56): Treasurer, it is quite clear in black and white that the funding was cut, and you have told us twice in this chamber that there are no budget cuts to the CFA. You have done it again. Why are you continuing to mislead Parliament and the people of Victoria, and especially the CFA?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (17:57): Mrs McArthur, you may wish to put this to a substantive motion, because you are making an allegation against me as the Treasurer of misleading the house. I have told you – this is the fourth answer now – that there have been no funding cuts to the CFA. There has been an increase in funding every year, which is very clearly outlined in the annual report that has been recently released. I am concerned that you are unable to read the annual report's funding table, and I invite you to a session where I will take you through it so that you can see that your presentation is an inaccurate and completely false reflection of what is contained in black and white in the annual report.

Child sexual abuse

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:58): (1192) My question is for the Attorney-General, represented in this place by the Minister for Corrections, Mr Erdogan. In response to a report by the New South Wales Sentencing Council, New South Wales will soon abolish the good character evidence as a mitigating factor for offenders during sentencing proceedings. This important change hopes to reduce trauma for victim-survivors and follows the advocacy of Jarad Grice and Harrison James, who co-founded the Your Reference Ain't Relevant campaign to remove good character references when sentencing child sex offenders. When I raised this in Parliament late last year, I was told the government will carefully consider the findings and recommendations of the New South Wales Sentencing Council once it is made available. So my question is: can the minister advise when we can expect a decision to be made on similar changes in Victoria?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (17:59): I thank Ms Payne for raising this issue of great public interest. The character reference is always a matter of interest, even in other matters, not just the ones that you allude to, but I will make sure that is passed on to the Attorney-General in the other place for a response in line with the standing orders.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:59): I thank the minister for passing that on. By way of supplementary, when I raised this issue in Parliament last year I was also told that the government would work closely with the Commonwealth and state partners through the standing committee of attorneys-general to identify opportunities to coordinate on this issue, so my question is: will the Victorian government commit to advocating for changes to character references at the next standing committee of attorneys-general?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (18:00): I thank Ms Payne for her supplementary question. As per the standing orders, I will make sure you get an appropriate response from the Attorney-General in the other place.

Ministers statements: early childhood education and care

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (18:00): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is continuing its significant investment supporting children and families to access kinder in 2026. This year we have 24 kinders opening on school sites across the state, and we have 15 more planned to open in 2027. We know that co-locating kinders on school sites helps children get the most out of their early learning. They make drop-off easier during the morning rush for families, and significantly, they make the transition to school smoother. It also helps ensure there is sufficient kinder capacity for communities, at the same time providing new and modern kinder facilities for children to learn, play and grow in. As well as kinders we have 14 Early Learning Victoria childcare centres opening across Victoria this year. This follows the four centres that opened last year. These government owned and operated centres provide affordable child care as well as three- and four-year-old kinder. They include critical community infrastructure, such as maternal and child health and playgroup rooms.

We are not only supporting access to early childhood education through infrastructure investment. In 2026 pre-prep has become available in 12 new local government areas, and this means another 3000 children at 130 services are eligible for up to 20 hours of kinder per week. Our government also continues to support vulnerable children and families, and this year up to 25 kinder hours a week are available to priority cohort children no matter where they live. In practical terms this will help more than 5000 children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from a refugee or asylum seeker background and children who have had contact with child protection. It will enable those children to access more hours of kinder. We are continuing to ensure that all children are entitled to free kinder, supporting with cost-of-living pressures. Free kinder now saves families almost $2700 a year. This is all part of our nation-leading $14 billion Best Start, Best Life reforms, which are transforming early childhood education. We know how important early learning is for each child's development and for the lifelong benefits it brings, and it is only this side of the house that is reforming early childhood education, matched with record investment.

Emergency services

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:02): (1193) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, I refer to the quarterly asset investment reports, which are submitted to the department of treasury by every department every quarter, and I refer specifically to the 2024–25 quarter 2 report from the department of justice. When the report was submitted to the Treasurer's department it showed a red warning on the delivery of emergency services upgrades. Despite an estimated investment of $9.6 million, only $0.178 million was provided in quarter 2, and I ask the Treasurer: when her department was provided with this warning, what action did she take?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (18:03): Mr Davis, thank you for your question. I think I am going to need some more information from you, because you have first of all outlined a period of time when I do not believe I was the Treasurer, so to expect me to have knowledge at hand about an asset register from before my time of being Treasurer, I am actually being quite polite in saying that perhaps if you provide some further information I will endeavour to see what information I can furnish you.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:04): I am very happy to give you a copy of the asset reports. They come through every quarter from every department, and I refer to the CFA capital upgrades program, which was designated an amber warning. The TEI is $81 million, but the quarter 2 actual is only $9.2 million. Can the Treasurer explain why the TEI was wrongly calculated and if this has resulted in delays in the delivery of the CFA capital upgrades program?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (18:04): I thank Mr Davis for his question. Similar to my answer to your substantive: again you are asking questions about a time that preceded me in the role. I probably should not offer to get you some information, but I am more than happy to do that in this instance.

Economic policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:05): (1194) My question is also to the Treasurer. A number of agencies, including Alpine Resorts Victoria, V/Line and Greater Western Water, have been provided with letters of comfort or support by the government to ensure that despite the financial challenges they face, they remain a going concern. I therefore ask: how many government agencies, statutory authorities or other state government entities have been provided with letters of comfort or support in the 2024–25 financial year?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (18:05): Again, Mr Davis, you are asking for information that crosses over with my time before being Treasurer.

David Davis: The annual reports were done in your time.

Jaclyn SYMES: You literally asked how many times in that period. Again – I will get to answering your question – asking questions of a minister for a duration that preceded their commission is I think not a great practice in this chamber. I have been rather generous in my commitment to you to provide you some information, because obviously you could submit it via a QON in any event.

Mr Davis, I think I do take issue with the way you have characterised this issue and the way you, I believe, are wanting to put this up for debate tomorrow. I am sure that you remember from your time as a minister that letters of comfort are a very common tool used by governments of every persuasion. I could probably give you some from your time, which well preceded my time. But they assist entities with their cash flow, which can vary from year to year. The alternative – and I am actually interested in the opposition's position – would be to put additional funds into every agency just in case. That would be at the expense of the taxpayer, and we would not have those funds available for some of the priorities.

So in fact it concerns me that your presentation of letters of comfort is somehow negative; it is actually financially responsible to do so. I am looking forward to and am pre-empting your motion tomorrow. But I have heard that you have changed your motion for tomorrow at the eleventh hour, which we are about to hear about: less than 24 hours before general business I am advised that we are debating a motion on letters of comfort tomorrow. So we will have plenty of opportunity to explore this issue in greater detail because, as I said, this is a responsible management tool and I make no apologies for a government that does it. I am pretty sure that when you were a minister in the previous coalition government the practice was adopted then as well.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:08): Treasurer, these commitments involve millions of dollars. Do you have oversight of these letters of comfort in 2025–26 or 2024–25 provided by the relevant departments to agencies, authorities or entities, or are they provided willy-nilly – that is, without coordination through DTF or your office? Do you tick them off?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (18:09): Yes, Mr Davis, I sign them. Your question was: are they provided willy-nilly? No, they are not. There is a process that involves DTF analysis and advice of course. And do I sign them off? Yes. So to suggest that this practice is willy-nilly or inappropriate, I –

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: Letters of comfort that come from the Treasurer are approved and signed by the Treasurer.

Ministers statements: Professor Emma Johnston

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (18:10): Unfortunately today is a day of condolences, and this is another. Today I rise to acknowledge the passing of Professor Emma Johnston AO, vice-chancellor of the University of Melbourne. I extend my heartfelt condolences to her family, her colleagues and the entire university community. Professor Johnston made exceptional contributions to Australia as a scientist, educator and university leader. She was widely respected for her collaborative approach, commitment to academic excellence, ability to engage beyond the university and passion for the marine environment. Professor Johnston was a student first at the University of Melbourne, where she completed a bachelor of science and then a PhD in marine ecology.

We were fortunate to have her return to Victoria to lead the University of Melbourne, one of Australia's leading academic institutions. As vice-chancellor, Professor Johnston brought clarity of purpose and a strong sense of responsibility to students and staff at the university. I was struck by the tributes to Professor Johnston that highlighted her efforts to support others. These tributes demonstrate that her positive impact will continue through the people she encouraged and mentored. She championed the opportunity, the inclusion and the vital role that higher education plays in our society.

Professor Johnston's contribution will be felt for many years through the people she supported, the institutions she strengthened and her contributions to deepening our understanding of marine environments. I acknowledge Professor Johnston's significant service to science and higher education and the significant legacy she leaves behind.

To Professor Johnston's family, friends and colleagues, we extend our deepest sympathies. She will be deeply missed, but her contributions to our natural environment, education and scientific inquiry will continue to benefit our community for generations to come.

Illicit tobacco

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (18:12): (1195) My question is to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. On Friday 30 January the minister put out a press release titled 'Smoking out illicit tobacco'. Victoria has 14 tobacco licensing inspectors. That is the same number Tasmania has, and they have a fraction of Victoria's population. Queensland has 43, Western Australia has 40, South Australia has 38. Why does Victoria have so few?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (18:12): I thank Mr Mulholland for his question and his interest in Tobacco Licensing Victoria, the first regulator of its kind in Victoria's history. I might take this opportunity to also acknowledge the Treasurer, who backed in this new regulator with $46 million of investment, because on this side of the chamber we do not talk about community safety, we also invest in it. The new regulator will be tasked with ensuring that there is tough new enforcement on the beat. It is about a regulator that is focused on enforcement, and the announcement I made last week was about making sure we are going to have officers and inspectors around our state focused on making sure we get ahead of this illicit trade, appreciating that this work requires a national approach. This is not unique to Victoria, and the 14 we have, the number of inspectors, is only one part of that equation. Inspectors are not going to be working alone. They are going to be working in partnership with other agencies. Understand? We have already seen some of the fruits of the engagement between Victorian police and federal police in the amount of arrests we have seen. Today in Victoria, I want to remind the chamber, we have had 150 arrests. Almost $40 million of illicit products and cash have already been seized. But this is just the beginning. The licensing scheme is a major new tool. We are confident we will have a strong start, and the capability will be improved as it continues.

Rather than going door to door, inspectors are deployed based on a risk basis and are intelligence led. That means we do not want to overburden some businesses that are doing the right thing, understanding that a lot of supermarkets and grocery markets are doing the right thing. There is no need to overburden them with inspectors. This work is going to be targeted, because we want to protect them. We want to make sure they continue to thrive in this state. Put simply, Victoria's enforcement approach is built on coordination and intelligence, not the size of one team alone. We will continue to do the work, we will work with other jurisdictions and we will work with the Commonwealth to make sure we smoke out the illicit trade.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (18:14): Minister, the government allocates more resources to the Premier's media team than it does to the 14 tobacco licensing inspectors responsible for tackling the illicit tobacco trade. How can anyone in Victoria expect to feel safe and how are legitimate businesses expected to survive when the priorities of the government are media spin instead of tangible, practical action on the illicit tobacco trade?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (18:15): I reject the premise of Mr Mulholland's question. Tobacco Licensing Victoria has strong enforcement powers, including suspending or cancelling licences, seizing illegal products and court action. In particular, with our new regulator, there is up to 15 years imprisonment. That has got to make the criminals think, and we know there is intelligence that they are concerned. They are looking to adapt their business model because they are

concerned about our new scheme. Give Tobacco Licensing Victoria a chance. You will see the work that they will do, and I am sure there will be further announcements in this space throughout this year.

Police conduct

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (18:16): (1196) My question is to the Minister for Police. After the Federal Court found the recent CBD designated area declaration by Victoria Police was unlawful and invalid, all Victorians deserve confidence that extraordinary search powers will not be used outside the law, including racialised communities. The minister repeatedly reassures Parliament that Victoria Police does not engage in racial profiling, yet independent reports continue to find disproportionate stops and searches of Aboriginal and racially marginalised communities, including in the operation of designated area powers. What specific actions will the minister take this year to end racial profiling, including mandatory publication of stop-and-search data by perceived race, enforceable training and discipline, and independent oversight, so Victorians can have confidence these powers are not being used in a discriminatory way?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (18:17): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for her question and her interest in this matter. I will make sure that is passed on to the Minister for Police in the other place for an appropriate response.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (18:17): When will the minister stop relying on assurances and establish an independent, properly empowered oversight mechanism, backed by transparent data reporting, to prevent, detect and sanction racial profiling?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (18:17): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for that supplementary question. I will make sure that there is an appropriate response from the Minister for Police in the other place.

Ministers statements: illicit tobacco

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (18:17): This weekend marked an important step in Victoria's fight against illicit tobacco. On Sunday enforcement of Victoria's new tobacco licensing scheme commenced. This reform is the result of significant investment in community safety by the Allan Labor government, backed by Victoria Police. Tobacco Licensing Victoria will strengthen intelligence and coordination across agencies, giving authorities a clearer picture of illicit tobacco activity and the criminal networks behind it. Inspectors are now out and about across neighbourhoods in our state. They are checking compliance and licensing obligations, supporting legitimate retailers and gathering intelligence to act against unlicensed or illicit businesses.

Their work is backed by serious consequences. Selling tobacco without a licence now attracts tough new penalties, and those caught selling illicit tobacco will face the strongest sanctions in the nation: up to 15 years imprisonment for individuals and fines of up to $1.8 million for businesses doing the wrong thing. And let us not forget about the results Victoria has already delivered: 200 search warrants executed, 150 arrests and almost $40 million of illicit products have already been confiscated. Criminal syndicates have been profiting from illicit tobacco products while honest and hardworking businesses have been undercut.

Tobacco Licensing Victoria is about protecting Victorian communities, backing thousands of retailers doing the right thing and cracking down on those who have been profiting from illegal tobacco for far too long. Commencing enforcement is a major milestone, but I remind the chamber that we know this is a national challenge, and we accept that. That is why in Victoria we will continue to work with the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions to stamp out the illicit tobacco trade.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (18:19): I thank Minister Erdogan, who will get responses from the Attorney-General for both of Ms Payne's questions. He will also get responses for Ms Gray-Barberio for both of her questions to the Minister for Police.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, I asked a question about the quarterly asset investment reports. In the 2024–25 financial year, quarter 2, the Treasurer was the Treasurer – she was in the job at the time. The quarterly asset investment report came in from the Department of Justice and Community Safety. The Treasurer can answer a question about a document that was sent to the department in the time when she was Treasurer.

Harriet Shing: Further to the point of order, President, as Mr Davis would be well aware, there are multiple rulings from this President and previous presidents about the granularity of questions and the extent to which a member can be expected to provide a response on their feet in respect of such granularity. Mr Davis, that is something which I would invite you to take account of in respect of the Treasurer's answer – that she would endeavour to provide information and to come back to you where it was available to her.

David Davis: Further to the point of order, President, I put it to you that these asset investment reports are submitted to the department to give warnings to the treasury department and the Treasurer. There is a series of green and amber and red warnings. I have not asked about the hundreds of green ones, I have asked about the troubled, or amber and red, ones, which are exactly the sort of thing beyond the granularity that you are suggesting – the red ones where the budget is blowing out or there is a problem. The department has said that there is a problem, and you would think that the Treasurer would be prepared to look at the material that comes from a department with the red warnings on it.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta Ermacora: On a point of order, President, there is too much noise, and Lilah is sleeping.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: If everyone stays calm, we will be all right. I think the Treasurer, actually, in one of her responses, hit the nail on the head. She said if there are any accusations that she may be misleading the house, there are other provisions around motions, and the debate that just went on then and points of order can happen during that. There is no point of order, but –

David Davis: On the point of order, President, we are not suggesting on this matter that she has misled the house. On the matter of the CFA, that is a different question. I will leave that to Mrs McArthur. But on this matter, I am merely suggesting that the Treasurer is not on top of her brief. A red warning comes in, and she appears unaware of it.

The PRESIDENT: Can we save it for debate on a future day.

Sarah Mansfield: On a point of order, President, I do not believe the minister's response to my question was relevant to the question, and I move that her response be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

The PRESIDENT: I will review that and get back by the end of today.

Sitting suspended 6:25 pm until 7:28 pm.

Nick McGowan: On a point of order, given the poignancy of today and the events that have occurred in this place, I just draw your attention, President, to some chalk that has appeared on the front steps of Parliament. I am happy to give you copies of that and what that says. I would rather not repeat those phrases here, but could your parliamentary staff perhaps investigate that and look to removing that as soon as possible? I think that, given what has been moved in this place in respect to

Bondi in particular, if not the timing then certainly the words do not lend themselves to what this place has passed today.

The PRESIDENT: It was just recently brought to my attention, so I think we can address it very quickly as far as removing it goes. Any sort of commentary whatsoever on our steps is unacceptable, no matter what the commentary. I am actually quite disappointed that someone could have done it. I will follow that up to make sure there is a bit more diligence around this sort of activity, because it has got me blown. I thank you for the point of order.

Constituency questions

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (19:29): (2082) My question is for the attention of the Minister for Housing and Building. My colleague in the other place Michael O'Brien has raised an issue in his electorate of Malvern and written to the minister on several occasions asking for action on the unsafe activities of some residents residing in social housing in Denbigh Road, Armadale. Prahran housing is aware of the ongoing situation, as are the police, who are helpless because of the lack of action by the government. On Sunday I, together with Amelia Hamer, met with residents who are becoming increasingly concerned about the violent, dangerous and antisocial behaviour. This includes the repeated yelling of 'I will cut your face off, expletive'; screaming and yelling at all times of the night; multiple residents threatened at knifepoint; a discarded ice pipe with a swastika on it; multiple reports of prohibited weapons, including machetes and knuckledusters; syringes and used tampons being thrown into neighbouring properties; fire extinguishers being used to smash cars and threaten passers-by; a man with a knife chasing local residents; and a fire in one of the units, thought to be caused by a meth lab, with the building still not repaired. That happened, I understand, 12 months ago, so to hear the minister in question time talk about safe residents having dignity and pride of place – these residents also deserve it. My constituents ask: will the minister commit to providing 24/7 security to keep residents safe?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:31): (2083) My constituency question is for the minister representing the Minister for Police. On 7 January a man was navigating bus replacements along the Pakenham train line and was assaulted by two individuals described as late teens or early 20s in the back of the bus. When he approached the bus driver about camera footage of the incident, the driver explained the bus only has a front camera and it cannot see the back of the bus. This calls into question the efficacy of the government's recent changes to surveillance laws in improving community safety on public transport. The victim then sought medical assistance from PSOs at Narre Warren station, but after waiting over 2 hours for an ambulance to arrive, he gave up and went home. He is now considering moving away from south-east Melbourne as he no longer feels safe. My question therefore is: what is the government doing to ensure effective community safety on buses and other public transport in the south-east?

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (19:32): (2084) My question is to the minister for higher education, and it relates to the former mental asylum Aradale in Ararat. Aradale is an asset owned by the state, but the committee of management is Melbourne Polytechnic. The historic Aradale site, which is an iconic heritage structure synonymous with Ararat but well known across western Victoria and indeed the state, is in drastic need of repair. I have seen pictures and video evidence that reveal parts of the roof are at risk of caving in. There is water damage and mould damage; walls are falling apart, and many of them have big holes in them. The heritage value of the building itself should be enough to justify preserving the building, but the site is used for other purposes as well, such as the tourism sector where ghost tours operate. Minister, can you please explain what the government is going to do to rectify this situation? We want to save Aradale so it is preserved well into the future.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:33): (2085) My question today is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The community in Heidelberg is again being told not to be concerned about further troubling impacts from the North East Link toll road tunnelling. Just a short while ago, as was well documented, a large sinkhole opened up in a footy oval, and we have seen more recently the Yarra River bubble like a spa bath. None of this feels in any way normal. There are many in the community who do not hold the view that these are acceptable occurrences during tunnel boring. Minister, you will agree, I hope, that people have the right to know that their community, their homes, their rivers and their parks are safe. Minister, can you rule out any further impacts like sinkholes or bubbling rivers that will be caused by the North East Link project?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:34): (2086) This month it was revealed that there was a major data breach – a cybersecurity incident – with respect to the Department of Education. I have been approached by a number of my constituents locally in Ringwood across the electorate, and in particular parents who are most concerned that not only their data as parents but also the data of their children – that is, their names, their email addresses and other details – have been potentially hacked and obtained by third parties unknown to the Department of Education. Some of these parents hold a particular status in our community. They have backgrounds in law enforcement and other professions, and they have a genuine concern for their safety and the safety of their children, notwithstanding they also have a concern for the privacy of their residences and the addresses that are associated with them. I would appreciate from the Minister for Education some guidance in respect to whether the addresses of both parents and children have been breached.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (19:35): (2087) My constituency question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Minister, constituents in my electorate of Northern Metro have long raised concerns about the unreliability and infrequency of east–west bus services, in particular, the 508 bus route between Brunswick, Northcote and Alphington, which consistently fails to meet community needs. For many in the community the 508 bus is their only practical way to reach work, education, community services and connecting public transport. During peaks, the buses run every 15 minutes, but this drops to 30 to 40 minutes on weekends, with the service stopping at 10 pm. The community, Minister, are calling for the 508 bus to extend its service to 12 am every night. Minister, will you start prioritising communities in the north and extend the 508 bus service to midnight every night?

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (19:36): (2088) My matter is for the Minister for Police here in this state, and it concerns the forthcoming visit to Victoria of the Israeli President, Isaac Herzog. I note that the New South Wales police commissioner has extended restrictions on protests for a fourth time and specifically is going to outlaw protests around this visit. Obviously in my electorate, Southern Metro, is the largest group of Jewish Australians of any part of the country, a very significant community, and many have raised with me the safety of the President and those who would seek to see him on his visit. What I am asking the minister to do is confer with his New South Wales colleague and introduce similar arrangements here. We at the moment have massive demonstrations which are not safe, which have led to great insecurity and violent antisemitism – *(Time expired)*

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (19:37): (2089) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, we are experiencing yet another high bushfire season, and communities right across my Eastern Victoria electorate are deeply concerned about dangerously overgrown roadside vegetation – fuel loads that turn state roads into fire wicks and fire corridors.

Despite repeated warnings from the CFA and local landholders, roadside slashing and fuel reduction works continue to be inconsistent, delayed or just not done. I can list Bass Coast, South Gippsland Highway; Hazelwood Road; Korumburra-Warragul Road; the Glengarry–Tyers road; and Strzelecki Highway. I can keep listing until morning all the roads – VicRoads roads – that need slashing and their fuel reduced. Will the minister commit to an urgent overhaul of roadside vegetation and fuel management and establish, in conjunction with the CFA, a process to make sure that these roadsides are slashed and fuel is reduced?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (19:38): (2090) My question is for the Minister for Police: what is the minister doing to combat the growing problem of illegal e-bikes and dirt bikes being ridden dangerously on pedestrian footpaths and public roads in the Yan Yean electorate? My office has been inundated with complaints from constituents who have been confronted by dangerous e-bike and dirt bike riders. Residents report feeling intimidated by groups of riders who roam the neighbourhood, and families no longer feel safe to let their children walk or play on the footpath, as these fast and dangerous bikes put kids at risk of serious collision. However, the Allan Labor government has failed to proactively respond to the problem, and instead of increasing staffing and police resources, local police report that stations in the Whittlesea police service area are only operating at 30 to 50 per cent of their designated staffing levels and station opening hours have been reduced. The state government must increase police staffing and resources to enable proactive policing – *(Time expired)*

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (19:39): (2091) My constituency question to start the new year is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it concerns one of my favourite topics, which is Donnybrook Road. As we know, Minister, Donnybrook Road is a disaster. On the Kalkallo side the road is little more than an old farm track riddled with potholes. I want to ask the minister: when will the sign on Donnybrook Road be fixed? I have raised this many times. It is dilapidated. It is meant to be a horizontal green sign saying 'Donnybrook Road', and one half is cut off, leaning diagonally. I think it perfectly symbolises the state of the road itself. In fact a few weeks ago I was out on Donnybrook Road in Kalkallo and Donnybrook with my colleague Wendy Lovell and the opposition leader Jess Wilson to have a look at the road, meet with the Donnybrook Road residents association, listen to them and take action on their behalf.

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (19:40): (2092) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport regarding the need for Sunday bus services in Strathfieldsaye, near Bendigo. I first raised this issue in August 2024 after I was contacted by Emily. The population of Strathfieldsaye is growing rapidly, and the suburb has more than 7000 residents. Emily facilitated a petition on the issue, which attracted more than 3000 signatures. In September 2024 the minister advised that the department would consider the request as part of ongoing reviews. Emily was also advised that community consultation would be undertaken, but so far there is still no timeframe for this consultation. Locals are upset that bus timetables on other days have been changed to suit the Metro Tunnel while the needs of this growing regional population have been ignored. They have also been advised to explore their eligibility for subsidised taxi and rideshare services on Sundays, which are costly. I ask the minister to advise when community consultation will commence and when residents of Strathfieldsaye can expect Sunday bus services to be delivered. This is a common issue. The government continue to focus on Melbourne, and yet there is a lack of public transport options across Northern Victoria.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:41): (2093) My constituency matter is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. As has been long established, the project will require the

occupation of the Box Hill Gardens for a substantial period, and constituents in my electorate are obviously very interested to know when that occupation of the gardens will commence. The planning originally said that by 2026 the main works occupation would take place. What I would like to know is, if not the day, at least the month under the project planning that the occupation for works of the Box Hill Gardens will take place and whether the replacement open space required will also be ready by that date.

Western Metropolitan Region

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (19:42): (2094) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police. Crime in Victoria is not easing. Criminal incidents continue to rise in my region in the west. Sunshine alone recorded more than 2500 incidents last year, an increase on the previous year. Residents are dealing with ongoing carjackings, gang violence, home invasions and other serious offences. The community is exhausted and wants action. Can the minister please update my constituents on whether he is planning to act on the call from his own colleagues, including the member for Laverton, to deploy more police to the Sunshine community, specifically protective services officers at Sunshine railway station? For once I agree with Ms Connolly in other place, and I urge the minister to finally increase police resources for Brimbank and the west, where they are urgently needed.

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (19:43): (2095) My question for the Minister for Energy and Resources concerns the comments made by the Premier about the alarmed residents of Horsham, who have been told their worries regarding the Western Renewables Link preventing accessibility in the case of a fire are those of conspiracy theorists. Minister, under the current CFA guidelines, our volunteer firefighters would be unable to access many of the properties affected by these transmission lines if fire were to break out. The possibility of powerlines arcing in smoke, electrocuting any trucks below and those on board is too high a risk and means firefighters will be unable to protect the homes and farms of those living in proximity to the proposed powerlines. In the wake of this year's devastating bushfires, do you think it is an appropriate phrase to describe these distressed Victorians as conspiracy theorists?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:44): (2096) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and I ask: will you make the Cranbourne East–Clyde rail extension an immediate priority rather than a future option? Eight years after being promised a plan to extend the Cranbourne line, residents in Cranbourne East, Clyde and Clyde North are being short-changed by the state Labor government. These are heavily populated growth corridors. Students and working professionals requiring reliable transport need the services to get to their places of employment and education, and they are being forced to travel on congested roads to access Cranbourne or Berwick stations or even Narre Warren. Local resident Siddharth noted that travelling from Clyde to Cranbourne station has taken him a whole hour, adding to his already massive commute. When will this government stop taking voters, including traditional Labor supporters, for granted and deliver this much-needed extension?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (19:45): (2097) My question today is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. A family-run business in the Eastern Victoria Region, Pakenham Bulk Foods, has suffered a 60 per cent collapse in turnover. This is due to the prolonged road closures on Bald Hill Road and Racecourse Road since early 2025. The works are now expected to continue until at least early this year. Despite repeated engagements with Major Road Projects Victoria and Cardinia Shire Council, no support was provided. The business reports no rate relief, no financial assistance and no hardship support. Staff have been laid off, and the closure is now imminent. The council has confirmed that the project is a state government responsibility. Businesses were offered letterbox drops or

relocation advice and no financial relief. My question for the minister is: why hasn't effective hardship or income support been provided to the businesses harmed by poorly managed and prolonged state road closures?

Petitions

Planning policy

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 1798 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that more consultation is needed on the development of high-density activity centres. The Allan Labor Government has announced the development of ten high-rise high-density zones in the municipalities of Bayside, Boroondara, Brighton, Darebin, Frankston, Glen Eira, Hume, Kingston, Monash, Moonee Valley, Stonnington, Whitehorse and Whittlesea. Planning rights will be stripped from councils and communities, high-rise development will occur as of right, and planning control will be exercised undemocratically by the State Government. In addition to a central activity district with as of right 12 storey developments, these zones contain enormous catchment areas where planning protections will be removed. Three and six storey developments can occur as of right and municipal heritage overlays and designations will be overridden resulting in the destruction of thousands of irreplaceable heritage properties. Canopy tree protections will be overridden resulting in the loss of neighbourhood amenities, exacerbating the heat island effect. The proposed plans do not include plans for proper health or education services or for additional open space despite projections of increasing local populations.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to desist from further planning actions to implement the announced high-rise high-density zones and recommence proper discussions and consultation with the local communities, councils and heritage peak bodies of all ten affected zones.

Crime

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 3340 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that violent crime, particularly criminal offences involving the use of weapons such as knives and machetes have become a pressing and critical issue in Victoria. Many residents do not feel safe in their homes or being out and about everyday. This is especially the case for vulnerable Victorians such as elderly people. The purchase and use of pepper spray by adults, 18 years and over, with no criminal convictions should be legalised to allow individuals the ability to protect themselves, by non-lethal means, should they face a violent confrontation where they are threatened with a weapon. This is the case in Western Australia, and soon to be introduced in the Northern Territory as well.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to legalise the purchase and use of pepper spray, by adults with no criminal convictions, for personal protection by non-lethal means should they face a violent confrontation and are threatened with a weapon.

David LIMBRICK: I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Tarneit health services

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 801 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the urgent need to establish a public hospital in Tarneit. The residents of Tarneit and surrounding suburbs call upon the Government to urgently fund, plan, and construct a public hospital in Tarneit in order to meet the pressing healthcare needs of our growing community.

The nearest major hospital, Werribee Mercy Hospital, is overwhelmed, leading to excessive emergency wait times and delayed treatment for patients. Tarneit is one of the fastest-growing suburbs in Victoria, yet it lacks a public hospital to serve its residents. Residents must travel long distances for urgent medical care, increasing health risks and unnecessary pressure on existing facilities. The establishment of a public hospital in Tarneit

will provide essential medical services, including emergency, maternity, specialist, and surgical care closer to home.

The Government should commit funding for a public hospital in Tarneit in the upcoming State Budget, fast-track planning and approvals to ensure the hospital is operational as soon as possible and engage with the local community to determine the required healthcare services and facilities. With Tarneit's population continuing to rise, investing in a local hospital is a necessity, not a luxury. The time for action is now. We, the residents of Tarneit and Victoria, demand better healthcare access and call on the Government to make this a top priority.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to urgently fund, plan, and construct a public hospital in Tarneit in order to meet the pressing healthcare needs of our growing community.

Trung LUU: I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

ADHD services

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) presented a petition bearing 5266 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council announcements made in Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales that general practitioners (GPs) are allowed to diagnose and prescribe medication for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). There has been no announcement made to allow GPs to be trained to diagnose and treat ADHD in Victoria. We have children as young as five and adults well into their 50s unable to access care. We are creating a preventable healthcare crisis if this continues. This is a chance for the Government to make the right choice for Victorians, not because it was pushed to but because it chose to. It is a chance for Victoria to lead with compassion and common sense, rather than being the last state to act.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council calls on the Government to allow up to 1,000 general practitioners to be trained to diagnose and treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in line with other Australian states.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Sexuality and consent education

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) presented a petition bearing 580 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the compulsory inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in Victorian schools, which introduces children under 12 to explicit and controversial concepts of gender and sexuality without parental consent.

Unlike traditional sex education, which focuses on biological facts and the basics of reproduction, CSE promotes sexual experimentation, normalises high-risk sexual behaviours, and advances ideological perspectives on gender that are not universally accepted. It encourages discussions of sexuality beyond an age-appropriate level, potentially compromising the emotional and psychological wellbeing of young children.

These programs fail to respect cultural, religious, and moral diversity and undermine the primary role of parents in shaping their children's values.

Under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, parents have a legal right to be involved in their child's education. Yet, current policies restrict their ability to prevent exposure to inappropriate content. Concerns have also been raised about a rise in child-on-child sexual abuse, with an average of six cases reported to police a week, since the introduction of explicit sex education.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to implement an opt-in requirement for all sex and relationships education for children under 12 to ensure schools obtain explicit parental consent before delivering such content, require schools to disclose all materials, controversial library books and lesson plans to parents in advance, and conduct an independent review

into the impact of comprehensive sexuality education, including potential links to increased child-on-child sexual abuse.

Marine conservation

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 14 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the need for a dedicated community-recognised day, Maritime Environmental Protection Day, to be held annually on 7 March. This day is to increase public awareness of pollution risks, marine ecosystem health, coastal protection and the importance of environmental stewardship across Victoria's waterways, bays and coastal environments. Victoria relies heavily on maritime industries, ports, coastal communities and marine tourism, yet there is no dedicated awareness day that promotes public education, collaboration, or community action to support marine environmental protection. The declaration of public holidays is the responsibility of individual states and territories. National public holidays are only recognised where agreement has been reached between the Prime Minister, State Premiers and Territory Chief Ministers. Although Government approval is required to formally declare a national public holiday, there is nothing preventing an individual, organisation or community from promoting and establishing a new national observance through public engagement and recognition. Several significant days across the year have become widely accepted and commonly celebrated without government declaration. Mother's Day and Harmony Day are well-known examples of observances that developed organically through community participation, public awareness and shared cultural value.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to support the establishment of a dedicated Maritime Environmental Protection Day to be held annually on 7 March, and to promote coastal resilience, cleaner maritime practices and the protection of Victoria's marine and coastal environments.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Electoral Amendment (Group Voting and Vote Counting) Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:51): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Electoral Act 2002 to abolish group voting tickets in Council elections, to change the way surplus votes are counted in Council elections and for other purposes. I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

County Court of Victoria

Report 2024–25

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (19:51): I present, by direction of the Governor,

the County Court of Victoria report 2024–25, a replacement for the copy tabled on Thursday 4 December 2025. I move:

> That the report be tabled.

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 1

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:52): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest* No. 1 of 2026, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

> That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Rachel PAYNE: I move:

> That the Council take note of the report.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (19:53): As a member of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee I would like to make a brief comment about that because it is disappointing I guess to note in appendix 4 of that report – and this is the first report of the year – that there were some regulations put forward, and when I looked into the regulations that were put forward I was quite surprised that the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples had issued an exemption to the regulatory impact statement, and that is in relation to the Traditional Owner Settlement (Negotiation Costs) Regulations 2025. I will just quote from the minister's correspondence, which has been tabled:

> A Regulatory Impact Statement for these regulations has not been prepared. As the Minister responsible for the administration of the **Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010**, I have issued an Exemption Certificate under section 8 of the **Subordinate Legislation Act 1994** …

When you further look into it, the minister said that, in her opinion:

> … the proposed statutory rule would not impose a significant economic or social burden on a sector of the public.

She referred also to:

> Following a consultation process on the proposed statutory rule …

When you look at the groups that have been consulted, they are actually all traditional owners. I do raise concerns about that because this applies to the land use activity agreement, and I have raised concerns in this chamber about the impact that that agreement and the costs associated with it are having on families, on local councils and on housing developments. The purpose of a regulatory impact statement is to ensure that all relevant information, including economic and social impacts, is considered, so I was disappointed that that has been put to the side, but I guess I am not surprised that under this government we continue to see a lack of proper consultation, a lack of parliamentary scrutiny and a lack of transparency, and I wish that it had been different.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Alpine Resorts Victoria – Report, 2024* *(released on 5 January 2026 – a non-sitting day)*.

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

Country Fire Authority – Report, 2024–25* *(released on 20 January 2026 – a non-sitting day)*.

Eastern Health – Report, 2023–24 *(replacement for copy tabled on Thursday, 14 November 2024)*.

Fire Rescue Victoria – Report, 2024–25*.

Greater Western Water Corporation – Report, 2024–25*, together with an explanation for the delay *(released on 24 December 2025 – a non-sitting day)*.

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under section 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule No. 136/2025 *(Gazette S720, 17 December 2025)*.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 –

Infrastructure contributions and development contribution levies – Report, 2024–25, under section 46GZJ of the Act.

Notices of approval of the –

Alpine, Ararat, Frankston, Moyne and Warrnambool Planning Schemes – Amendment GC267.

Ballarat Planning Scheme – Amendments C257 and C258.

Ballarat, Banyule, Boroondara, Brimbank, Colac Otway, Darebin, Golden Plains, Greater Geelong, Hobsons Bay, Hume, Macedon Ranges, Manningham, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Melton, Merri-bek, Mitchell, Monash, Moonee Valley, Moorabool, Nillumbik, Stonnington, Surf Coast, Whitehorse, Whittlesea, Wyndham and Yarra Planning Schemes – Amendment GC282.

Bayside and Kingston Planning Schemes – Amendment GC264.

Bayside Planning Scheme – Amendment C196.

Casey Planning Scheme – Amendments C291 and C303.

Darebin Planning Scheme – Amendment C220.

East Gippsland Planning Scheme – Amendments C169 and C172.

Frankston Planning Scheme – Amendments C156 and C165.

Golden Plains Planning Scheme – Amendment C104.

Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme – Amendments C282 and C297.

Greater Dandenong Planning Scheme – Amendment C230.

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme – Amendments C278 and C457.

Hindmarsh Planning Scheme – Amendment C21.

Mansfield Planning Scheme – Amendment C56 (Part 1).

Maribyrnong Planning Scheme – Amendment C191.

Maroondah Planning Scheme – Amendment C162.

Melbourne Planning Scheme – Amendment C447.

Merri-bek Planning Scheme – Amendment C196.

Mornington Peninsula Planning Scheme – Amendments C286, C312 and C313.

Southern Grampians Planning Scheme – Amendments C61 and C62.

Stonnington Planning Scheme – Amendment C358.

Strathbogie Planning Scheme – Amendment C85.

Victoria Planning Provisions – Amendments VC277, VC278 and VC303.

Whitehorse Planning Scheme – Amendment C257.

Whittlesea Planning Scheme – Amendments C251 and C275.

Wyndham Planning Scheme – Amendment C267.

Yarra Planning Scheme – Amendment C329.

Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme – Amendment C212.

Puffing Billy Railway Board – Report, 2024–25, together with an explanation for the delay *(released on 8 January 2026 – a non-sitting day)*.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012 – No. 152/2025.

Building Act 1993 – No. 140/2025.

Casino Control Act 1991 – No. 137/2025.

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 – No. 144/2025.

Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017 – No. 154/2025.

Confiscation Act 1997 – No. 151/2025.

County Court Act 1958 – No. 135/2025.

Gas Safety Act 1997 – No. 145/2025.

Human Tissue Act 1982 – No. 139/2025.

Land Tax Act 2005 – No. 149/2025.

Local Government Act 2020 – No. 146/2025.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 – Nos. 141/2025 and 153/2025.

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 – No. 136/2025.

Public Administration Act 2004 – No. 142/2025.

Road Safety Act 1986 – No. 155/2025.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – No. 138/2025.

Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 – Nos. 147/2025 and 148/2025.

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 – No. 143/2025.

Water Act 1989 – No. 150/2025.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 –

Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 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 and 155/2025.

Legislative instrument and related documents under section 16B in respect of –

2026 Formula 1 Australian Grand Prix Public Access Area Declaration under section 27A(1) of the Australian Grands Prix Act 1994.

Ministerial Guidelines for Councils relating to payment of Rates and Charges under section 181AA(1) of the Local Government Act 1989.

Surveyors Registration Board of Victoria – Minister's report of receipt of 2024–25 Report*.

Triple Zero Victoria – Report, 2024–25* *(released on 20 January 2026 – a non-sitting day)*.

Victorian Law Reform Commission – Artificial Intelligence in Victoria's Courts and Tribunals, October 2025 *(Ordered to be published)*.

* *together with the Minister's reported date of receipt.*

Proclamations of the Governor in Council fixing operative dates for the following acts:

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, 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)*.

Committees

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into the Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria

The Clerk: I table a copy of the government's response to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry into the cultural and creative industries in Victoria.

Petitions

Responses

The Clerk: I have received the following papers for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: Attorney-General's responses to petitions titled 'Action to end youth crime crisis', 'Amend self-defence laws' and 'Inquiry into anti-recidivism initiatives and youth justice intervention programs'; the Minister for Corrections' response to a petition titled 'Assistance dog acquisition and training program'; the Minister for Education's response to a petition titled 'New specialist school in the Western suburbs'; the Minister for Planning's responses to petitions titled 'Inquiry into the Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Bill 2025' and 'Reconsider the proposed Cairnlea Estate Master Plan'; the Minister for Police's response to a petition titled 'Boost police presence in Lang Lang'; and the Minister for Roads and Road Safety's responses to petitions titled 'Inquiry into the state of Victoria's roads' and 'Retain Maryborough VicRoads services'.

Production of documents

Housing

The Clerk: I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 11 December 2025, in response to a resolution of the Council on 15 October 2025 on the motion of Ms Gray-Barberio relating to alternatives to demolition of public housing sites. The letter states that the date for the production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

Rural and regional roads

The Clerk: I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 11 December 2025, in response to a resolution of the Council on 13 November 2025 on the motion of Ms Tyrrell relating to Victorian roads. The letter states that the date for production does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

State Electricity Commission

The Clerk: I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 11 December 2025, in response to a resolution of the Council on 13 November 2025 on the motion of Mr Davis relating to State Electricity Commission meetings. The letter states that the date for production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

Department of Premier and Cabinet

The Clerk: I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 11 December 2025, in response to a resolution of the Council on 19 November 2025 on the motion of Mr Davis relating to Department of Premier and Cabinet opinion polling. The letter states that the date for production does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

Animal care and protection legislation

The Clerk: I table a further letter from the Attorney-General dated 26 January 2026, in response to a resolution of the Council on 19 November 2025 on the motion of Ms Purcell relating to proposed animal care and protection legislation. The letter states that the date for production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

Machete amnesty

The Clerk: Finally, I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 26 January 2026, in response to a resolution of the Council on 3 December 2025 on the motion of Mr Limbrick relating to market research services for the machete prohibition campaign. The letter states that the date for production does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, at least four of the letters the Clerk has read out were dated 11 December. That is almost two months ago, and there could well be further activity. What on earth is the government doing? It may be that the minister is able to enlighten us on those four documents: Victorian roads, alternative to demolition of public housing sites, the SEC meetings and the Department of Premier and Cabinet opinion polling. It is two months since those letters were sent to the chamber, so maybe the minister can enlighten us as to what has happened in those two months.

Ryan Batchelor: Further on the point of order, for maybe the fourth or fifth time today Mr Davis has used the opportunity to take a point of order to debate something or ask a further question or make a contribution. I think it is a sustained and gross abuse of the standing orders.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Batchelor's point that people should not use points of order as a point of debate is correct. Mr Davis, I am not too sure if any minister at the table here has any knowledge of the Attorney-General's actions as far as progressing any of this goes, so I think that –

David Davis: On the matter of the public housing sites, this minister may actually be able to shed some light.

The PRESIDENT: I think it is very difficult for a minister to respond to a letter from another minister, so we will leave it at that.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

General business

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (20:15): I move, by leave:

> That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 4 February 2026:
>
> (1) order of the day made this day, second reading of the Electoral Amendment (Group Voting and Vote Counting) Bill 2026;
>
> (2) notice of motion given this day by Georgie Crozier on paramedic staffing levels;
>
> (3) notice of motion given this day by David Davis on Victoria's financial position; and
>
> (4) notice of motion given this day by Nick McGowan referring matters relating to the 2026 summer fires across Victoria to the Environment and Planning Committee.

Motion agreed to.

Petitions qualifying for debate

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:16): I move, by leave:

> That this house authorises the petition tabled by Wendy Lovell on 2 December 2025 titled 'Inquiry into the Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Bill 2025' to be given precedence over all other items listed under petitions qualifying for debate on Wednesday 4 February 2026.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Bushfires

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (20:17): As we heard in this chamber earlier today about bushfires in Victoria, my members statement is on that topic. In Natimuk I was humbled to meet CFA volunteers and local community groups alongside Premier Jacinta Allan. Natimuk lost 17 homes, and there was damage to multiple buildings, sheds and fences. Some people had not yet got their crops in, so some crops were lost as well, and a relatively small number of livestock were lost compared to other areas. We also met Michael and Net Sudholz, who had lost their home. Net was there that day in a pair of shoes she had borrowed from someone else because she had left her house – which is no longer her home – in bare feet in a terrible rush. It was very heartening to see just how together the community are in supporting each other, and we heard a lot of examples of that in the chamber earlier today. I want to congratulate the Natimuk community on what they have been doing.

Tamil Heritage Month

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:18): I was honoured to attend the Tamil Heritage Month celebrations as a special guest of the Tamil Festival Australia 2026, which is recognised as the largest Pongal celebration in Australia. The colourful festival celebrates the efforts of Tamil Australians from Sri Lanka, India, Singapore, Malaysia and beyond. Tamils' contributions enrich Victoria's cultural fabric, and I thank them for their wonderful invitation and their hospitality.

Cranbourne community infrastructure

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:19): The Labor government is interested in optics, but what is it delivering? It complains that budget black holes are not its fault, but let us consider a couple of examples of how our hard-earned taxpayers money is being used in areas of Cranbourne. For instance, we had the Balla Balla centre that was very modern and lovely; it was right next to the Cranbourne library. It was completely levelled, demolished – a beautiful building that was being used. Then, to keep the optics going, they took the name of the Balla Balla centre down to Selandra Rise. They renamed the Selandra Rise community centre 'Balla Balla Community Centre' so that people would not realise that they had completely demolished a perfectly good building to put up what they called the Cranbourne Community Hospital, which was a promise in the 2018 election. That hospital turns out to not have an emergency department. It cost millions of dollars, and all they did was relocate the allied health services from about 100 metres across the road to what they call the Cranbourne hospital. But the Cranbourne hospital is not a real hospital.

Metro Tunnel

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (20:20): Sunday saw the Metro Tunnel's big switch, with all Sunbury, Cranbourne and Pakenham trains running through the tunnel on a new and improved timetable. More frequent trains will benefit passengers along that whole corridor, which is welcome, but so far passengers on other lines have not been so lucky. The government has said for years that the Metro Tunnel would mean more trains on other lines too. This was part of the investment case, and Transport Victoria is still saying 'Don't worry, everyone benefits from the Metro Tunnel' on social media. Unfortunately, this is not yet true. Taking Sunbury lines out of the city loop should have meant more trains on the Craigieburn and Upfield lines, particularly at peak hours, when the loop is full, but

the big switch sees no upgrades on these lines. Some extra weekend and evening services are expected later in the year but nothing for those crowded peak periods. The Sandringham line, in my electorate, also expects some weekday upgrades in a few months, but there will still be big holes in the timetable, particularly on Sunday mornings, when you can wait for up to an hour to catch a train to the cafes and beaches along the line. There is plenty of capacity to run more trains, but the government so far chooses not to. The so-called big switch has so far been a missed opportunity to rewrite timetables from the ground up and fix longstanding problems. Melbourne's rail network is a hugely valuable asset, and the Metro Tunnel is a welcome addition to it. It is time we got the most out of the rail network and the exciting new Metro Tunnel.

Australia Day

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:22): I rise today to acknowledge the outstanding contribution of many people in the local south-east community, many individuals who were in fact recognised for their community service last week, in particular in the Australia Day ceremonies in Frankston and in Greater Dandenong. I wish to acknowledge Peter Talbot, who runs the 3199 Frankston beach patrol, who was recognised for his longstanding service to the Frankston community and his efforts in supporting local groups. I also recognise the Living Treasure awards in Greater Dandenong, which were given to winners Christine Keys and Trish Marson. Christine's work preserving and sharing our local history has ensured that the shared heritage is valued and remembered, while Trish's decades of service at the Noble Park junior football club have created a welcoming environment for generations of families. I would also like to acknowledge Young Leader of the Year joint recipients Mohammed Nawed and Atifa Ahmed, whose leadership and advocacy demonstrate the very exciting promise of the next generation in the south-east. Amongst the day as well it was also wonderful to take part in a number of citizenship ceremonies in Frankston, Greater Dandenong and Knox and to celebrate the many hundreds in the south-east and many tens of thousands, I am sure, across the nation who have chosen to call our great country home.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region health services

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:23): On another matter, it is very exciting to see the ongoing delivery of new health services in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. Whilst the Liberals opposite may still deny that they exist, it is great to see these new facilities, including the Cranbourne Community Hospital, up and running.

Economic policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (20:23): I want to draw the chamber's attention to the Reserve Bank announcement today of the massive rise – the 0.25 per cent rise, to 3.85 per cent – which will hit many families very hard. Everyday Victorian families are going to feel this hit. This is a failure of Labor. It is a failure to manage money. You cannot trust Labor with money at a state level or at a federal level. Massive, massive, massive growth in the –

A member interjected.

David DAVIS: Well, I have got to tell you, your Labor mates in Canberra are responsible for this. They are the ones – your mates in Canberra, your Labor mates – who have actually caused this problem, a massive explosion of spending, and this has driven up what has gone on here. The community are going to feel it very hard. The families that are struggling, families that are doing it tough, are going to feel it very, very directly because of what Labor has done. I think the community have had enough of the tax rises, they have had enough of the interest rate rises, they have had enough of Labor and the costs that go with Labor. Whether it is Victorian taxes, whether it is the massive spending that you have seen at a federal level, the enormous waste that we have seen –

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: I will tell you what we would not do: we would not waste $50 billion on cost overruns. I am not talking about the value of the projects, I am talking about the cost overruns at a state level – $50 billion in cost overruns. That is a huge amount of an addition to the state debt, more borrowing by Victoria – *(Time expired)*

Bushfires

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (20:25): I would like to dedicate my members statement today to my constituents who have been affected by the January fires in the north-east and also every other Victorian and interstate individual who has travelled to help during this devastating time. Over the past few weeks I have witnessed the most incredible displays of community spirit and volunteering, so much so that it overwhelms me with such pride and admiration that I have to fight back tears each time I enter the fire zones. You would think that after three weeks of seeing communities of such outstanding Victorians rallying together during this time of devastation I would become a little desensitised to it, but no. I cannot get a grip on how proud I am to be the representative of these people, many of them who have lost everything still demonstrating such strength, kindness and positivity in this time. That is the very reason why I wake up each day so grateful to be a part of these communities and to have my children growing up amongst them. We truly are the greatest nation on earth, and I have the cream of the crop right here in Northern Victoria.

Lunar New Year

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:27): As Lunar New Year approaches, communities across Victoria prepare to welcome the Year of the Horse, a symbol of energy, perseverance and hard work. In the traditional zodiac race, the horse finished seventh, held back not by lack of strength but by stopping to help others along the way. That spirit of generosity and determination continues to resonate today. Chinese Lunar New Year is a time for family, renewal and wishing good health and prosperity in the year ahead. I look forward to joining the community at the Chinese New Year Festival in Box Hill on 21 February to celebrate culture, tradition and community together.

Oil and gas exploration

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (20:27): On the weekend I joined over a thousand other people in a paddle out in Torquay organised by Surfrider Foundation to fight against the recent approval of new oil and gas exploration in southern sea country by state and federal Labor governments. While I would love to think Labor might do the right thing and listen to the community, history suggests otherwise. Just two years ago the community came together to paddle out, once again in Torquay and also in Warrnambool, to stop the largest ever seismic blasting project in the world, and we succeeded – not because Labor did the right thing but because the community pressure forced the company to give up. As we swam amongst the ash from the still-raging Otway bushfires, it was difficult to ignore the feeling of total betrayal by Labor on climate, with the latest approvals in both state and Commonwealth waters. Off the coastline of communities that have just experienced devastating fires and flash floods, the Allan and Albanese Labor governments gifted fossil fuel companies access to more oil and gas for Christmas, companies that will make mind-boggling profits from their climate destruction and pay virtually no tax while communities that have lost everything and taxpayers are forced to foot the bill. It is completely unjust, and on the weekend the Surf Coast community made it clear they are going to change this script.

Shepparton train services

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (20:29): Labor is bragging about its big switch to new train timetables, but for Shepparton residents it is just another big let-down. I wanted to start 2026 by using my members statement to tell my constituents in Shepparton that after waiting several years and enduring constant disruption to their rail services, they can finally take advantage of additional train services to Melbourne, but unfortunately I cannot deliver that news. Almost five years ago, back in 2021, Jacinta Allan promised that by 2023 there would be nine return train services every weekday

for passengers travelling between Shepparton and Melbourne. But Jacinta failed to meet her own 2023 deadline and constantly delayed this project with an endless string of excuses. Six weeks have now passed since Labor's announced completion date for upgrade works on the Shepparton line of 14 December last year, but the updated timetables, which include dozens of new services on other regional train lines, reveal that Shepparton has missed out once again on new train services, proving that Shepparton is not a priority for Jacinta Allan and the Labor government. If the signalling work for stage 3 of the Shepparton line upgrade is now complete – two years late – then why weren't the additional services included in the big switch timetable? Labor has run out of excuses for further delays. The government must turn on the Wyndham Street traffic lights and roll out the full nine weekday return services immediately. Jacinta Allan needs to stop with the spin and come clean about when she will fulfil her promise to deliver nine – *(Time expired)*

Rotary Club of Wonthaggi

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (20:31): The Wonthaggi Rotary Club for 32 years have been presenting service awards and did so recently on Australia Day. They have presented over 250 service awards, and the president Leah Montebello and her team – and I want to acknowledge her team of Ashley Lamers, Don Paproth, John Duscher, Brett Tessari, Graham Sprague and Ray McCurry – attended and celebrated with the community. On this day, which I celebrated with them, Hook and Jean Matthews of Glen Alvie received a community service award. John Walsh received a community service award. He has been in everything, like most community members. He has been the president and treasurer and mentor of the Dalyston Football Netball Club. He is a generous person at community working bees, working in the background. Jamie Moresco, a CFA volunteer and an incredible person, also received a community award. Russell Cargill received a community and sports award. The environment, conservation and arts award was won by a combination husband-and-wife team Geoff Glare and Anne Looney. Congratulations to them and to the Wonthaggi SES for recognition of 50 years of service. But the Citizen of the Year award went to Rodney McLean, a humble volunteer. He has been a long-time volunteer CFA member and volunteer with Uncle Bob's Club and Friends of the State Coalmine, and he is an all-round fantastic bloke.

Youth justice system

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (20:32): Victoria's youth justice system is in a complete mess, and the new Productivity Commission data makes that abundantly clear. Under Labor Victoria now spends $7304 per day to detain a single youth offender. That is nearly three times the cost in New South Wales and double the national average. Yet despite this extraordinary spending, Victoria's outcomes are worse than any other state in the nation. More than four out of five offenders who spend at least one day of their sentence in a youth justice centre will re-offend within 12 months. In New South Wales fewer than two out of five youth offenders return. This highlights that youth offending in Victoria is not about being rehabilitated but that these children are entering the revolving door of crime and youth justice. Conditions inside the justice detention centres are also deteriorating. Victoria's youth detention assault rate per custody night is now 59 per cent higher than that of New South Wales. Not only are these environments unsafe and ineffective, but the government is charging the taxpayer more than any other state to deliver them. Labor has also scaled back its diversion programs – proven programs that prevent reoffending and help children to get out of these situations. This comes as the youth crime crisis continues to rise, and Victorians are paying more and getting less.

Bills

Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Bill 2025

Council's and Assembly's amendments

The PRESIDENT (20:34): I have received the following message from the Legislative Assembly:

> The Legislative Assembly returns 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Planning and Environment Act 1987**, to make consequential amendments to the **Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986**, the **Subordinate**

Legislation Act 1994 and other Acts and for other purposes' and informs the Legislative Council that the Assembly has:

(1) refused to entertain amendment Nos 1, 2, 5 and 6 as they seek to impose a tax, a direct infringement of the privileges of the House as set out in the *Constitution Act 1975*;

(2) agreed to the remaining amendments; and

(3) made further amendments with which agreement is requested.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (20:35): I move:

That the message be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (20:35): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Holocaust education

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (20:35): (2244) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Education, and the action that I seek from the minister is an update on how Holocaust studies are being integrated into the Victorian school curriculum. 27 January is International Holocaust Remembrance Day. That day now marks 81 years since the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in 1945. On that day I had the honour and privilege of attending a commemoration service at the Melbourne Holocaust Museum, joined by many of my Labor colleagues from the state and federal parliaments.

It was a lovely service, a lovely ceremony. We heard from Holocaust survivor Joe Szwarcberg, who lives in Melbourne. Every week he tells his story to young Victorian school students who come to the Holocaust museum to learn about the horrors of the past. Joe was born in Poland in 1930. He was nine years old when the Germans invaded Poland. He went through a series of labour and concentration camps before being liberated in April 1945. He emigrated to Australia a few years after, and until the age of 83 he operated a shoe shop on Centre Road in Bentleigh, just up from my electorate office. He spoke on the night with his daughter and granddaughter about Holocaust remembrance that bridges the generations. It was very interesting to hear both his daughter's and his granddaughter's reflections on their experience in learning that their father and grandfather was a Holocaust survivor and when they knew. Joe's daughter did not find out until quite later in her life because that was not something that was spoken about much then, but his granddaughter learned at a much younger age about the truth of what her grandfather had endured, reflecting, I think hopefully, a greater acceptance and understanding, particularly in today's communities, about what happened during the Holocaust and a willingness for people like Joe to talk about it.

We know that the Holocaust is history's most sickening example of where hate ends. We know that the Holocaust itself began with words. It began with a systematic dehumanisation of Jews, and we cannot allow those sorts of words to be part of the public discourse today. The reflections that we had in this chamber and in the other chamber today speak much to the best of what this Parliament can be. Holocaust remembrance and Holocaust education is something that is incredibly important. It is important that it is part of the Victorian school curriculum. We are very fortunate to have so many Holocaust survivors here in Melbourne, and the Holocaust museum is a great monument to them.

Member conduct

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (20:38): (2245) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and it is regarding, I have got to say, a pretty concerning media release I saw from her office over the

weekend titled 'Equality is not negotiable under a Labor government'. It is as though the government only looks at equality through the LGBT rights lens, and it is just such a limited lens to look through because the concept of equality is so much broader than that. According to the Australian Human Rights Commission website, equality is where we all have the same rights. We should all receive the same level of respect and have the same access to opportunities. If that is the case, then this government have not done a great deal to advance real equality in this state. We only have to look at things like the treaty legislation, which enshrines inequality in law; the emergency services tax, which disproportionately punches down on country Victorians; or the VicGrid legislation, which harms farmers' property rights disproportionately; let alone that people in my electorate of Western Victoria do not have the same access to health care, closeness to schools or public transport, which in some parts barely even exists, or even the poor state of our roads.

If the rest of Victoria was treated the same as my electorate, you would be out protesting – and many in my electorate actually do. But leaving the government's curated version of equality to one side, I have to call out the extremely disappointing judgement the Premier has displayed in her release. Let me quote:

> You'll never see this Premier marching in Pride on one day and cosying up to One Nation on the next.

I have got two issues with that statement. Firstly, the Premier and indeed her staff lobby or cosy up to One Nation all the time, and they need to do that to pass legislation in this very chamber. The Premier is just an angry hypocrite. This extremely selective and delusional reality the Premier wants people to believe is undone by two simple things: facts and truth. The second issue I have is the inference that Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, the Parliament's only One Nation MP, is somehow homophobic. That is completely offensive to someone like me, who is Rikkie's friend. I consider you a friend, Rikkie. It is also just plain wrong. It reeks of political desperation from a Premier that seems more interested in attacking other people than focusing on the needs of Victorians. That is not leadership. I know Rikkie very well as a gay man. She is one of my closest friends in this place. Anyone who tries to call her homophobic will have to go through me first. Rikkie is not homophobic, and what is worse is I know that the Premier knows that. Rikkie works with everyone across this chamber from all different parties. I have got to say it is extremely disappointing to use sexuality as a pretext to make attacks like that. The Premier owes an apology, and that is the action that I seek.

Family Drug Support Australia

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:42): (2246) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Mental Health, and the action I seek is that she work to ensure Family Drug Support receive the funding that they have requested in the upcoming state budget. Family Drug Support has been doing extraordinary work in Victoria over the past decade. I would particularly like to acknowledge Tony Trimingham's contribution. Tony established Family Drug Support in 1997, following the tragic loss of his son Damien to an overdose. The help, guidance and compassion that Tony and his organisation have provided to thousands of families in Victoria and across the country during times of immense distress cannot be overstated. To date Family Drug Support have delivered their vital services in Victoria for many years without any financial support from this or previous Victorian governments. Their request is for a $500,000 per year package, supporting the addition of two full-time workers to their team. It is a very modest ask and a drop in the ocean of the state budget overall that would provide significant and meaningful change to many families in this state.

Families and carers affected by substance use continue to face profound and lasting challenges that ripple across communities. Family Drug Support has long been at the forefront of delivering compassionate, evidence-informed support that improves relationships, enhances wellbeing and strengthens family units during times of crisis. The people who access these services keep family members and friends alive and help to facilitate their improved life options. Family Drug Support celebrate the knowledge and wisdom of families, many of whom provide a valuable service themselves to the community. Their funding request will allow them to continue and to expand their

work and support literally thousands of people. Minister, the work of Family Drug Support is invaluable. They equip families with the skills to support loved ones independently. They enhance the strengths of families and carers and improve the overall health and wellbeing of not just the person affected but their entire family network. Please support their work by working to ensure they receive state funding in the upcoming budget.

Bushfire recovery

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (20:44): (2247) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Agriculture, Ros Spence. I am going to break my 15-second rule this evening and complete a couple of comments that I want to make about the bushfires and their effect on Natimuk. In particular, when the Premier and I met up with community members in Natimuk, we met with the gymnastics club members – three women whose club facility had been affected by smoke from the fire and from the burning down of the building next to it. There were also some significant historic buildings that were burnt down. A local community historian had just completed a summary of one of those buildings. I also met David Sudholz, who is the captain of the CFA brigade in Natimuk. He and his crews have been doing some fantastic work and have been doing so for a very long time. I want to put on record my congratulations and thanks to him and his team and also to Mayor Brian Klowss, who is the mayor of the Rural City of Horsham but is also a Natimuk farmer. The only thing he did not lose was his house. He got his crop off the night before, which was lucky or well planned, but his pastures, fences and shedding are all gone. He is an example of a farmer in Natimuk who was significantly affected. He has also had wind damage to the soil subsequent to the fires. The bushfire recovery grants and concessional loans are now open for fire-affected farmers like Brian Klowss. The action I seek is an update on these programs and any other available supports to help our farmers recover and rebuild.

Harold Freedman mosaic

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (20:46): (2248) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for her to direct the Department of Transport and Planning, which is responsible for the state government offices at 30 Little Malop Street, Geelong, to remove the hoarding and allow full public access to Harold Freedman's *Geelong Regional History* mosaic mural. This mural is not a minor decorative feature; it is a significant public artwork commissioned by the state of Victoria in 1977. Completed over two and a half years and unveiled in November 1980, it is heritage listed by both the National Trust and the Victorian Heritage Register for its historical importance and its depiction of the changing lifestyle of the region's people. The mural consists of more than 1 million tiles set against a golden background. It depicts key moments in Victoria's early history, including Indigenous life, first settler ships, early agriculture and explorers on horseback engaging with an Indigenous man. These scenes are rendered in a style of portraiture realism, meaning the figures are lifelike, proportional and historically accurate.

Yet, as of last year, Harold Freedman's descendants discovered the artwork inaccessible to the public without good reason. Hoarding was placed over it, initially citing building works. When the family questioned the covering, they were told by the property director that the decision was influenced by anger expressed by Indigenous visitors and staff. Heritage protection exists precisely to stop each generation from erasing the past because it makes a few people uncomfortable. A poll conducted by the *Geelong Advertiser* asked whether any aspect of the mural was disrespectful; 98 per cent of the 1390 respondents said no. The public does not want this mural hidden. They do not see it as offensive; they see it as their history. Harold Freedman was a deeply patriotic Victorian, appointed the first and only state artist of Victoria in 1972. He was a man of many talents, an official war artist during World War II, a fine arts teacher at RMIT, an illustrator and a magazine art director. He believed art should be accessible to ordinary Australians, not locked away. When his children and grandchildren came to Geelong to see a great Australian artwork created by a man who loved this country, they were confronted not by history but by a blank sheet. That should trouble every one of us. This is not the Australia we believe in. We are a nation that honours its artists and shared story. We do not hide our

history because it offends modern over-sensibilities. Minister, restore the mural, restore our history, restore Australian – *(Time expired)*

Member conduct

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (20:50): (2249) My adjournment this evening is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to apologise for calling One Nation Victoria homophobic. Over the weekend, while I was out, boots on the ground, joining other volunteers delivering hay and other vital supplies to those affected by bushfires, the Premier spent her day marching in the Midsumma parade and attending press conferences. During a press conference on Sunday the Premier used the words 'homophobic', 'transphobic' and 'ultra right' when describing both myself and my colleagues in the coalition. I find this incredibly offensive. I have absolutely no problem with how people want to live their lives. In fact some of my closest friends are gay. I believe everyone should have the right to be themselves, to express themselves and be able to live their lives free of persecution. But here we are, with the Premier running her mouth, defaming those of us with differing priorities in our workload. As someone in a position of power and public prominence, I thought the Premier would be above name-calling and pettiness, but here we are. For those who would throw my voting against the anti-vilification bill at me, hear this: I voted against that bill because it was contradictory, because it was restrictive to the freedom of speech we have enjoyed in this state since its establishment and because I, unlike the Premier, listened to the will of my constituents, who overwhelmingly asked for that bill to be defeated in its form at that time. No-one should be subjected to hate speech, no matter if you are gay, straight, trans, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, left leaning or right leaning and so on. One Nation Victoria is made up of a wide and varied demographic. We have people from all walks of life: young, older, LGB, straight and migrants, whether they have been here for five months or even 50 years. For the Premier to label all of these people as homophobic, transphobic and ultra right wing just shows her naivety.

Youth crime

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (20:52): (2250) My adjournment is a matter for the Premier. Last year the Allan Labor government announced the establishment of the violence reduction unit, which will focus on preventing violent youth crime before it happens and guiding at-risk young people towards making better choices. This measure is critical for keeping Melbourne safe and will work in tandem with our tough new bail laws and other measures to deliver on our agenda of public safety through both early intervention and serious consequences – in other words, tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime. The VRU is based on evidence drawn from the successful implementation of violence reduction units in Glasgow and London. Since the mayor of Greater London Sadiq Khan implemented London's VRU in 2019, homicides in London have fallen by a third and hospital admissions of young people for knife assaults have fallen by 43 per cent. The London VRU publishes its performance on its website quarterly. It is changing that city for the better and changing the lives of thousands of at-risk young people. I am sure that everyone in this chamber wants to see Victoria's VRU succeed in bringing down youth crime. Therefore the action that I seek is for the Premier to provide my office with an update on what sorts of metrics and measurements the VRU will use to measure its effectiveness and show whether it has been successful.

Yan Yean Road upgrade

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (20:53): (2251) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action that I seek is for the minister to expedite support for a small business owner in my electorate whose business was seriously damaged by a flood of water run-off resulting from works on the Yan Yean Road upgrade stage 2. I recently met with Glenn, who owns a bicycle shop in Doreen. Glenn has a thriving business building, selling and repairing bikes for kids and adults, but Glenn's business recently took a massive hit. On Sunday 21 December, just days before Christmas, which as we all know is the busiest time of the year for a bike shop, an afternoon of typical rainfall quickly turned into a flood that would ruin his shop. Behind the bike store is a large block of

land that slopes downwards towards Glenn's shop. Rain has never been a problem before, even on days of heavy rainfall, as the land was covered in vegetation which both held and slowed the movement of water. But as part of the works for stage 2 of the Yan Yean Road upgrade, all that vegetation was cleared and the soil graded, resulting in the surface water collecting and moving quickly downhill through channels created by temporary road access.

A week before the incident, when crews were grading the dirt, Glenn spoke to the workers about his concerns regarding water run-off and was assured that there was nothing to worry about as the land had been shaped to guide the water past his shop. But in fact the stormwater gathered and accelerated downhill towards his shop and then overwhelmed a low fence of wooden stakes and debris knitting that was only a foot high. A knee-high wave of muddy water then surged into the back of his property and through the shop, causing extensive damage. Nineteen bikes stored at the rear of the shop, waiting for Christmas collection, were knocked over and covered in mud. Stock and bicycle parts on low-lying shelves that were needed to assemble bikes on order were contaminated. The water ran over the main shop counter, destroying computer equipment, point-of-sale tech and the printer, crucial electrical equipment for assembling and repairing bikes, as well as an MIG and TIG welder, a $6000 electrical lift and a similarly priced computerised brake machine.

The clean-up costs totalled over $7000 and the value of damaged equipment runs into the tens of thousands of dollars. Glenn also lost over $20,000 worth of business in those days before Christmas and instead had to refund thousands of dollars of lay-by orders he could no longer fulfil. Glenn is grateful for the interest shown by his local parliamentary representatives Lauren Kathage, Rob Mitchell and me. We all want a good outcome for Glenn and hope that his business can be restored quickly. Representatives from the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority, which is responsible for the Yan Yean Road stage 2 project, visited Glenn's shop to see the damage.

Water safety

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (20:56): (2252) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Environment and Minister for Outdoor Recreation. A constituent has contacted my office about jetski activity right near St Kilda Pier throughout December 2025. They described jetskis operating at high speed close to the pier, and most concerningly, people riding the jetskis deliberately directing spray at pedestrians. They have video footage of riders repeatedly soaking members of the public, including families, elderly people and visitors who had no expectation of being targeted like this. This is not harmless recreation, this is annoying and intimidating behaviour, and it presents a clear safety risk. St Kilda Pier is a major public destination that has been recently redeveloped to be a safe, family-friendly space, and we know it is used by pedestrians, swimmers and people visiting the beloved penguin colony, particularly during the breeding and chick season. The idea that high-powered craft are able to hoon near the pier, returning after authorities leave and escalating behaviour, is really alarming. Importantly, this is not just one complaint – just before Christmas the City of Port Phillip asked the minister for decisive action, including permanent exclusion zones within 200 metres around St Kilda Pier and nearby beaches and increased patrols and enforcement.

The action I seek from the minister is to introduce a permanent personal watercraft exclusion zone around St Kilda Pier and other high-risk, high-use areas identified by council, at least 200 metres, consistent with the council's request and public safety at our crowded urban beaches. It would also help to boost active enforcement, especially at peak times, with meaningful consequences for repeated breaches, including the use of existing seizure and impoundment powers where appropriate. And we need to clarify responsibilities and reporting pathways so that residents and people experiencing inappropriate behaviour are not bounced around between agencies. It would be really helpful to provide clear public signage on the shore and near the water so the rules are unmistakeable. Minister, the risks from this behaviour are foreseeable and they are ongoing, but they are preventable. Please do not wait for serious injury or fatality before the government acts on this matter.

Swifts Creek Mill

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (20:59): (2253) My adjournment is for the Minister for Agriculture in the other place. Recently the mill at Swifts Creek announced its closure, meaning loss of work for 15 locals. It is important that these workers are supported through this period and that is what ForestWorks will do. It is industry owned and not-for-profit, with people from the sector with experience that will support these workers, ensuring that they receive financial support and a path to employment, including training, but it is important that we have jobs that they can move into. Swifts Creek is a small town. It is somewhat geographically isolated. I have been up there over the last year with community groups and with town leaders and talked about how there has been a contraction of business. There have been investments by the government in school upgrades, in a new 33-place kinder, and upgrades to the rec reserve facilities, which I was fortunate to be able to open at the grand final last year. However, as I said, we have got to make sure that there are jobs for these people as they leave the mill. There are projects rolling out through the Forestry Transition Fund, and we know these will lead to new jobs and new businesses. The action I seek is for the minister to update the house on the timber transition initiatives in Swifts Creek.

Bushfires

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (21:00): (2254) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs and relates to major problems that some residents of Northern Victoria are facing trying to get insurance for their homes. One resident finished building a new house in November 2023, and a lot of their land is already cleared. At extra expense they built their new home to the bushfire attack level 29 standards, but their existing insurer recently refused to renew their insurance. A quote from another company came in at $16,000. They continued to pursue further quotes and, thankfully, were able to insure their property, but insurance costs are going up, with fewer options. This family is not alone. I have heard from residents from other parts of Northern Victoria concerned that some insurance companies have withdrawn from providing insurance altogether, yet a mortgage contract usually requires a resident to have building insurance. If you cannot insure your house, it is very difficult to sell.

One resident told me they have had conversations with multiple brokers who are calling clients daily saying that they cannot find them insurance. They inform me that the insurance industry was not consulted when BAL codes were introduced and do not believe the standards reflect the realities of rebuild costs or fire damage and do not incorporate building code details into their assessment. They received a quote of $50,000 for sprinkler systems and $200,000 for fire shutters for two buildings and noted these products are not tested to a measurable standard and do not make any difference to the resilience rating. They ask if there is scope for a community buying scheme for products such as roof sprinklers, where the products are tried and tested, starred and government approved. It appears as though the bushfire attack level rating of a home does not have any effect on the amount of insurance payable, only that BAL ratings are a factor in how an insurance company assesses risks and sets cover levels or premiums. In many parts of Northern Victoria the cost of insurance is escalating beyond what families can afford, leaving some without any choice but to sell their home and property. Obtaining insurance is problematic in many parts of Northern Victoria, and I look forward to the minister's response to these concerns.

Climate change

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (21:03): (2255) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the government to make coal and gas companies pay for the damage caused by the summer bushfires and floods. In the last couple of weeks Victoria experienced record temperatures that are not normal, with north-west country Victoria the hardest hit, reaching temperatures up to almost 50 degrees. This summer we have seen ravaging bushfires across our regional communities, with thick clouds of smoke engulfing skies across the state. My thoughts remain with everyone affected, particularly the family and loved ones of Max Hobson,

the cattle farmer who lost his life. One death is one too many. Alongside this tragic loss 434 homes have been destroyed, 28 homes significantly damaged and 1054 buildings impacted. More than 34,000 livestock have been lost along with over 100,000 hectares of agricultural land, and these figures are expected to rise.

When we talk about climate change, we too often overlook climate-related disparities. While many of us have access to air conditioning, there are many in our community during record temperatures that did not have access to these facilities: people living with disability, older Victorians, people living in overcrowded housing. Extreme heat is a silent killer. It drives hospital admissions, worsens chronic illness and places enormous strain on our health system, often without the visibility of other disasters. I also want to take a moment to thank our emergency services professionals for the extraordinary work that they do to protect lives, homes and communities. So many, we have seen during this season of bushfires, sacrificed their own homes while trying to save the homes of their neighbours. Premier, why are you and your Labor government refusing to acknowledge and link these extreme weather events to the climate emergency we are already in? Our state has the capacity to build a future powered by clean, renewable energy; that means choosing industries and jobs that support people and communities and transitioning out of coal and gas projects that put lives and livelihoods at an increased risk. This Labor government has a poor record when it comes to protecting Victoria's natural environment and oceans. If governments continue to prioritise fossil fuel profits over people's safety and future, it will get worse. Premier, will you stand up to the vested interests of these coal and gas companies and make them pay for the damage they are inflicting on Victorian lives and communities?

Road tolls

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (21:05): (2256) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. In the middle of a cost-of-living crisis Victorian motorists have been slugged with an excessive administration fee for travelling on CityLink and the West Gate Tunnel. The action I seek is for the minister to urgently review Transurban's administration fee practice on CityLink and West Gate Tunnel tolls and bring Victoria in line with reform already underway in New South Wales. Victorian motorists have been slugged with administration fees that are not only excessive but also unjustifiable. If a driver fails to pay a toll within three days, Transurban adds a $16.30 administrative fee to the invoice. Leave it unpaid for 17 days and that fee doubles to $31.49. Often an ordinary toll as low as $3.27, with these charges, can snowball into criminal debts of up to $450 enforced by Fines Victoria at taxpayers expense. Last financial year Victorians paid $987 million in CityLink tolls. That figure will soar with the opening of the $10.2 billion West Gate Tunnel. Yet while New South Wales has acted, slashing the administration fee to just $1.10 for the first notice and $2.20 for the second notice, here in Victoria the Allan Labor government remains silent. Transurban agreed to remove administration fees in New South Wales from mid-2026 following a government review. Why are Victorians still paying up to 10 times the cost of the toll in fees?

Financial counsellors and community legal advocates have called these fees 'totally disproportionate' and a barrier for struggling families. Hardship programs exist on paper but fail in practice. Unlike public transport, there is no concessional rate with tolls. This is not just about fairness; it is about preventing vulnerable Victorians from falling into spiralling debt. Removing ridiculous administration fees or at least lowering them significantly is a first step, but broader reform is needed. I call on the minister to act now. The Allan Labor government cannot allow a $45 billion toll giant to profit at the expense of families already battling cost-of-living pressure. If New South Wales can deliver a reform, so can we. Victorians deserve a fair go, not punitive fees that turn a $3 toll into a $450 debt.

Poultry industry

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (21:08): (2257) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action I seek is for her to commit to a pilot program of in-ovo sexing in Victoria to eliminate the culling of male chicks. It might come as a surprise for some here to learn that every year in Victoria an estimated 3 million to 5 million male chicks are sent along a conveyor

belt into a high-speed macerator and ground up alive. That is about half of all chicks born in our state being treated as nothing more than waste by the egg industry. Instead of pointing to the obvious solution of stopping egg consumption, I am proposing a clear pathway for this government to end male chick suffering altogether. The technology now exists to determine the sex of a chick before it hatches, and it has already been tested at mass scale in some of Europe's most forward-thinking countries. Known as in-ovo sexing, it uses DNA analysis to identify male and female eggs before the embryo can feel pain, with over 99 per cent accuracy. This is a practical solution for egg farmers, where male chicks can be identified before hatching and the need for their unnecessary suffering can be completely eliminated.

Consumer support for this technology is already strong. In August 2025 a survey targeting Australian consumers found that 66 per cent of respondents were willing to pay more for eggs produced without chick culling, and 73 per cent believed the industry should adopt in-ovo sexing, once they were informed about the routine killing of male chicks. Germany, France and Austria have already banned male chick killing, and Italy will follow by the end of this year. Other countries, including the United States and the Netherlands, have adopted in-ovo sexing voluntarily or through industry-led programs. The *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry* already state that when in-ovo sexing becomes commercially available it should be used here as well. That technology is now commercially available to Australia, and all states and territories endorsed these guidelines. Acting now simply enforces what has already been agreed to. Victoria is already phasing out cruel battery cages. In-ovo sexing is the next logical step if we are at all serious about animal welfare leadership in our state. I urge the minister to give serious consideration to this proposal and take the next step in ending the routine killing of male chicks in Victoria.

Crime

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (21:11): (2258) Tonight I wish to draw attention to the sharp rise in crime across the City of Whitehorse. The figures show that criminal incidents in Whitehorse have risen from 8212 to 9589 in just one year, an increase of over 16 per cent, and that is not a marginal change. It is a significant jump that residents across Box Hill, Blackburn, Forest Hill and surrounding suburbs are already feeling in their daily lives. Of particular concern is the nature of offences driving this increase. The most common principal offence is theft from motor vehicles, with more than 2300 incidents recorded. This is followed by other theft, motor vehicle theft, theft from retail stores and criminal damage. These are not abstract statistics. They affect real people, real lives and real quality of living. The data also shows that houses and street locations account for the majority of offences. What that highlights is that crime is occurring where people live, walk and raise their families. Box Hill recorded the highest number of incidents, followed by Mitcham, Burwood East, Blackburn and Forest Hill.

Equally troubling is the low rate of resolution. Only 22 per cent of incidents resulted in charges being laid, and while 67 per cent remain unsolved, that means two out of every three victims are left without answers, accountability, justice or a sense that they are somehow safer. This rise in crime has occurred while the government continues to prioritise everything else except the safety of our community. The absolutely tragic statistic is that right now we have less police than when Jacinta Allan became Premier. Despite a supposed massive recruitment campaign, we have nearly 400 less police than we did two years ago, and the number of police is also undermined by the fact that we have lost experienced police. We have new police, but they are new on the job and do not have the experience. We do not have street patrols. We have police stations closed, including in my electorate. What we do not have is any semblance of a plan for how we restore this. Ten years ago all our police stations were open. Now we have got 500,000 more people living in the state, and we have got less police, less police stations and more crime. The action I seek from the Minister for Police is to restore minimum staffing to police stations and provide a clear timetable to rebuild frontline police numbers.

Crime

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (21:14): (2259) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Police as well. It is no secret that I have had to speak so many times in this place about crime and about incidents that have taken place throughout my region. Recently there was a whole lot of footage that was put out of a number of young people that stormed a Woolworths store. There were hundreds of them – in fact a lot more than what the papers recorded, because by the time the person took out their camera and was filming it from their phone, they had actually missed half the people that had gone into the store and caused the damage. My understanding is that Woolworths has not pressed any charges. Rumours around the area say that they were not locals, but the reality is that there definitely were a bunch of locals in amongst the mix of young people that were there, and some of the parents were quite appalled to look on national television and see their own children running into that store and causing havoc. It is no secret either, that I had a constituent call me about a bashing on a bus, and that situation resulted in a head injury and a report to the police.

In recent times I have been looking at what has been happening in Frankston. Frankston's crime rate has surged. Yet, like with many other police stations throughout the south-east, we do not have enough police – and we do not have police stations that can be manned throughout the south-east for 24 hours. So the action I seek from the minister is to outline what specific additional resources will be allocated to the Frankston police station to address the 10 per cent spike in crime, which has now reached its highest level in a decade. For years this government has claimed that the south-east is getting the resources it needs. Well, just ask the people of the south-east, and they will tell you that is not the case. Figures from the Crime Statistics Agency Victoria tell us a far more sobering story, and my constituents in Frankston know that this is true. Here are some of the facts: criminal incidents in the Frankston area surged by 10 per cent from last year, reaching over 13,500 recorded incidents in the LGA. The crime rate in Frankston is now roughly 9320 per 100,000 people, which is higher than the statewide average, and theft from motor vehicles is rampant, with over 2000 incidents recorded in the last reporting period alone. Residents are telling my office that they are now starting to avoid the Frankston CBD, especially after dark, due to a growing sense of lawlessness and a sense that they do not feel safe. Minister, we need you to do something about it.

Ambulance services

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (21:17): (2260) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Ambulance Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to explain the discrepancy with the number of code 1 callouts by Ambulance Victoria within its 2024–25 annual report. That report was one of the 250 annual reports that were dumped on Victorians in October as this Labor government again sought to obscure the facts by overwhelming scrutiny with paperwork. They have got a good habit of doing their dump day so we are overloaded and Victorians cannot see the true facts. But when you go through the annual reports, you actually can find out really interesting facts like this. Ambulance Victoria's annual report is impeccably polished. It is just a shame the curated 132-page document did not include a proofreader or fact checker, because the headline on page 14 is 'A year in numbers', and it celebrates a reduction in code 1 call-outs, with 393,671 code 1 cases last year, down from an all-time peak of 407,347 the previous year but still almost 25 per cent more than prepandemic numbers.

The report also provides a statistical summary on page 84. It says code 1 call-outs were 406,874. This is not a transposition error, a typo. This is 13,201 calls that are buried in the stats. This is 36 calls a day, one and a half every hour, unaccounted for. I thought perhaps this was an accounting anomaly – a regular occurrence – so I looked at the previous annual report covering 2023–24 and lo and behold, the figure on page 10 of that report, also under 'A year in numbers', matched exactly the statistical summary on page 69 of that same report. The same report shows the proportion of code 1 emergency incidents responded to within 15 minutes was 65.3 per cent statewide in 2024–25. Simple maths tells me that means more than 141,000 people suffering a major medical emergency did not get an ambulance inside the life-saving 15-minute benchmark. This is simply not good enough, and neither

were the findings of the inquiry into Ambulance Victoria, conducted by the committee that I was on, the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, which showed many of these code 1 calls are incorrectly classified.

A union survey found only one in five calls were accurate in determining the level of acuity. There is also widespread acceptance that Triple Zero Victoria call taking is flawed, something I have been concerned about for some time. Ambulance Victoria CEO Jordan Emery accepted that, as did Victorian Ambulance Union secretary Danny Hill. There have been cases where ambulances have been sent with lights and sirens to a toothache because the patient has mentioned the pain is radiating into their chest. Some of this may have been avoided had this Labor government undertaken the final stage of its revised ambulance dispatch pilot that included AV staff having medical oversight of the initial emergency calls to better identify real emergencies. Indeed, it is a recommendation of the parliamentary inquiry's – *(Time expired)*

Indian women's cricket team

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (21:20): (2261) I rise this evening to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events concerning Victoria's engagement with India through sport and in particular the missed opportunity when it comes to women's cricket. The fact that Victoria missed out on or did not actually pursue hosting the women's international cricket team for their 2026 tour I think is the biggest stuff-up since Labor's cancellation of the Commonwealth Games when it comes to tourism to this state. Victoria rightly places enormous emphasis on cricket and on the MCG as global assets. Cricket is central to our state's sporting identity, and it is also the cornerstone of Victoria's broader Indian strategy, both in terms of soft diplomacy and in attracting Indian tourists, students and business investment.

However, recent scheduling decisions raise legitimate questions. At a time when Labor spent almost $600 million to cancel the Commonwealth Games and should be seeking alternative ways to support sport, international cricket should have been leveraged more strategically. Matches involving India should have been taken to regional centres, driving tourism, hotel stays and local spending while strengthening international relationships. There has been no comparable effort, compared to the men's teams, to attract the women's team to Victoria – a massive lost opportunity. Even Hobart got not one but two back-to-back matches of the women's international cricket team. I understand Melbourne's MCG and Marvel Stadium had scheduling conflicts due to football, but what about all those regional stadiums and grounds that were meant to be used for the 2026 Commonwealth Games? You would have had those stadiums packed with Indian tourists there to see the Indian women's team play cricket.

I seek the action of the minister to outline what steps are being taken to ensure women's international cricket, particularly involving India, is actively pursued, promoted and, where possible, taken into regional Victoria for the benefit of our communities across the state. It is not good enough to just pursue the men's team. It is absolutely embarrassing that Hobart gets not one but two games and Victoria gets none. We have missed out. As I said, this is the biggest stuff-up in terms of tourism and investment since Labor's cancellation of the Commonwealth Games.

Norwood Secondary College bus services

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (21:23): (2262) My question – I suppose it is more of a plea than a question, in all fairness – is to Minister Gabrielle Williams, the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Today, while we have been very busy in this place giving a number of condolences – most worthy of course, but nonetheless – in my electorate of Ringwood the Norwood Secondary College has yet again encountered a very significant problem when it comes to the buses that service the school. I raised this issue over a year and a half – in fact two years – ago with the

previous minister. I raised it in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) last year in June – on 5 June, to be precise, of last year – and the response at that time was that:

> The operator of school bus route 2641 manages the type of vehicle used to service the route and has advised that while the bus often gets close to capacity, it has not reached or exceeded capacity.

That is a quote from the response to the PAEC question – that is, in the public hearings – by the minister at the time. The problem at Norwood Secondary College is, and I am advised this by the parents and the broader school community, the bus is routinely overcrowded – that is, there are more children than there are seats. The children – and they are young adults – then have to stand in the hallways. In some of the more modern buses of course there are no standing areas. Today the driver of that bus refused to move and five young people had to get off. This has perhaps come around in part because we know it is now free for students to travel on public transport. That is something I welcome. I have championed that for many years myself from opposition, and in government in fact, so I do not take exception to that. But what I do take exception to is five students who needed to get home having to literally step off that bus because they could not be accommodated.

There have been repeated requests from the school community and me as a local member to have a larger bus, and this is the crux of the issue. It is a smaller bus. It is not one of those concertina buses, as I call them – that is, the longer buses. They are precisely what we need. We know categorically that these buses are overcrowded consistently. We have had other issues with the safety of some of the drivers. I have the utmost respect for most of our bus drivers, but we have had issues on this particular route before with the safety and the wellbeing of these young people, these children. As I say, it is less a question and more a plea for Minister Williams to please intervene and ensure that the students on the 2641 bus route have a bus that is of sufficient size that everyone gets home every night, as I am sure we would wish them to do.

Youth crime

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (21:26): (2263) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Youth Justice. 1100 young offenders are now responsible for three out of five home invasions. This small group that is known to police cycles through Victoria's broken bail system again and again, and everyday Victorians are paying the price for Labor's failure here.

Home invasions are amongst the most traumatic experiences that anyone can suffer. Innocent people are left feeling terrified in their own homes, and these repeat offenders are left to continue the cycle on new victims. At the same time young offenders are being failed by a broken youth justice system. More than two-thirds of the youth currently held in youth justice centres are awaiting trial. Labor's long neglect of the courts has left them floundering, unable to dispense justice and using outdated paper-based processes.

When the courts fail to move cases through the system, the damage does not pause. These delays mean that all youth detainees, both innocent and guilty, are being held in the same so-called youth justice centres, which have the highest rates of physical assault in Australia. If anyone doubts the broken systems, the numbers settle that question. More than four out of five offenders who spend at least one day of their sentence in a youth justice centre will reoffend within 12 months – that is four out of five of them. This is why our magistrates refuse to place youth offenders in these centres. As for the damage, Victorians are paying more than ever. Despite fewer young people being in detention or under supervision than a decade ago, the government spends almost three times as much per person than New South Wales, and our outcomes are catastrophically worse.

Labor has abandoned crime prevention, despite youth crime. Labor has provided only two youth crime prevention program grants in the last two years. Meanwhile it has cut funding to 34 African community affiliated prevention programs that these communities are crying out for. There is a better way. The Liberals and Nationals will deliver a $100 million safer communities plan, with our Restart and Youth Start programs allowing these young children to have an off-ramp and to turn their lives

around. A system that fails to stop repeat offenders fails victims, and a system that warehouses children without rehabilitation fails young people. The Labor government is failing on both counts. The action I seek is for the minister to explain why repeat offending remains so high among known cohorts and why prevention funding has been cut during a crisis.

Responses

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (21:29): There were 20 adjournment matters, and all 20 matters will be referred to the relevant minister.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (21:29): Before I declare the house adjourned, I committed to Dr Mansfield that I would review an answer from Minister Shing in terms of whether it complied with the relevant standing orders. Having reviewed it, I will uphold Dr Mansfield's point of order and, because of the lateness in the day, give Minister Shing two days to respond in writing, in line with the standing orders, to the substantive question.

The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 9:30 pm.