Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 18 March 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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The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General –

Modernising myki, March 2026 *(Ordered to be published)*.

Timely Payments Performance, March 2026 *(Ordered to be published)*.

Integrity Oversight Victoria – Report on its inspections of controlled operations records and reports for the period 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024 *(Ordered to be published)*.

Ombudsman – Outsourcing small claims handling: How councils manage fairness and responsibility, March 2026 *(Ordered to be published)*.

Wildlife Act 1975 – Notices under section 86 of the Act –

Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) (Boat Prohibition) Notice No. 1/2026 *(Gazette S139, 13 March 2026)*

Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) (Game Ducks) Notice No. 1/2026 *(Gazette S139, 13 March 2026)*.

Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) (Wetlands Closure) Notice No. 1/2026 *(Gazette S139, 13 March 2026)*.

Petitions

Responses

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: Minister for Planning's response to a petition titled 'Desist from high-rise, high-density zone planning'.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

Jacinta Ermacora having given notice:

Renee Heath: On a point of order, President, if the member wants to bucket Mrs McArthur, she's going to have to do so in a substantive motion.

The PRESIDENT: That is what she is giving notice of.

Further notices given.

Members statements

Kew East Primary School

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:49): Today I rise to speak on my visit to Kew East Primary School last week, where I had the pleasure of touring resurfaced tracks and play areas alongside principal Matt O'Hern and speaking with their year 6 cohort, hearing directly from the young voices of my electorate. I had the opportunity to talk about what I do as a member of Parliament. That includes our work as parliamentarians on legislative matters and my work across committees and more. It is important to have open dialogue on matters of politics from a young age, as our work directly impacts all Victorians, including children, and to hear their voices on matters that directly

impact them and ensure that they know how our parliamentary system functions and operates. The students had the opportunity to ask me a lot of questions, wondering about how my day-to-day schedule works, what issues really drive me and what makes a difference. It was an excellent experience to pay a visit to Kew East Primary School, and I thank principal O'Hern and staff and the year 6 cohort for having me.

Rosebud Hospital

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (09:50): Rosebud Hospital is too old, too small and too important to patch up again. But the people who live there, work there and visit there are still being asked to rely on hospital facilities built in the 1960s. The Mornington Peninsula is one of Victoria's most productive regions. It generates roughly the same annual output as Geelong, about $28 billion to $30 billion. It attracts 8 million visitors per year, yet per capita it only receives $5600 in state funding, while Geelong receives $14,400. That is just not good enough. Rosebud Hospital has reached the point where patchwork is no longer credible. The region has a growing and ageing population. Seasonal demands place even more pressure on local health services. Patients are too often forced to travel to Melbourne or into Frankston for the care that they should be able to access closer to home, and it is tough luck if you cannot drive yourself, because Labor has turned a blind eye to the lack of public transport in the peninsula for over a decade. A new hospital would deliver a larger emergency department, more operating theatres, new patient wards, modern imaging and contemporary day medical services. It would also reduce pressure on the Frankston hospital and other hospitals. This is what the coalition is going to deliver. We will rebuild the hospital.

Duck hunting

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:52): I rise today with a deep sense of sadness because today is the first day of Jacinta Allan's disgraceful duck-shooting season here in Victoria. As of 2 hours ago our wetlands and our regional communities have been turned into a slaughterhouse for the next three months. When I think about how we are here when we came so close to banning duck shooting in Victoria, when the government formed their own inquiry and when that inquiry told them to end duck shooting in Victoria, I am still in disbelief that just one person could get in the way of that. The government have done everything they possibly could since that day to cover up the cruelty of duck shooting, including threatening rescuers with $12,000 fines for going out on the wetlands. But despite this, there are many people out there today doing the job that the government should be doing of helping these waterbirds and rendering them assistance. I want to send them my love, my support and my solidarity. I wish I could be there with you all, but I will be joining you on the weekend. Even though we are not in the place we thought we would be right now, mark my words, we will end duck shooting in Victoria no matter how long it takes. One day we will look back at this disgraceful decision by Jacinta Allan and her government and at the suffering caused to our native waterbirds and we will be in disbelief. We will end it here in Victoria.

Melbourne

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (09:54): It is official: Melbourne is simply the best. Melbourne has been crowned the number one city in the world in *Time Out's* 2026 global best cities ranking. For those of us in the Northern Metropolitan Region, it is certainly not hard to see why. Our patch is home to some of the best attractions that our city has to offer – the vibrant, livable place that it is today. You only have to look at the last few weeks to see Melbourne at its absolute best. We have seen massive crowds flocking to the Moomba festival along the Yarra and record-breaking attendance at the Formula One, and of course the return of the footy has brought that unmistakeable energy back to the MCG. It was particularly special to see a hard-fought win for the Blues last week. But beyond the major events, what truly makes Melbourne the world's best place is the everyday experiences – the local cafes, the world-class restaurants and the incredible diversity of our city. It is our local small businesses in Northern Metro that are the backbone of that reputation. I want to congratulate every

Melburnian who contributes to the liveliness of our city on proving that Melbourne certainly is the place to be.

Gender identity

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (09:55): Let us talk about misogyny in Victoria. We have all been told that there is absolutely no downside to letting men claim to be women under the law and that if we say otherwise, well, then we are bigots unfit to be members of Parliament or polite society. But then we found out that this government has already made a secret damages payout with our taxes because a male murderer claimed to be a woman, was put in a woman's prison and of course raped a young mum who was unfortunate enough to be sharing his cell. Then we found out about the male child rapist, also in the women's prison, who, I was very condescendingly told by a man, was isolated for her own safety. He is now suing the government over that, and he is doing it using our taxpayer dollars. Then we had the Melbourne man that pleaded guilty twice to secretly filming women and girls in public toilets – over 150 videos – and the judge let him go free without conviction or even a proper fine. Why? Because he was questioning his gender. Gender identity should never trump the safety of women and girls. It is time to end these legal fictions. Women and girls are getting sexually harassed, assaulted and raped, and then the taxpayers are being left to foot the bill for the inevitable lawsuits – and all for the sake of men whose feelings are more important than our safety. I will tell you what: the patriarchy is real, and Labor brought it back.

Gendered violence

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (09:56): On 8 March we marked International Women's Day with the theme 'Balance the scales', and I was proud to stand with the Pacific Business Networks and share space with my Pacific sisters. I hosted the Multicultural Women's Alliance Against Family Violence to advocate against the ongoing epidemic of gender-based violence. On 15 March we marked International Day to Combat Islamophobia, falling during the holy month of Ramadan, a time of reflection and community for many Muslim Victorians, despite the poison of anti-Muslim hate being on the rise, and to honour the memories of those massacred in Christchurch. This Saturday 21 March we recognise the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. These are not just calendar dates; these are reminders to us of how deadly and life-threatening racism, discrimination and gendered violence can be. Women from multicultural, migrant and refugee communities, First Nations women, women with disabilities and trans women often experience these risks at the intersection of race, culture and gender. Despite these compounding barriers, women continue to lead, advocate and uplift those around them. They support families, strengthen communities and drive progress. To the men in this chamber and beyond: take a moment to acknowledge the women in your lives – the mothers, sisters, partners, colleagues and community leaders. Their support, sacrifice and leadership help make the achievements of so many.

In One Voice

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (09:58): Last Sunday was one of the great events in the Southern Metro Region, the In One Voice festival on Selwyn Street in Elsternwick. It is a celebration of Melbourne's vibrant Jewish community, one of the largest celebrations of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere. Selwyn Street in Elsternwick came alive with stalls, with food and with sounds of Jewish culture. It is also the location of the future Jewish Arts Quarter, which will be established on the street, and the announcement on Sunday of confirmation of an additional $2 million of state government support in addition to the previous $5 million of state government support means that project is now construction ready. The Jewish Arts Quarter will feature a performing arts centre, exhibition spaces and shops as well as cafes and restaurants. It will also be a new home for the Jewish Museum of Australia. I am very proud to be part of a government that stands with our Jewish community and celebrates the wonderful contribution that Melbourne's Jewish community makes to our city.

Hemp industry

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (09:59): As the conflict in the Middle East enters its third week with no immediate resolution in sight, uncertainty around global fuel supplies continues to ripple around the world. Across Australia petrol and diesel prices are soaring, leaving our farmers and industries dangerously exposed. Logistics experts warn that Australia's fuel insecurity is far worse than we had expected. The solution to our fuel insecurity now and into the future could be hemp, the fast-growing and climate-friendly crop which can be grown practically anywhere. Hemp seed can be used to make biofuel, which would power most existing vehicles without modification. One hectare of hemp is able to produce up to 1000 litres of biofuel. Hemp requires minimal water and takes very little time to grow – 100 days from seed to harvest. The return for farmers could range from $2000 to $7000 per hectare. I could go on about its many uses and benefits to the economy, but you can read about it in the parliamentary inquiry into the industrial hemp industry in Victoria, which Legalise Cannabis Victoria referred a couple of years ago. In this era of geopolitical insecurity, with climate change biting hard, it is time we got serious about developing our hemp industry in Victoria.

Planning policy

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:00): I am very proud to represent the growing outer suburbs of Melbourne. They are indeed a wonderful place to live, work and raise a family, and as they grow, we are investing in them. Indeed in particular in the Clyde North area in the outer south-east we have seen just this year two brand new school openings, Balambalam Primary School and Birranga College. We are investing in new kindergartens on school sites, the extension of the routes 798 and 831 bus services, the opening of the Casey early parenting centre, the opening of the Cranbourne Community Hospital and the forthcoming much-needed upgrade to Casey Hospital's emergency department. We are also currently investing right now in major works to upgrade Clyde Road, both as it goes over the freeway in Berwick and as it intersects with Thompsons Road as well.

We are making these investments because our growing suburbs deserve nothing less. But as we do so, we see the Liberal Party across the chamber fighting against our efforts to ease the pressure on the growing suburbs. We know we cannot keep growing at these unsustainable rates, and that is exactly why this government is focusing on investing in the densification of activity centres in inner and middle-ring suburbs to take that pressure off our growing outer suburbs. But at the very same time the Liberal Party is opposing all these measures, leaving more of that growth to the outer suburbs. They come in here and complain that there has not been enough done. This government will continue to get on with the work whilst they will continue to talk from the sidelines, saying one thing to the inner city and another thing to the outer suburbs.

Neurodiversity Celebration Week

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (10:02): This week is national Neurodiversity Celebration Week. Starting in 2018 and running from 16 to 20 March, Neurodiversity Celebration Week is a worldwide initiative that challenges stereotypes and misconceptions about neurological differences. It aims to transform how neurodivergent individuals are perceived and supported by providing schools, universities, organisations and others around the world with the opportunity to recognise the many skills and talents of neurodivergent individuals, whilst also creating more inclusive and equitable cultures to celebrate differences and empower every individual. I want to give a special shout-out to all the students at the Rossbourne School, Victoria's only dedicated neurodiverse high school.

Bills

Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026

Statement of compatibility

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (10:03): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

> In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the **Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026**.
>
> In my opinion, the **Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026**, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.
>
> **Overview**
>
> The bill amends the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to ensure that a person with a disability who is taking medication for a disability or receiving medical treatment for a disability cannot be discriminated against for doing so.
>
> **Human rights issues**
>
> *Recognition and equality before the law (section 8)*
>
> By amending the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 the bill does not restrict any Victorians' rights but rather enlivens section 8 of the Charter – recognition and equality before the law – by supporting the rights of Victorians receiving medical treatment for a disability or taking a prescribed medication for a disability to be free from unlawful discrimination.
>
> The bill supports the right of people with a disability who receive medical treatment or take a prescribed medication to be treated equally under section 8 of the charter.
>
> **Conclusion**
>
> I consider that this bill is compatible with the Charter.
>
> **David Ettershank**
> **Member for the Western Metropolitan Region**
> **Legalise Cannabis Victoria**

Second reading

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (10:03): I move:

> That the bill be now read a second time.

Every single day, tens of thousands of Victorians battle chronic pain. Whether people suffer from arthritis, endometriosis, autoimmune conditions or a legacy of wounds sustained in service to their community or their country, they seek nothing more than to get on with their lives – caring for their families, earning a living, enjoying a well-deserved retirement, participating in public life and contributing to their communities.

Similarly, tens of thousands of Victorians wrestle daily with the existential dread of living in this post-pandemic, globally warming, conflict-ridden world that has a devastating impact on their mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. Their aspiration to get on with their life is often hindered by their complex medical conditions.

These are a few examples of our fellow Victorians who look to our health system for support.

And despite its much-publicised flaws and inequities, we have in this country – indeed in this state – a world-class health system.

We have an incredibly skilled and dedicated health workforce, we invest billions of dollars in our health infrastructure and we have access to cutting edge pharmaceuticals and therapies.

In short, while it could always be improved, there is much to be thankful for in our access to medical treatment and medications.

How ironic is it then that those thousands of Victorians dealing with illness and injury, who access our medical system for support to get on with their lives, regularly face discrimination for simply undergoing a medical treatment or taking a prescribed medication.

But that is the current reality. Whether it be in employment, housing, education or accessing services, Victorians are not currently protected from this medical discrimination – and that is, to put it bluntly, a disgrace.

The aim of the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026 is simple – to end the discrimination against people with a medical condition who access medical treatments or take prescribed medication to treat that condition.

Our bill reflects the recommendation of the Victorian equal opportunity and human rights commissioner to the inquiry into workplace drug testing in December 2023 that there is no explicit protection against unlawful discrimination for people taking prescribed medication or undertaking medical treatment.

Their submission was based on the many complaints and enquiries the commission receives from people facing disciplinary action or termination of employment because they are taking prescription medication.

The types of prescribed medication recorded in these complaints include opioids for pain management or sleep disorders, amphetamines prescribed by a psychiatrist for the treatment of ADHD, and medicinal cannabis.

While discrimination is not confined to the workplace, the types of discrimination commonly occurring in workplaces include being dismissed by your employer for taking prescribed medication, despite being medically cleared to perform work; testing positive for a prescribed medication during a workplace drug test and being dismissed, even though it was safe for the person to perform their role and there were no side effects from their medication; employers relying on dubious 'health and safety' concerns to dismiss an employee on prescribed medication, rather than making reasonable adjustments in the workplace; and stigma and discrimination around disclosure of use of prescription medication.

The commissioner identified this as an area in desperate need of reform and proposed a simple amendment to the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to address this omission.

Our bill gives life to the commissioner's recommendation – a recommendation that was unanimously supported by all members of the committee – government, opposition and crossbench alike. It amends the act to provide that a person with a disability who receives medical treatment or uses prescribed medication is protected.

We live in an age where our ability to treat medical conditions with new treatments, including new medications, increases every day. Not only has our understanding of how different medications and practices grown over recent years but our social and cultural perception of drugs has evolved. Drugs that were once inherently 'evil' are entering mainstream practice. The widespread research and use of substances – previously deemed to be dangerous – for therapeutic purposes would have been unheard of even a decade ago.

Chronic illnesses that were untreatable in previous times can now be managed, if not cured.

Medications can now treat chronic pain, decrease inflammation, soothe damaged nerves and prevent seizures. People might be prescribed analgesics, muscle relaxants, anti-seizure medication and even antidepressants to treat a range of physical and psychological conditions.

It is not uncommon for people with neurological conditions, such as autism and ADHD, to be prescribed medication to manage their symptoms, and these numbers are rising. We are seeing an increasing use of medications to treat mental health conditions.

But our laws lag behind these advances in treatments. While a person with a disability is protected from discrimination if they require physical support to manage their condition, this is not extended to people who require support in the form of medication or medical treatment.

The Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026 makes a simple but important reform to extend protection to people who receive medical treatment or use medications prescribed by a registered health practitioner.

The bill amends section 4(1) of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 by inserting the definition of a registered health practitioner as 'a person registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law to practise in a health profession within the meaning of that Law (other than as a student)' and section 7(3) of the act by inserting:

(3A) For the purposes of subsection (2) –

'What is discrimination?' –

> if a person with a disability uses medication that has been prescribed to the person by a registered health practitioner for the medical treatment of that disability, using that medication is taken to be a characteristic that a person with that attribute generally has.

(3B) For the purposes of subsection (2), if a person with a disability receives medical treatment from a registered health practitioner for that disability, receiving that treatment is taken to be a characteristic that a person with that attribute generally has …

The Equal Opportunity Act is very broad in its definition of 'disability'. Disability is simply defined as:

(a) total or partial loss of a bodily function; or

(b) the presence in the body of organisms that may cause disease; or

(c) total or partial loss of a part of the body; or

(d) malfunction of a part of the body, including –

  (i) a mental or psychological disease or disorder;

  (ii) a condition or disorder that results in a person learning more slowly than people who do not have that condition or disorder; or

(e) malformation or disfigurement of a part of the body …

It includes a disability that may exist in the future and, to avoid doubt, behaviour that is a symptom or manifestation of a disability.

I may, for example, suffer from anxiety and insomnia, which falls under partial loss of a bodily function. A health professional may prescribe medicinal cannabis – which has aided so many people in reclaiming their sleep. I should have the right to take that medication without fear of repercussions, so long as it does not pose a threat to others and is consistent with the recommendation of my registered health practitioner.

As I said, our social and cultural perception of medical treatments as well as drugs has evolved over time. We all know someone who has had cancer; we all know someone who suffers from a mental health condition. Many of us may know someone who is being treated for substance misuse. And we know that treatments and medications can have side effects or result in complications that may impact on that person's ability to live or work to their full capacity without support, without some adjustments.

Why are these people not afforded legal protection?

Legalise Cannabis Victoria has heard from many, many people over the years who have suffered discrimination for taking medicinal cannabis, prescribed by their doctor, to treat a medical condition.

But our bill's reach is much further. It protects all Victorians who responsibly take prescription medication from facing discrimination because of it.

If I break my leg and am required to walk on crutches, my workplace should make reasonable adjustments, even if I never fully recover. If they do not, I can seek justice under the law.

Other disabilities, particularly when it relates to mental health conditions, are often not visible. They may need to take medication that slows them down a bit, for example.

However, a person facing discrimination because they take medication to treat that condition will find access to justice far more challenging.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission know that the number of people who make a complaint about discrimination is merely the tip of the iceberg. Most people who experience discrimination will not proceed with a complaint because they don't have the time, energy or resilience to go through a process at a tribunal.

It's introducing that element of proof which is the real barrier to proving at a tribunal that the treatment they're receiving is captured by the attribute of disability. People need to go through a lot of additional effort to prove that there has been discrimination. The lack of specific coverage for medical treatment or prescribed medication in the act increases the burden on complainants, which is already incredibly high.

We have heard from people who have felt the need to hide the fact that they are receiving treatment or taking medication for fear they will be disadvantaged. That stress and anxiety is compounded for workers who are subject to random drug tests at their workplace.

Workplaces may also have no understanding of the effects of changing medications. Flare-ups and side effects or issues with new medications can leave people feeling unwell – perhaps not to the point where they need to take a sick day but definitely leaving them feeling less than up to the job.

Or they might be a worker in our increasingly casualised workforce who is not in a position to take time off work to manage their symptoms. They may need to work from home for the day. They should not face judgement and discrimination. This would be unacceptable for a person with a physical disability. So why do we not give people with chronic conditions the same protection?

We have heard from someone with ADHD whose manager believed they were faking their symptoms. Another manager told them that 'everyone has a bit of ADHD' and that they just needed to 'not let it affect them'.

They were unable to use a company car because their boss mistakenly believed that their legally prescribed medication would test positive for illicit drugs at a roadside drug test.

These attitudes are borne of ignorance and stigma and are incredibly harmful. People are reluctant to disclose their medical history or what medications they take if they believe they will be judged and face discrimination, and who can blame them?

Of course, I have more than a personal passing interest in this matter. I have experienced years of chronic pain due to back injury and, until a few years ago, an autoimmune condition polymyalgia rheumatica. That I stand here today, making this speech, has only been made possible by my access to wonderful health practitioners and sophisticated medical treatments.

And apart from the fact that I am standing in this place today moving this bill, there is absolutely nothing unique about my medical experience. It is shared daily by far, far too many Victorians.

When your morning starts with a battle to push through the pain, to summon the willpower just to get out of bed, to feed your kids, to get to work, to simply live your life with some quality, why should you also face discrimination for accessing the treatments that make that possible?

Of course, discrimination occurs in settings above and beyond the workplace. We continue to hear of people being stigmatised and discriminated against for their use of prescribed medicinal cannabis.

We know of a person admitted to hospital who had their prescribed medicinal cannabis confiscated. The patient was taking medicinal cannabis to treat fibromyalgia, which was administered in the form of a herbal vaporiser. They were not able to take their prescribed medication anywhere on the hospital grounds – including in the smoking area. No adjustments were made, no attempt to speak with the prescribing doctor – just an outright ban. Worse still, when that patient, who had a previous addiction to opiates, was denied access to their medicinal cannabis, they were offered instead the very opiates that had almost been their ruin. There's no justification for this sort of medical bigotry.

In discussions around this proposed amendment, questions have been raised about any potential detrimental consequences to, for example, employers or service providers. By way of response, I would simply note that the Equal Opportunity Act provides a range of exemptions to the act and defences against claims of discrimination that have proven to be both robust and effective in dealing with what is, after all, a complex problem – for example, the test of 'reasonableness' that is applied to the modification of workplaces or work processes.

In advancing this amendment to the act, we would simply note that nothing in this bill serves to undermine the scope or integrity of the exemptions and defences provided for in the act.

Our society is ageing rapidly and we are living longer – due in no small part to the advances in medical science that have allowed us to live longer. The first of the baby boomers are now hitting 80. And we know that the need for medical treatments and medications increases exponentially as we age.

The World Health Organization estimates that roughly 1 billion people – or one in seven people – suffer from mental health disorders – generalised anxiety disorders, depression, bipolar disorder, PTSD – with wideranging symptoms that can severely impact a person's ability to live a functional life, let alone a fulfilling one. These conditions are more often than not ameliorated through medical treatments and medications.

We need safeguards in place to ensure people's right to access treatments that suit their needs without fear of discrimination.

People are entitled to seek healthcare services and treatment that meet their needs. In fact, that right is enshrined in the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights.

It is time to afford Victorians who take medication or seek medical treatment compassion and understanding and, importantly, protection under the law from unlawful discrimination.

There would not be a member in this chamber who doesn't have thousands of their constituents who experience or risk discrimination for simply accessing entirely legal and justified medical treatment and medications. Those constituents, those voters, deserve the simple, considered and modest protection recommended by our own Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and also by the Legislative Council's joint party inquiry.

I urge members to support this bill.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:21): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Production of documents

Animal research

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (10:21): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

(a) primates, including macaques and marmosets, are highly intelligent and socially complex animals whose use in scientific experimentation raises significant ethical concerns;

(b) Monash University operates a research facility in Victoria where primates are bred, housed and used in experiments;

(c) the keeping of exotic species such as primates is regulated under the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, which requires permits to ensure the containment of 'pest' animals;

(d) concerns have been raised by animal protection organisations and members of the public about the ongoing use of primates in experimentation and the welfare of animals held in research colonies;

(e) calls have been made for primates currently held in research facilities to be retired to appropriate sanctuary environments where possible;

(2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within four weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, all documents in the possession, custody or control of the Victorian government relating to primates kept for research purposes by Monash University, including:

(a) Monash University's pest animal research/education collections permits issued under the Victorian Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994;

(b) any other applications, approvals or renewals associated with those permits;

(c) any documents relating to the potential retirement, relocation or long-term housing of primates currently held in research facilities operated by Monash University; and

(d) any correspondence between the Victorian government and Monash University regarding the keeping, containment or management of primates.

Hidden inside a university laboratory in a small country town near Gippsland, monkeys are being bred, kept out of public view and used for experimental purposes. The facility, operated by Monash University's Monash Animal Research Platform, has operated in secrecy for over 15 years. It is permitted to hold up to 850 primates, namely marmosets and macaques, and it is the only facility of its kind that we know of here in Victoria. In 2018 research obtained by Animal-Free Science Advocacy revealed some of the experiments conducted at this site. These included deliberately infecting monkeys with HIV to study its effect on their bodies and invasive neurological procedures where their brains were opened up for research. In 2023 my office highlighted findings, also from Animal-Free Science Advocacy, formerly known as Humane Research Australia, which reported the deaths of five macaques at this facility due to heart failure, chronic infections, anaesthesia errors and even from extreme bullying by other primates at the site.

I understand the need to advance medical research to address some of the world's most serious health concerns, but these occurrences are truly shocking, and the only reason they are publicly released is when dedicated advocacy groups request this hidden information, and they have to fight like hell to get it. I want to understand, if these tests are so crucial, why is the public barred from any meaningful insight into what is happening behind closed doors in our state? People should not be asked to blindly accept that animal experimentation is the only pathway forward. In fact transparency allows the public to make informed choices about what science we want to support. We would never subject human primates to these procedures, so why are non-human primates treated any differently? It begins to feel less like necessity and more like an unwillingness to move beyond practices that should already be behind us, particularly when there are more effective alternatives that already exist.

Monash has claimed that these monkeys cannot be rehomed because of permits issued under Victorian laws, yet nobody has ever seen these permits. Under the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994

primates are classified as so-called declared 'pest animals', meaning it is illegal to keep them without a special permit. But the Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes requires researchers to actively consider rehoming animals wherever possible, including primates used in experiments. This is precisely why transparency in this situation is essential. The public deserves to see the permit and to understand why retirement or rehoming is being ruled out for these animals and why their suffering is permitted without public scrutiny.

Unlike other research bodies and pharmaceutical companies, Monash University has actually not signed on to the Openness Agreement on Animal Research and Teaching in Australia. This is despite Monash claiming the highest standards of care and that the facility has been formally audited. However, that has only happened once in the past decade. The lack of commitment to transparency is unacceptable when so many questions remain unanswered. In 2020 alone 108 macaques and 63 marmosets were used for research here in Victoria, with almost 600 primates bred in total and 66 deaths of these primates being recorded. This is only a glimpse of the scale of what remains hidden behind laboratory walls in a gated compound here in our state. If research is truly as crucial as Monash University claims, then it should withstand scrutiny. If it cannot, then the public deserves to know. The time for secrecy has passed. Transparency, ethics and accountability demand that these documents be released. I commend the motion to the house.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:26): I am pleased to rise to speak on short-form documents motion 1348, which has been put forward to us today by Ms Purcell and relates to the issue of primates used for research purposes in Victoria. Indeed it does open up and invite a very interesting moral and ethical debate, which we could have and which I suspect I will not be able to sufficiently delve into in the scope of a short-form documents motion debate. However, it does touch on a particular ethical quandary that we do face and indeed many other civilisations face as well. The need for medical research and for it to be done thoroughly and appropriately is of course paramount, and it is something that I reflect upon as Victoria is the nation's leading centre for medical research and indeed one of the top three centres in the world. Alongside Boston and London in the UK, it is one of the top three centres for medical research. It is important for all types of work to advance that. Notwithstanding that, we do have to be always mindful of animal welfare considerations, and it is something that I am grateful to Ms Purcell for raising with us today, because it is a timely reminder for us to be looking at this through the appropriate lens.

In accordance with the government's longstanding policy to not oppose short-form document motions requiring the government to provide documents to the house, I can confirm that the government will not be opposing this motion today. Indeed I will concur with Ms Purcell on the point of transparency. Whilst this work is in many cases vitally important, it is not a bad thing for it to be transparent, accountable and publicly disclosed so that that conversation can happen in a mature and evolved sense as to the particular benefits of this type of research or any other particular considerations or changes which may need to be considered.

I do note that this year the government released the *Statistics for Animal Use in Research and Teaching, Victoria 2024*, which is in a high-level summary report issued by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action which enables us to get a bit of a snapshot of the numbers of animals that we are talking about being used for research purposes, including in particular primates. We know that in 2024 the number of animals used for research and teaching purposes was 32 per cent below the 10-year average. Indeed there are currently 232 Victorian licences to use animals in research and teaching. There were also 92 uses of animal ethics committees, AECs, which are required to be set up in examination of any proposal for research involving animals. An AEC has to be satisfied that the work is scientifically valuable and that any research undertaken is ethically acceptable. The AECs do play a very important role in regulating this sector, and indeed we know that there are 92 AECs currently registered with Animal Welfare Victoria. Animal Welfare Victoria, as a function of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, plays an important role in overseeing and ensuring probity in this system. These statistics are used to inform broader government policy and

compliance programs but also indeed to advise the community, through reporting processes and mechanisms, about the nature and purpose of animals used in science. The code – the national code in fact – also requires that animals be sufficiently rehomed and that as part of any process for consideration through the AEC there are plans in place to ensure the appropriate rehoming of animals once the research has concluded, and indeed Animal Welfare Victoria plays a role in that as well.

It is not just of course primates that are involved in medical research in Victoria. Indeed in some cases domestic dogs and cats, embryonated eggs, whales and dolphins are in some cases as well. But as this motion pertains to primates, I return to my remarks at the start that the government will not be opposing this motion. We are in this state and continue to be one of the world's leading centres for medical research and innovation. The work that our universities and teaching hospitals do is in so many cases absolutely cutting edge and world leading, and this government will support them to do that and, in supporting this motion today, will do so in a way that ensures that any of that research which involves animals is as accountable and as transparent as it can be.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:31): I rise to make a brief contribution on behalf of the Liberals and Nationals in relation to Ms Purcell's documents motion. May I say as a matter of principle the Liberals and Nationals do not oppose documents motions. We certainly support transparency and the release of documents as an important mechanism in this chamber. I note that we have a long list of documents that have gone through this documents motion process that we are still waiting for the government to actually deliver to Parliament and to the people. I just want to make a point of saying that just because we are supporting a documents motion by the Animal Justice Party it does not mean that we align our policies with the Animal Justice Party. Indeed the Animal Justice Party would have us close down every livestock farm in this state and would have us eating lentils, but animals would have died in the process of growing those lentils, as they do right now. I am just making that very clear. We support the documents motion; we do not support the policies overwhelmingly of the Animal Justice Party.

This motion seeks documents regarding the use of primate research in Monash University, permits in terms of the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 and renewals, correspondence and materials, and that is fine – let that go through. It is also important to put on record that animal research in Victoria operates in one of the most tightly regulated and ethical frameworks in the world. The National Health and Medical Research Council oversees that, and indeed Australia and Victoria have some of the highest support for ethical research recognised internationally. Indeed, when you put it up against the US, the EU and Canada, it stacks up very highly. These systems certainly ensure that primates and all animals used in research are used under strict justification, continuous monitoring and independent veterinary involvement, and so they should.

We stand for animal welfare, and I note that primates are used very sparingly in relation to this. I am not sure that it is a hidden facility. It is a facility in Victoria that is regulated very highly and used in very important Monash medical research. It is often used as that bridge between the understanding, the research and actual life-saving medical treatment. There has been a list over many decades of the important work that animal research has provided in relation to stroke recovery. Back in the day there were also vaccines that were life saving, not only in Australia but across the world. I note that Monash University have been doing some significant work in terms of cognitive control and treatment of addiction and age-related dementia. No-one wants to see parents or anybody suffering from addiction and age-related dementia. This is very important work that Monash has been doing. Also, in terms of breakthroughs in HIV treatment – again, I am old enough to know about the shocking and devastating effects in the 1980s and 90s of HIV – the progress that has been made through medical research is really awe inspiring, and we must recognise that part of that is certainly from the important work that has been done.

I am a little bit concerned about the retirement of research primates. I do not want this to be a simplistic assumption that you can just retire primates that have really lived their lives in very strictly controlled research environments. It must be guided by veterinary expertise. Whilst there is an element there that

may sound reasonable, it must be those people that understand primates to the nth degree. Medical experts must be able to be part of that retirement situation where applicable, so let us walk through cautiously in relation to that. But our position certainly is straightforward: we support the production of documents. We also support the government delivering on the production of documents when we have passed production motions in this house. We support transparency, but we also support evidence-based, high welfare standards and rigorous oversight in Victoria's research sector while defending the central role of ethical scientific research in protecting and improving human health.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:36): I am pleased to rise to speak on Ms Purcell's documents motion about animal testing facilities. I think particularly we can appreciate today of many days Ms Purcell's continued dedication and advocacy for animal welfare in the state of Victoria. The motion before us today seeks in accordance with the standing orders a range of documents relating to primates that are being potentially kept for research purposes by Monash University, including permit renewals, the permits themselves and any other documents in relation to the operation of the primate research facilities currently operated by Monash University, and correspondence between them – obviously a matter of some concern to Ms Purcell and others in the community.

There is a range of material that exists on the public record that seeks, as part of a framework, to regulate the use of animals in research and particularly medical research purposes in the state of Victoria. It is not a field of endeavour that is free from government oversight and regulation, particularly because of the concerns that many have about the consequences of that research on the subjects, on those animals. The use of animals for research and testing in this state prohibits any experimentation if there is a valid non-animal alternative. As part of the oversight process animals can only be used in research where an animal ethics committee is satisfied that the work is ethically acceptable and scientifically valuable. They are necessary and appropriate safeguards that we have got in place here.

What is interesting is in January there was a release of a statistical report on the use of animal research in Victoria which showed that animals used in research and teaching in Victoria was 32 per cent below the 10-year average for the report period, which was for the year 2024. I think what it demonstrates is that there is clearly within the field of medical research and within the field of research more broadly an understanding that there are circumstances when it may be required to use animals in research and teaching. We understand and accept that that is part of how research and teaching occur. There are, however, also measures put in place, oversight put in place, to ensure that where that does occur it is occurring in a way that is as a resort only when there are no non-animal alternatives available.

The people who serve on the animal ethics committees oversighting the research program are required to undertake mandatory training for the ethical use of animals, and there have been a number of people who have been through that process. There are 232 current Victorian licences to use animals in research and teaching and 92 animal ethics committees registered with Animal Welfare Victoria. Licence-holders report approximately 2600 projects annually to make up the statistics report. The statistics that are collected and collated in those reports are used to inform government policy but also inform compliance programs, because it is an important part of undertaking a program of compliance with regulations to ensure that the government is properly aware of the nature and location of the proposed activities so the regulators can ensure that they are being conducted in accordance with the regulatory framework. It is also an important source of information to the community.

We do think that these matters are ones that should be taken seriously. The oversight regime and the reporting regime that we have in place in particular are ones that do seek to shed light on these issues. Within the broader community we do want to make sure that both the welfare of those who are subject to testing regimes and the end goal of the research are taken into consideration and that the two matters are dealt with in a way that is consistent with both community expectations and in accordance with the broader regulatory framework here in Victoria. And with that, I will end my contribution.

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:41): I would like to add my personal support to and commend Georgie Purcell's motion to the house. This has long been a passion of mine. In fact it goes back to grade 5 and grade 6 when I did a school project. Anything that shines a greater light, as has been said in this chamber today, in respect to Monash University and the use of primates in their research facility, obviously breeding them, housing them and then testing on them – this is not about a zero-sum game. Everyone appreciates the good work Monash University does in terms of medical research. However, I can only see a world in which that research is enhanced by the transparency that Georgie has proposed today. So my commendation to you, Georgie, on this effort. It is a great step forward.

Motion agreed to.

Contraceptive pill access

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:42): I rise to speak to the motion in my name. I move:

> That this house:
>
> (1) notes:
>
> (a) the announcement by the Premier of the expansion of the Chemist Care Now program from July 2026 to allow participating pharmacists to provide the oral contraceptive pill to women without a prescription;
>
> (b) the concerns raised by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Australian Medical Association that this practice undermines established clinical safety standards and is contrary to determinations from the Therapeutic Goods Administration that the pill should only be prescribed by medical practitioners; and
>
> (2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, all briefings, correspondence and other documents provided to the Premier by the Department of Health and the Minister for Health, or her office, relating to the expert medical advice sought and received on the safety of pharmacists initiating supply of the oral contraceptive pill.

What the motion essentially is asking for is the health advice that the Premier received when she made this announcement just a couple of weeks ago. In my motion I talk about the TGA and the various concerns that they had. It is on the record that the TGA undertook a review about five years ago looking at this very issue. When they did look at it – they took advice and they looked at this in great detail – they made a decision not to change the scheduling of any oral contraceptive substances. They said there was an increased risk of thromboembolism, especially with age, smoking, obesity or migraines with aura; cardiovascular risks – for example, having a stroke; possible increased cervical cancer risk; and side effects that change over time and require medical oversight. They also stated that safe use and eligibility criteria and risk factors are numerous and complex, requiring ongoing medical assessment. I think that is very important in the context of this debate. Oral contraceptives may mask conditions like endometriosis, and we know the Premier has been out on that, but she has disregarded this advice in relation to that very specific issue. There have been some other areas that the TGA did raise around the existing mechanisms through telehealth or continued dispensing rules, which already support access without fully removing the need for a prescription. The annual GP visits ensure women review contraceptive choices, including safer and more effective options.

The AMA has come back, and they strongly oppose the proposals, as we know. When they went to Family Planning NSW, they broadly supported improved access, according to the TGA, but highlighted many safety, training and implementation issues. That really was the whole point of that review. The risks of downscheduling outweigh the benefits. Current scheduling should be retained to protect women's health – that is critical – and regular GP oversight remains essential for safe use of oral contraceptives and broader reproductive health care. When the Premier made this announcement there seemed to be some tension with the Minister for Health, who clearly did not agree with the

Premier's announcement. She went off and liked the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners' social media post. There were some tensions between the Premier and the health minister, it is understood. But the president of the RACGP Dr Muñoz said she was:

> … blindsided by the announcement as the government had recently told the college that allowing pharmacists to initiate the pill was not a policy it would pursue.

Their own Labor members of Parliament have also raised concern. Federal member for Bruce Julian Hill criticised the contraceptive pill announcement. He said:

> I was also surprised, to say the least, to see this announcement by a state government, against the advice of the relevant medical colleges …

I think this was fair enough. He has got firsthand experience, I understand, from his own daughter who had a DVT linked to an off-label prescription of a contraceptive pill, so he was concerned about those safety issues. But what I am concerned about is the Premier's language. She said:

> I'm not going to let vested interests and old-fashioned ways of thinking – and middle-aged white men – decide when and where women should get the healthcare they need.

I think we are all sick of this language from this Premier. We are sick of it. It is divisive, it is unnecessary and it is quite frankly out of order. She needs to stop dividing the community and labelling people who are concerned about an issue 'middle-aged white men'. It is offensive.

David Limbrick interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Mr Limbrick interjects – racist and sexist. It is a reverse form of misogyny, and I am sick of the Premier doing this. It is extraordinary that she has disregarded medical expert advice on this very important issue around women's safety measures. I say the Premier has gone alone on this decision, because the minister does not even agree with her. It seems like they are at odds, just like they were at odds with the ADHD virtual ED announcement. This is a Premier who is desperate. She is clinging at everything she can, and it is critical that we understand the advice that was provided to her and her office on this very important issue that goes to women's safety. I am going to stress it again: this issue goes to women's safety. I am going to stand up for women in this place against the Premier, who is trying to grab votes. All this is is a vote-grabbing exercise. It is a dangerous vote-grabbing exercise. We need to see the documents, and they need to be released within the specific timeframe. It is not a big ask. I would urge all members in this place to make sure the Premier desists with her ridiculous language and releases the documents.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:48): I rise to speak in support of this documents motion brought by Ms Crozier. I am also quite curious to see what advice and evidence has informed this decision and led to this announcement by the Premier. I have to say I was also quite surprised when this announcement was made. I am actually very supportive of reducing the barriers to access to contraception for women and gender-diverse people everywhere. There are barriers that exist, and there are lots of ways we need to be looking at reducing those.

In my electorate of Western Victoria there is a particular issue in parts of the central part of western Victoria with accessing a whole range of things, including abortion, contraception and just general cervical screening. All of those things are difficult to access. It is complex. It is not just the doctors that are the barrier. It is actually also, from evidence we have looked into, the pharmacists in some cases, so this is a complex issue. Increasing the scope of practice of other health professionals is also something I am not fundamentally against. I actually think we need to be looking at that. I think there is a lot of ability to increase the roles that different health professionals undertake in our health system. That is a sentiment that is not always shared by some of my doctor colleagues, but I fundamentally believe that.

It is not really about who is prescribing in this instance – I think there are very good pharmacists out there who may be quite capable, with the right training, of doing a pretty good job of this – but I think

about where and how this prescribing is taking place. A retail pharmacy setting I do not believe is a great setting in most instances to be doing this kind of work, and I say that as someone who has done so many of these consultations. This is not a 5-minute consultation that you can do at the desk of a pharmacy. It is quite different to something like emergency contraception. I will even accept that a repeat prescription of the pill is a lot more straightforward. Initiating contraceptives is actually quite a complex thing, and it is the bread and butter of general practice; it is what you train for. The comments that were made that this somehow frees up GP time – to do what? This is the stuff we want to be doing. This is the good stuff. There is a bunch of stuff I can tell you we do not want to be doing – give that to someone else – but this is the core business of general practitioners.

There are some things that I think need to be worked through. When someone comes in asking for the pill, it is often not just the pill. What do they want the pill for? The pill is used for a whole lot of different reasons. Contraception is one of them, but it is not the only one. Sometimes it is menstrual management or menstrual migraines, or it might be for dealing with acne or for some of those issues that exist for that person, so you are going to tailor the particular pill or advice that you give to someone around that. We have a huge problem in this country with an underutilisation of long-acting reversible contraceptives – Implanon and IUDs. While I hear that they will be able to raise these other options, they are not actually able to provide that for someone when they come in.

You also need to take a detailed family and personal history from someone to identify their risk factors. It is usually an ideal time to have a broader conversation about general health and wellbeing and do things like check someone's cervical screening, check whether they need an STI check-up and give them sexual health advice – the fact that you are on a contraceptive does not mean you are protected from STIs, and you still need to use condoms. Do you want to be having that conversation at the desk of a pharmacy? I am just not quite sure that that is the right setting. I will grant that some pharmacists have a separate room, but I also question whether any retail pharmacist wants to be off the floor for 20 minutes having this conversation in a room. It is just not the environment that you typically expect these kinds of consultations to occur in.

I think, crucially, the other thing that is really important when you initiate contraception is the follow-up. I cannot tell you the number of times when you start something and it needs to be tweaked. You might need to change the type of pill that they use, you might need to give them advice about taking it in a different way, running packets together – there are all sorts of bits of advice you might give to someone. And checking people's blood pressure: there is a decent proportion of people – about one in 20, possibly even up to one in 10 – who get high blood pressure as a result of being on the pill, and that is something that needs to be monitored. You need to bring someone back for a check-up to check on those things. Again, I am not saying that you cannot manage all of these things in a retail pharmacy setting, but it is not really a place that is set up for that. I think it is instructive that entities like the TGA recommend against this approach and a number of the other peak bodies are quite concerned about it.

I am really looking forward to what comes out of this documents motion, if we get anything. I am very open to being persuaded on it, but there are certainly a lot of alarm bells based on the public statements that have been made by the Premier.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (10:53): I rise to speak on the short-form documents motion brought forward by Ms Crozier regarding the expansion of the Chemist Care Now program. While the government will not oppose this motion, as per parliamentary convention, as is familiar to all in this place, it is essential to place on the record exactly why we are expanding access to the oral contraceptive pill and how this initiative supports the needs of Victorian women.

The Allan Labor government is making it easier to get the pill at the chemist without a prescription, and from July 2026 women over 18 will be able to access the oral contraceptive pill at one of 850 participating Chemist Care Now pharmacists. This change will save women time and provide them with more options to get the care they need. It will also expand access for women in rural and remote areas, where access to a GP is more challenging. By utilising our network of participating

pharmacists we are ensuring that location and wait times are no longer a barrier to basic health care. Our expanded access to the pill will bring Victoria in line with Queensland and Tasmania as well as other countries around the world, including the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand. This is also, it is important to note, a change supported by organisations, including Women's Health Victoria, who have welcomed initiatives that make it easier for women to safely access their preferred contraception, including directly from their local chemist, which gives them more options.

Safety and extra training are at the very heart of this program. Pharmacists who want to deliver this service will be required to complete a postgraduate training module. They must undertake a thorough consultation and outline any risks before dispensing to keep women safe. They must also provide comprehensive advice on other options, including long-acting reversible contraception. And if there are any concerns, our pharmacists will refer the woman to a GP, as per normal practice for a range of health care. The expansion of the program to include the initiation of the oral contraceptive pill will be guided by a clinical prescribing and management protocol. The TGA has classified the oral contraceptive pill as a schedule 4 medicine, and states and territories are responsible for the laws that regulate health practitioners that can supply, prescribe and administer scheduled medicines. In Victoria that includes pharmacists that are part of the Chemist Care Now program. Through this program Victorians can already receive resupply of oral hormonal contraception; treatment for shingles, uncomplicated urinary tract infections and psoriasis; and some travel vaccines.

The success of this program is already evident in the data that we are seeing. Victorians have accessed more than 77,000 occasions of care from over 870 approved pharmacists across the state, and this includes over 35,000 consultations for uncomplicated UTIs. There have been over 17,000 consultations for resupply of contraception and over 23,000 consultations for travel health vaccination services. Over a quarter of the 870 approved pharmacists are in rural or regional Victoria, improving access to health care for rural and regional Victorians. The program is overwhelmingly used by Victorian women, it is important to note, with 68 per cent of the consultations provided to women seeking resupply of hormonal contraception or treatment for uncomplicated UTIs. This program will be expanded to include 23 common health conditions and wellbeing services, including resupply of menopause replacement hormones, planned for implementation in late 2026. As I said earlier, we will not oppose the production of these documents. We are confident in the expert medical advice that underpins this program, which prioritises the health, safety and time of Victorian women.

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:57): I will make my comments very brief to allow for other speakers, but I want to support Ms Crozier in this motion. It is a very important motion. I also want to add my support to the comments from Dr Mansfield. No-one here wants to make it harder for any woman to receive the contraceptive pill, or any other pill for that matter, and to put it in such a way as the government have done and pit people against each other is not only part of their form but unfortunately a very sad reflection upon this government. There are very genuine concerns held by men and women right across this state, including medical professionals and the AMA, who put that on the record, and other colleges, who have also expressed a very serious concern for the welfare of women and the unintended consequences of the Premier's actions. I lend my support wholeheartedly to Ms Crozier's motion today and hope that it does, as has been said by other members, actually result in the release of documents, because this government is notorious for not doing so.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:58): I rise to make a brief contribution on the docs motion in Ms Crozier's name. Contraceptives should be as cheap and as widely available as possible – I think all of us in the chamber agree to that. For one in four women in Victoria the pill is their contraceptive of choice, so no doubt the Premier's recent announcement to expand access to the pill was welcome news for that group. From July 2026 participating pharmacists who have gone through additional training will be able to provide the pill to Victorians without a prescription, who will now have increased access to their preferred form of contraception without the need for or the potential cost of a GP appointment.

We know that this builds upon existing policies where pharmacists can resupply an existing prescription. However, as identified in this motion, there are a number of stakeholders that have expressed serious concerns about this announcement. These include the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Australian Medical Association. They say this change undermines established clinical safety standards, raises concerns relating to risk factor screening and is contrary to determinations by the Therapeutic Goods Administration that the pill should only be prescribed by medical practitioners. They rightly note that the initial appointment with a GP to get a prescription presents an opportunity for conversations about sexual health, side effects and safe relationships, something that may be lost in a pharmacy environment that lacks privacy, as Dr Mansfield has indicated. This is particularly important as it gives the opportunity to talk about more effective long-lasting reversible contraceptives, which Australia has a low uptake of compared to other similar countries. When it comes to side effects, they should not be underestimated. They include nausea, weight gain, mood changes, depression, bloating and loss of libido. While they are not as common, more serious health problems are also possible. There is still a lot of stigma about sexual health in the health system, which has historically failed to take women's pain seriously. If you are going to train pharmacists to do the prescribing, then additional training must be comprehensive.

Interestingly, despite a huge gap in the market, we still do not have a commercially viable alternative for men. The closest we have ever seen was in 2011, with an international study on hormonal birth control methods that was eventually stopped because the risks apparently outweighed the potential benefits. Despite 75 per cent of participants being satisfied with the results, some reported mood changes, depression and pain – enough to end that trial. Now, don't those side effects sound familiar?

We understand that there is more likely to happen in this space, with the federal government's recent announcement that from January 2027, concession card holders will be able to access pharmacy-prescribed contraceptives across Australia under a 12-month trial. There will also be advice on national standards for prescribing contraceptives, which is expected to be finalised midyear. Whether it is at a national level or here in Victoria, these kinds of changes work best when everyone is on board. With that in mind, increased transparency is a good step to building that trust, including the briefings, correspondence and documents detailed in this motion relating to expert medical advice.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Evan Mulholland:

> That the bill be now read a second time.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (11:02): I just quickly want to move an amendment that is in Mr Mulholland's name. After discussions with the Greens, we are really keen for this to be retrospective, and this amendment clarifies that. We need to get to the bottom of what has happened to the $15 billion that has been lost to corruption. In principle it should not matter how much that money is; any cent that belongs to the Victorian taxpayer should absolutely be accounted for, and the fact that has just gone unnoticed or potentially has been minimised is immoral and unacceptable. Secondly, there are a lot of things that this $15 billion could have paid for. It could have ended homelessness in Victoria. It could have housed every single one of those people. It could have really helped upgrade our hospital infrastructure that is really needed by Victorians. It could have increased the police presence on our roads – as we all are aware in here, we are 2000 short. That is some of the information on the amendment that I am going to move on behalf of Mr Mulholland, and I ask that it be circulated.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (11:04): I rise to speak in support of this bill. This bill gives IBAC two of the three critical powers it needs to get to the bottom of the Big Build corruption fiasco. First, this bill gives IBAC follow-the-dollar powers so that IBAC can investigate the alleged corrupt conduct of third-party contractors who are the direct and indirect recipients of public funds. This is critical, so IBAC can follow the trail of how the government lost $15 billion in taxpayers money, all the way through to publicly funded projects and into the private sector and organised crime. Secondly, this bill opens up IBAC's hearings to the public. There is an old saying that sunlight is the best of disinfectants, and my medical opinion is that this government needs to work on its vitamin D. Victorians have a right to learn what IBAC learns in real time, not shrouded under an unnecessary veil of secrecy currently imposed over IBAC proceedings. But – and this is a big 'but' – this bill does not expand IBAC's jurisdiction so it has the teeth to thoroughly investigate the full extent of the Big Build corruption. Now, two out of three ain't bad, but the Greens think that this bill can go further, and we will be introducing amendments today to achieve just that. I kindly ask that my amendments be circulated by the clerks.

Currently IBAC can only investigate corrupt conduct involving alleged serious indictable crimes or common-law offending like bribery or misconduct in public office. Unless we expand IBAC's powers, there is a mountain of allegations of corruption that will never be properly investigated and Victorians will be denied the right to know where the $15 billion of their taxpayer money went. Let me outline briefly a few of the allegations from Geoffrey Watson's report that IBAC will not be able to investigate, even if armed with follow-the-dollar powers. The CFMEU sold jobs for cash. Individual underground rail loop workers allegedly had to donate $100 in cash to CFMEU officials for a fabricated charitable cause just to be allocated a shift. With up to 100 workers on a single night shift, that is $10,000 extracted from working people every time a roster turned over. The CFMEU filled health and safety roles with alleged and convicted killers, bikies and drug dealers. Health and safety representatives exist to protect workers' lives in potentially lethal workplaces. The former CFMEU leadership used those positions as rewards, handing them to criminals, alleged and convicted killers and patched members of outlaw motorcycle gangs. These roles paid sometimes $300,000 a year. Most appointees had no qualifications. Many were never onsite, and if they were, they sat in air-conditioned offices watching Foxtel and betting channels.

The enterprise bargaining agreement system became a black market. An EBA is the ticket to work on the Big Build. The CFMEU controlled who got one and who did not. That monopoly power was worth an enormous amount of money, and the former leadership treated it as a personal asset to be sold. A labour hire EBA could cost $500,000. An EBA fixer named Harry Korras was recorded on tape without his knowledge explaining how the system worked. He said:

> So there's a fee to get an EBA. I think the upfront fee is cash. But all you've gotta do, I told ya, pay the boys, make sure they're okay and that's it. That's business.
>
> … Everybody gets to eat.

Organised crime figures were handed EBAs and union-backed contracts. Faruk Orman, an acquitted alleged murderer and close associate of Mick Gatto, with Gatto's name tattooed on his torso, was gifted multiple EBAs, despite having no skills or experience in any of the relevant trades. In one case his application was approved in three days instead of the usual months. He sold the company for $250,000 days later. Senior CFMEU officials enriched themselves with millions in assets gifted by contractors. Senior organiser John Perkovic allegedly received a new house built by a building contractor and former disgraced cop that Perkovic enriched through conferring EBAs and Big Build contracts. There was no written contract and no disclosed price, and it was financed in ways he could not explain. Perkovic received the neighbouring block of land transferred to his daughter for free, not below market value – free. Not a cent changed hands. His accountants later valued the two properties together at $2.8 million. Perkovic also had four luxury cars in his household, including a Range Rover and a BMW, all from contractors who stood to benefit from the CFMEU's apparent monopoly of Big Build contracts.

Let me be clear: it is highly unlikely any of these allegations could be investigated by IBAC if this bill became law today, nor could the majority of allegations outlined in the Premier's 2024 IBAC referral letter. This includes allegations of CFMEU officials advising building companies to hire bikie-controlled subcontractors or to retain underworld standover men, and a person using a state rail upgrade project vehicle to drive to Footscray Hospital when bleeding from a gunshot wound. Our first proposed amendment seeks to expand the definition of 'corrupt conduct' so that IBAC is no longer restricted to investigating serious indictable crimes or common-law offences like misconduct in public office, bribery or perverting the course of justice. This would empower IBAC to identify, investigate and expose corrupt conduct of public officers and dodgy third parties that does not constitute a criminal offence but nonetheless still damages citizens' confidence in public administration.

The bill also makes provision for investigations of conduct occurring before the commencement of the bill as well as allowing IBAC to re-examine matters that it has previously dismissed or referred to another agency. This amendment will align IBAC's powers with those of most other anti-corruption watchdogs across the nation, including the new National Anti-Corruption Commission.

IBAC has been clear about the powers it needs to investigate corruption on Labor's Big Build sites. The Greens are the only party who have brought laws to this place to give IBAC real teeth and close the loopholes preventing it from properly investigating corruption. Do not just listen to us; listen to the experts. The Honourable Anthony Whealy KC, chair of the Centre for Public Integrity, stated:

> The Centre for Public Integrity fully supports IBAC's call for urgent reform. The Victorian agency needs the wider powers possessed by ICAC in New South Wales. Presently it can only investigate 'relevant criminal offences'. It should be able to investigate a wider range of corrupt conduct and breaches of public trust more generally. Secondly it should be able to investigate subcontracting agencies involved in the performance of public functions. Its inability to investigate the CFMEU scandal is a good illustration of its painfully limited jurisdiction. This has to change and change urgently.

Associate Professor Will Partlett at the University of Melbourne, Stephen Charles Fellow at the Centre for Public Integrity, said:

> These amendments give the IBAC needed powers to effectively oversee the misuse of power and money by modern government, which increasingly is done at arm's length by private companies or through grey corruption that might not constitute a crime.

The Big Build scandal has been a wake-up call. So much corruption, which devastates public trust, costs taxpayers billions and poisons the integrity of government, falls outside of what IBAC can currently investigate. What recent events have amply demonstrated is this: whether the corrupt conduct constitutes a criminal offence or not, the scale of the damage caused to our community is the same.

I turn to our second amendment, which provides a clarification of the meaning of 'corrupt conduct' and retrospective application of follow-the-money powers. This amendment seeks to do two things. The first is to ensure that IBAC can apply the follow-the-money powers proposed by this bill retrospectively – that is, IBAC can investigate conduct occurring prior to this provision becoming law. In this place I have heard the concern that this would amount to the retrospective application of criminal laws and that this violates the rule of principle that people should only be punished for conduct that was clearly prohibited at the time they acted. To put it bluntly, this argument is nonsense. Section 162(6) of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 states that IBAC cannot find that someone is guilty of a criminal or disciplinary offence; IBAC cannot punish alleged criminal offenders.

The second thing this amendment seeks to do is clarify that a finding of corrupt conduct is not a finding of criminal misconduct. As I have just noted, section 162(6) of the IBAC act states that IBAC cannot find that someone is guilty of a criminal or disciplinary offence. IBAC has long adopted a conservative interpretation of the IBAC act to avoid breaching section 162(6), given that the definition of 'corrupt conduct' is confined to serious indictable offences or common-law offences. This is precisely why Victoria's anti-corruption commission has until now stopped short of making formal findings of

corrupt conduct. To address this constraint, IBAC put to the Integrity and Oversight Committee that the act could be amended to make clear that any such finding is not a finding of guilt but rather a jurisdictional determination. IBAC's position is that such a change would allow it to report with greater clarity on corrupt conduct, sharpen its prevention-focused recommendations, avoid prejudicing criminal investigations and prosecutions and help rebuild public trust in our institutions. This amendment exists to give IBAC exactly that power.

As a Parliament, we have the opportunity today to start providing Victorians with real answers about the full extent and cost of what has been occurring in their name. I urge all members to do the right thing by the people of Victoria now and into the future by supporting this bill and our amendments, and I commend the bill to the house.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (11:15): I am very pleased to rise to speak today on Mr Mulholland's private members bill, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026. Obviously, last sitting week we debated a private members bill from the Greens, which the Liberal Party said that they would not support because they wanted to think about it a bit more, clearly so they could debate their bill first. I will not get into the back and forth there. I think it probably speaks to who wants to take their name forward in this way.

The legislation that we are debating today is similar but not identical to the legislation we debated in the last sitting week. It stems from a desire of those in this place to suggest amendments to the legal framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, largely, although not wholly, based on recommendations arising out of the report of the Integrity and Oversight Committee, which was tabled in December last year, into the adequacy of IBAC's legislative framework. I say 'largely, not wholly' because there are many things in that report that are not included in the legislative package and the legislative amendments that are brought forward today which I think would help IBAC's functioning in the state of Victoria. There are things in this legislation that the report of the committee did not recommend and expressly recommended against, which I think is worthy of some consideration. Then there are other matters purporting to implement recommendations of the report, which, I think, as I explained in my contribution the last time we debated this, are complex matters that need to be dealt with as a more comprehensive suite of considerations and package. Taking a couple of amendments here and there to try and do justice to the complexity of the adequacy of IBAC's legislative framework I think is an approach and a response that is being driven by a political moment, rather than being driven by a desire to achieve workable, long-lasting and effective reform. Certainly I am firmly in the latter camp of being an advocate for substantive, long-lasting and impactful reform rather than cherrypicking certain aspects of these issues, some of which are in conflict with other things which have been said and leaving a range of other serious and important considerations on the cutting room floor. I think what this approach demonstrates is that the motivating factors here are not genuine consideration of IBAC's legislative framework or the report of the Integrity and Oversight Committee but factors that have been motivated by other means.

I want to just quickly use a bit of this speech to talk about the political context, the allegations of corrupt conduct and what the state of Victoria faces in terms of dealing with these issues. I want to then go into the particular amendments that are proposed in the bill and the subsequent series of amendments that have been circulated by Dr Mansfield and by Dr Heath on behalf of Mr Mulholland. Some of the contribution today will echo the contribution I made in the previous sitting fortnight, largely because the issues remain on the table and have been largely unanswered. I will continue to raise the issues that I have and pose those questions until we get an answer, because as I said last time, I think that the complexity of the legal framework that we are dealing with here and the implications and ramifications of law reform here should be dealt with comprehensively and not cherrypicked like they are today. I think and I hope that we will get to that in the context of the debate.

Obviously there have been very serious allegations of criminal behaviour on construction sites in the state of Victoria which absolutely need to be both investigated and stopped, and that is what the government is seeking to do. I do not know that she intended to make this point, but over the course

of Dr Mansfield's contribution she highlighted the limitations on IBAC's capacity to bring criminal proceedings and the way that IBAC's jurisdiction as an investigatory jurisdiction is one that seeks to investigate allegations of improper conduct, not to pursue breaches of the criminal law. If we have allegations before us that there have been and are breaches of the criminal law occurring in the state of Victoria, the appropriate body to deal with them is Victoria Police. The appropriate body to deal with allegations of criminal activity in the state of Victoria is Victoria Police. No other body, whether it be the standing royal commission, in the form of IBAC, that we have in this state or another royal commission-like process, is going to – because of the way that those processes work – or is empowered with the same prosecutorial vehicles to bring criminal charges and to arrest people. I think that if you are serious about stopping criminal behaviour on construction sites, you call the cops, because what the police can do is arrest people and what the police can do is charge people. Since 2024, when Taskforce Hawk was established, more than 70 charges have been brought against people connected with organised crime and criminal behaviour in the construction industry here in Victoria. If you want to target criminals, call the cops. That is what we do.

The other element which is important here is getting the regulatory framework with the powers and resources to ensure that firms that are not fit to work on these construction sites are off the job. That is what our Labour Hire Licensing Authority has done. That is what the additional powers that we gave the Labour Hire Authority to investigate and remove the licensing arrangements from subcontractors in the construction industry have done – laws, a framework, an agency, a Labour Hire Authority to regulate the labour hire industry here in Victoria, initiated by this Labor government and opposed by the Liberal Party. In 2018 the Liberal Party voted against the laws to regulate labour hire in this state. If it was up to them, there would be no rules in place to regulate labour hire on construction sites in the state of Victoria, because they voted against the authority. Since then, with that authority and with the additional powers granted by this Parliament at the initiation of the government last year, we have seen 170-odd licences revoked from labour hire authorities here in the state of Victoria. Zero of those licences would have been revoked by the Liberals because they did not want to have the authority in the first place. They voted against the Labour Hire Authority, which is out there on construction sites right now, taking licences away from those who are not fit to hold them.

Nick McGowan interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): Mr McGowan, please cease interjecting.

Ryan BATCHELOR: The last point I will make is just to sound a note of caution against the gross exaggeration of some of the figures that we are seeing in the course of this debate and the attribution of figures in their entirety to corrupt and criminal conduct, because the cost escalation is built into the figures that Mr Watson put into that report, figures which he himself said were obviously rough and crude – 'rough' and 'crude' is how Mr Watson –

Nick McGowan interjected.

Gayle Tierney: On a point of order, Acting President, I ask that the house be called to order. You asked Mr McGowan to desist from interjecting, and he has continued to do so.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): I uphold the point of order, and I ask Mr McGowan to cease interjecting. Mr Batchelor to continue without assistance.

Ryan BATCHELOR: There are others who suggest he query the underlying assumptions of those calculations. Some of them are as a result of the increased wages and conditions that have been paid to construction workers in the state of Victoria. So when the Liberals and the Greens get up and say that all of that money is going into the hands of corrupt people, I think what they are actually doing is saying that all of the people who work in the construction industry in the state of Victoria are corrupt.

Nick McGowan interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): Mr McGowan, the President is due back in 3 minutes. Please do not make me get him earlier.

Renee Heath: On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Batchelor is being extremely provocative. I think that he is asking for a response from the opposition. I just want to make sure that he is being truthful.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): Mr McGowan will have the opportunity to respond in his contribution.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I am not sure why the Liberal Party feel that they need to try and silence a critique of their own words, which say that every worker involved in the construction industry is corrupt. That is what the Liberal Party are saying by dint of their own words because of the way that they have characterised those statements and, frankly, some of the contributions from the Greens have said exactly the same thing.

What I will do instead, following that, is get on to the substantive issues that have been proposed in the amendments being brought forward today both through the bill and in the amendments that have been proposed by Dr Heath on behalf of Mr Mulholland and by Dr Mansfield. The substantive amendments in the bill seek to grant IBAC powers to effectively follow the dollar. What they seek to do is to respond to a recommendation in the Integrity and Oversight Committee's report – I think this is the important part – to clarify and streamline the definitions of 'public officer' and 'public body' under section 6 of the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2011.

One of the issues that the Integrity and Oversight Committee has grappled with for many years in various reports is that the way that the IBAC act was drafted in 2012 was quite extensive and convoluted in the application of what constitutes a public body and a public officer for the purposes of corrupt conduct here in the state of Victoria. I should say at the outset that the act itself and the jurisdiction and powers of IBAC do cover instances where someone in the construction industry seeks to improperly influence the decision-making of a public official or a public body. I think that gets lost sometimes in the debate. That somehow IBAC does not have powers to deal with some of the issues that might arise in the course of the way construction projects are operated in the state is simply not true overall, because anybody who seeks to improperly influence the exercise of a public official or a public body's duties is captured by the definitions of 'public body' and 'public officer' and the definitions of 'corrupt conduct' in sections 4 and 6 of the IBAC act. I think we just need to put that in a little bit of context. IBAC has powers here with respect to people seeking to influence the decision-making of public bodies and the decision-making of public officers. One of the challenges that exists is obviously with the complex web of subcontracting arrangements that exist in many areas of government endeavour, not only in the construction industry but also, quite frankly, more broadly across a range of different services. The recommendation of the Integrity and Oversight Committee was:

> That the government seek input and advice from the Commonwealth Government and other stakeholders to clarify and streamline the definitions of 'public officer' and 'public body' under section 6 of the *IBAC Act 2011* (Vic).

The concern I have with the amendments being moved in the substantive bill today is that they do nothing to clarify and streamline. I think the effect of the amendments that we see before us will be to increase the complexity of these definitions. I would like to see a simpler set of definitions of 'public officer' and 'public body' in the act, which then gets to some of the conduct that the amendments purport to seek to get to.

The other thing that we need to do, which is detailed in recommendation 5, in my opinion, is understand where there is a substantial connection between alleged corrupt conduct and government funding. The concern that I have with the particular amendments that Mr Mulholland has brought forward here is that they are not only a bit unwieldy but seek to borrow from concepts that have been

used and acquitted in audit legislation for the purposes of conducting performance audits and import definitions into a set of definitions about 'corrupt conduct', 'public officer' and 'public entities' to deal with a different set of issues. I think what we need here is an actual, proper consideration of all of these definitions as the IOC has recommended. What we have on the face of it in terms of the follow-the-dollar powers I do not think delivers on the recommendations of the Integrity and Oversight Committee and I think will add more complexity into this law. Frankly, I think the operation of IBAC and its investigations could deal with less legislative complexity rather than more.

The other things I want to do in dealing with the substantive act is deal with the questions of the proposal to repeal section 117(1)(a) of the principal act, which deals with public examinations only being held in 'exceptional circumstances'. It is a little bit difficult to understand from the contributions that the opposition has made on this bill what they mean by this particular amendment. It was largely absent from Mr Mulholland's second-reading speech, the justification for this amendment. He barely mentioned this amendment in his second-reading speech, so we as a chamber are not informed as to why the Liberal Party thinks that this is the correct approach. We do not know what the Liberal Party thinks is the right approach. What we do have is some commentary from the Integrity and Oversight Committee on the question of the use of IBAC's coercive powers and the significant coercive powers that IBAC has and whether this exceptional circumstances test for public examination should be repealed. The IOC in its report on the adequacy of IBAC's legislative framework said that:

> Section 143 of the *IBAC Act 2011* (Vic) provides that any secrecy obligations required of public officers, other than Cabinet confidentiality, are overridden by requirements to comply with a witness summons during IBAC examinations. Section 144 of the *IBAC Act 2011* (Vic) provides that a person summoned to provide evidence to IBAC cannot claim privilege against self-incrimination to not provide the evidence.

The committee report goes on to say:

> … it also increases the risk of reputational damage for witnesses, creates complication in balancing the needs for confidentiality and public transparency, and provides less protection for witnesses in comparison to providing evidence in a court of law.
>
> IBAC's examination process is notably different than the court process for giving evidence. Aside from the abrogation of privilege discussed above, submissions have also highlighted that while witnesses in IBAC examinations are able to have a lawyer present, their lawyer is not able to speak, and there is no opportunity for cross-examination to enable a right of reply. It has also been stated that '[e]xhibits used by IBAC lawyers in examinations are not provided to witnesses or their lawyers prior to the commencement of the examination, which is distinctive from court processes.

This is technical but serious, because what it attempts to do is to demonstrate that IBAC public examinations are different to court proceedings in a court of law, which are held in public. Because IBAC's examination processes are necessarily inquisitorial, they necessarily are not determinative of guilt or innocence. But to use those inquisitorial powers the Parliament has granted IBAC exceptional powers to erode the human rights of its witnesses. There is no privilege against self-incrimination in IBAC proceedings. Lawyers cannot speak in the course of public examination. Witnesses are not provided with any material before they are asked questions. They are exceptional sets of powers, which have been recognised as being in conflict with the charter of human rights but a necessary conflict because there are protections in the IBAC act against having a person's reputation unlawfully attacked, which is one of the rights protected under section 13 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

What we have not heard at all from the opposition is why it is necessary to change this element when the coercive powers of IBAC and the rights of witnesses are different to those that they would expect in a court of law – no privilege against self-incrimination, no access to a lawyer during proceedings and no provision of information to witnesses before questions. The opposition should, if they are proposing to take away significant rights from citizens, at least have the courage to explain why, and they have been silent in the second-reading debate so far. I think we deserve answers as to why they think removing this test is compatible with the legal framework – the charter here in Victoria – and necessary, because we know that, for example, the operation of the National Anti-Corruption

Commission has this protection and has adopted Victoria's protections in terms of public examination. Certainly, after detailed consideration on this particular point, the Integrity and Oversight Committee did not recommend that section 117(1)(a) be repealed. To quote from the committee's report:

> While the Committee acknowledges that the exceptional circumstances test in section 117 of the IBAC Act 2011 (Vic) provides a high threshold for holding an examination in public, the Committee considers that this is appropriate when considering the risks associated with IBAC's public examinations, including reputational damage.

We did so in the context of several years of the Integrity and Oversight Committee, particularly in the last Parliament, being concerned about witness welfare in IBAC proceedings – being concerned about the way that those proceedings have affected individuals who are, in some instances, taken off the streets and put into a car and driven away and told they cannot tell anybody about what is happening to them. We know that there have been exceptionally serious consequences from the way that these coercive powers, significant coercive powers, have been used and that certainly there has been at least one tragic incident of someone taking their own life as a result of their involvement in IBAC proceedings. They are serious issues. We should take them seriously. I think that the Parliament deserves to hear a little bit more from the Liberal Party as to why they think that removing section 117(1)(a) is appropriate and necessary, because I just do not think that they have so far.

The last points I want to cover deal with the proposed amendments by Dr Mansfield and the Greens, which largely mirror some of the amendments to their bill that were moved last sitting week, particularly, and this came out in that discussion, including changes to the definition of 'corrupt conduct' by removing a requirement that the conduct constitute a relevant criminal offence in the state of Victoria and in IBAC's jurisdiction. It is something that the IOC talked about. Certainly in her contribution on that bill and even in her contribution today Dr Mansfield talked about why this is necessary to eliminate grey corruption. I think here again it is important to look at that, particularly when we are dealing with laws and particularly when this is the kind of conduct that Dr Mansfield and the Greens are seeking to deal with here, and they have expressly said that these amendments are designed to deal with grey corruption. To quote again from the IOC's report:

> Some scholars have noted that including acts of 'grey corruption' may be difficult to define legally. For example, Professor Tim Prenzler notes that '[t]he term "grey corruption" appears to have utility in political discourse in describing areas of minor corruption and/or unethical but legally ambiguous practice'.

Then the discussion goes on. The committee went on to say:

> The Committee recognises the difficulty in settling on a workable legal test for a definition of serious corrupt conduct in the political context that falls short of a criminal offence, and notes the lack of substantive definition, and even consistent definition between witnesses, on what would constitute 'grey corruption'. The Committee does not consider that the term 'grey corruption' is helpful in guiding reforms to the IBAC's legislation.

The report then goes on to have a more fulsome discussion about some of these issues and also looks at what amendments might be required and necessary to common-law offences of misconduct in public office to more clearly define the elements of that offence that constitute corrupt conduct under the IBAC act. I again hope that we might get some sense of what it means and what kinds of conduct and behaviour are sought to be dealt with by this amendment, which is, to use the words of those who propose it, to deal with grey corruption, when we have considerable evidence from experts and scholars that this is a very difficult definition to make and one that is probably not appropriate in the context of dealing with the legislative framework for our integrity agencies. I think it would be good in the course of the debate to deal with those here.

There have also been amendments moved on retrospectivity. I think we have to be particularly careful as a Parliament in proposing measures which would include a retrospective element, least of all retrospectivity which would date back to the commencement of the IBAC act itself in 2013. I think we need to think very carefully about whether the particular provisions that have been proposed here are appropriate in that context.

There is a lot more that I could say about some of the particular amendments, because it is a particularly complex piece of public administration and law, and I know that in the debate last sitting week people took issue with the seriousness with which I take these matters and the consideration and thought that I give them. But they do matter, because this body has exceptional powers and it abrogates the rights of individuals in a fairly significant way, as I have outlined. That is necessary to eliminate corrupt conduct, but we do need to treat the particular amendments that we are proposing seriously and give them thought. I would much prefer to see a legislative reform package that responds to the Integrity and Oversight Committee report as a whole after proper consideration and after proper and due analysis of the range of issues that the IOC dealt with and also posed as questions to the government to consider. I do not think that the amendments moved by the opposition and by the Greens satisfy that rigour in today's context.

The PRESIDENT: Before I call the next contribution, can I acknowledge in the gallery the Deputy Premier of Queensland the Honourable Jarrod Bleijie.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (11:45): I know we are no longer hosting the Commonwealth Games here, but if we were, Mr Batchelor, my opponent on the other side there, would have received a participation medal – not gold – for deflection. That is as good as it goes, Mr Batchelor.

I would like to make a brief contribution on Mr Mulholland's excellent bill, not a blow-by-blow retelling of shocking allegations – and there are plenty of shocking allegations. We have heard them all in recent weeks, and every day brings a new story of a new outrage. Instead I want to reflect briefly on something more fundamental: the quiet contract between a government and the people it serves and what happens when that contract is broken. Most people are not particularly interested in politics. They want to get on with their lives. Somewhere in the back of their minds they accept that the whole circus is necessary, but they would rather not look too closely at it. They expect the silly political games, the stunts, the initiatives that come and go. They understand there will be disagreements in politics, and they are generally content to let us get on with it. That is the contract: we get on with the business of government and we do not trouble them unduly with it. They put up with elections every few years. They do not necessarily enjoy them – maybe a sausage sizzle here and there. Many of them might even think we are a bit frivolous. Others consider us a necessary evil. But in general the public is content to let the political circus and class carry on as long as we do not cause them direct problems in their daily lives. In fact we are a whole lot less relevant to most people than we might think ourselves. Rightly or wrongly, many of them do not know what is going on in politics. Sometimes they do not even know who we are, much to our surprise.

But that contract can be broken, not by poor policy or even by mistaken decisions – those are expected and to some extent forgiven. The contract breaks when government conduct spills over into something the public cannot look away from – open and undeniable corruption. That is what is going on here. When the cost of major infrastructure projects inflates by billions of dollars, people want to know why. At first they might want to put it down to inflation. Over on the other side there it is always a war or COVID that causes the problem or inefficiency – the usual culprits. But when the scale is so vast they begin to realise something else is going on, and that something is not inefficiency, it is illegality. It is corruption on worksites. It is abuse of the law. It is intimidation in criminal conduct operating in broad daylight. Let me say it plainly and slowly: billions of dollars lost, not to inflation and not to inefficiency but simply to corruption.

We have to thank the Queensland government for actually exposing this extraordinary corruption, and long may it continue, hopefully till November this year. Thank you, Queensland. Thank you to the LNP government in Queensland. What a lot of heroes they are. Yet even then the public is remarkably forgiving. They can be generous with the benefit of the doubt, sometimes more generous than those of us closer to the action believe is warranted. They reason that crime and corruption do happen, and when it is isolated it is not necessarily a deal breaker for their support of a government. But even that benefit of the doubt has been utterly exhausted by this Labor government – for two reasons. First, it is

not isolated. The findings of Geoffrey Watson make that abundantly clear. Federal court decisions confirm it. We see it across field after field of this government's operations. We see it in the politicisation of the public service, where advice is no longer fearless or impartial but politically compliant. The public service has become an extension of the Labor Party. We see it in the awarding of contracts to mates, the appointment of former ministers and MPs to plum positions, the entire nexus of what might be called soft corruption, which has become this government's speciality. And then of course there is the hard corruption, the kind that Geoffrey Watson documented in devastating detail: organised crime on worksites, drug distribution, bikie infiltration, billions in taxpayers funds siphoned away through a system designed to reward Labor's friends, to say nothing of the strippers that were provided for onsite CFMEU workers as well.

The second reason the public's patience is exhausted is the government's response, or rather its total failure to respond with any semblance of integrity. If a government reacts to corruption by condemning it, investigating it without fear or favour, rooting it out and perhaps even apologising, the public may accept that. Mistakes happen. Corruption can infiltrate any system. What matters is how you respond, and that is everything this Labor government has not done. They ignored the warnings for years, they buried what they could, they deflected and denied and they attacked the messenger, launching extraordinary personal attacks on Geoffrey Watson SC and former IBAC Commissioner Robert Redlich, amongst others, people of the highest standing and integrity who dared to shine a light on what was happening. They hamstrung the very bodies that could have investigated. They restricted IBAC's funding. They denied it the powers it asked for, which is precisely what this bill is about. And they have certainly never apologised.

Michael Galea interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Mr Galea, please.

Bev McARTHUR: May I continue in silence, without interjection from over there. The truth is that Labor are too deeply entwined in this to extricate themselves.

Members interjecting.

Renee Heath: On a point of order, President, Mr McIntosh just offended the standing orders by interjecting when he was not in his place. He is a bit further into the backbench there, so I just wanted to bring that up.

The PRESIDENT: I uphold the point of order. Members, interjections are unruly anyway, but if people really need to, they should be doing it from their place.

Bev McARTHUR: Of course Mr McIntosh does not know where he lives, either in this chamber or in his electorate, because he does not live in his electorate. Perhaps he needs to go back to his electorate. The truth is that Labor is too deeply entwined in this to extricate itself. It is entwined with the unions, entwined with the contractors. That is the real reason we had the massive splurge on the Big Build: everything all at once to generate enormous contracts and work for the union allies of the Labor Party, work for your union allies, all funded by the public purse. The poor taxpayers of Victoria are picking up the bill for your political actions. And that is why they cannot get out of it now. They are in bed with these people. It is part of their DNA. It is part of your DNA over there.

They are a government that has been there far too long, so we are taking matters into our own hands. My colleague Mr Mulholland's private members bill would give IBAC the follow-the-dollar powers it has been requesting since 2017, powers to trace public money beyond government agencies and into the hands of private contractors, subcontractors and third parties, where taxpayer funds ultimately end up. IBAC's own commissioner has told this Parliament directly that the current laws are too weak. IBAC's own commissioner – your appointed commissioner – has told this Parliament that the current laws are too weak. They are too weak because you do not want the corruption that you are responsible for exposed. You are a disgrace on that other side, a total disgrace. You have abused the taxpayers of

Victoria. $15 billion worth of abuse – that is what you have done. But this bill is the first step toward restoring the accountability that Victorians deserve. This is the first step. We are just beginning. Look out over there. You are in real trouble. $15 billion has gone down the gurgler courtesy of your corruption, your association with the CFMEU, your abuse of the process and your hatred for the taxpayers of Victoria. You do not care about them. You do not even care about the real workers in this state. You certainly do not care about the people of this state. And you need to be held accountable; you absolutely need to be held accountable in every way we possibly can.

I congratulate the crossbench for getting involved and for making sure that this corruption is exposed and the taxpayers of Victoria have their money properly spent on the infrastructure that is required, not on lining the pockets of criminals. That is what you have done. You have been totally associated with lining the pockets of criminals in this state, and you should hang your heads in shame. You should endorse this bill. We are trying to make your life better. We are trying to help you out by exposing the corruption that has been involved.

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: Yes, the backbenchers should absolutely get behind it, Mr Mulholland. Well, they might not be there much longer, Mr Mulholland, some of those backbenchers. They will be struggling to hold their places. We have got to make sure Mr McIntosh gets the number one position. Poor old Ms Shing might get rolled. But anyway –

Members interjecting.

Bev McARTHUR: Enver will get number one. But here on the opposite side we are interested in the taxpayers of Victoria. We are going to make sure the taxpayers of Victoria get value for their money and make sure that this corruption is exposed, that your abuse of process is exposed and that the $15 billion is found. Thanks again to the Queensland government for making sure this is happening. What a great government they have got in Queensland. We look forward to joining them after 26 November in Victoria.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Stripsearching

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:00): (1269) My question is to the Minister for Corrections. As Ms Payne mentioned yesterday, last week the Human Rights Law Centre, Flat Out and FIGJAM released a report advocating for the end of stripsearching in all prisons. It notes that body scanning technology was supposed to reduce stripsearching yet, Minister, advocates say routine strip searches continue and are often not properly recorded. In a number of prisons – for example, Dame Phyllis Frost – it has been reported to us that scanning machines are in place but staff are not using them regularly. Minister, as you have acknowledged, public reporting on stripsearching is done for youth corrections. Why do you refuse to publish prison-by-prison data on scanner use and strip search use across all adult prisons?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:01): I thank Ms Copsey for the question. I do almost feel like this is the same question as yesterday, although I might just seek your –

The PRESIDENT: I hate paraphrasing people, because I can get it wrong. I think yesterday it was not a question about body scanning being used, so that is why I think it is a different question.

Katherine Copsey: On a point of order, President, if it assists, yes, that is the difference, but also I am asking about public reporting.

Enver ERDOGAN: I thank Ms Copsey for her question and her interest in the report. I want to thank everyone for the work that they do in our corrections system and everyone that reports on our corrections system. I have been very loud and clear in this chamber about my commitment to having a modern and effective corrections system that not only protects the community but also protects our staff and provides a pathway for those in custody to turn their lives around. That is a commitment that I want to see through, and that is why every investment we have made in our corrections system is based on those principles about a modern, effective, humane system. Investments include the investment in new technologies where they are available and where they are applicable, such as body scanning technologies. Dame Phyllis Frost, as Ms Copsey has referred to, does have state-of-the-art airport-style body scanners. But we do understand that prison environments are quite dynamic and there is a need to make sure that there are a range of options for people who are trying to prevent contraband from entering our systems or any other illegal products that may jeopardise the safety and security of staff and prisoners. All methods need to be available, including stripsearching.

Obviously, in terms of the reporting around strip searches, I did answer this question; I reflected on it yesterday. We do have a robust system of reporting for the youth justice system, which is a much smaller system than the adult corrections system – about one-fifteenth of the size of the adult corrections system in terms of the amount of people in the system. We are able to document and provide that information. In terms of the best data collection in terms of not only the demographics in our custodial facilities but body scanning or body searches, I think this is all the kind of data that I have always raised with the department. I do understand there are sometimes operational challenges in collating that data, especially when you are running a system as large as our adult correction system, with 15 premises. But it is something that I am happy to take on notice and raise with the department to see what information we can provide, because I have always been committed to full and transparent disclosure about our system.

We are very proud of the investments we have made to minimise the need for these strip searches where possible, and if there is more or better data that we can collate and provide, of course the department should be looking at doing that. We do that in YJ. It is a lot more complex in the corrections system, so I do not necessarily accept your premise that it is a choice. It is more the complexity. We still have many systems that are paper based, and obviously the reporting of that will be potentially an operational challenge for our frontline staff, who are busy keeping us safe and busy being focused on the rehabilitation of those in custody.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:04): Thank you, Minister, for your contemplation of this. Surely if the government is making the investment in this technology and, as you stated yesterday, you want to see strip searches reduced to the minimum possible, it would stand to reason to check whether they are being used. A key finding of that report – and this goes to the point that you made about trying to intercept contraband and the operational demands that you have just outlined – is that less than 1 per cent of prison strip searches result in contraband being found. Body scanners are available. They are a less invasive alternative. They are less time and resource intensive. Women spoke evocatively at the report launch about the degrading and traumatising impact of strip searches. What justification does the government have for continuing that invasive, degrading and traumatising practice?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:05): I thank Ms Copsey for her supplementary question. I think I answered part of your question in my answer to the substantive – that is, these are dynamic environments and our commitment to keeping contraband out means that we need to have a wide variety of tools. But we do want to minimise the use of strip searches in general, and that is why we have invested in new technologies that mean there is less use of these invasive searches, but they are still an important option for staff, especially as the potential for strip searches, as I understand it, does have a significant deterrent effect. Removing strip searches altogether

will also remove that effective deterrent, so I think it is important. We need to minimise them, but they are a deterrent. I think they do –

Katherine Copsey interjected.

Enver ERDOGAN: Taking up that interjection, they do play an important role as part of the system. I think the goal is to have –

Nick McGowan interjected.

Enver ERDOGAN: I will take up that interjection, Mr McGowan. They most definitely are not a punishment. Taking up the point that Ms Copsey made, it is actually quite burdensome for staff to undertake these searches. The use of technology is more efficient.

Construction industry

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:06): (1270) My question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Minister, it has been revealed that now the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority director-general –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I am sorry; Mr Mulholland, could you start again with the question, please?

Evan MULHOLLAND: It has been revealed, Minister, that the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority director-general Kevin Devlin, the now interim CEO of the Suburban Rail Loop Authority:

> … repeatedly raised concerns with then-minister Jacinta Allan about union misconduct and the abuse of its industrial muscle …

Given his comments, do you still have confidence in Mr Devlin?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:07): Thanks, Mr Mulholland. Interestingly, in your question you do not refer to comments made by Mr Devlin, you refer to reports, and there is a difference. What we have been very, very clear about –

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Harriet SHING: Sources, Mr Mulholland – I will take up that interjection. A source is not a comment, a source is an assertion. A source is an unnamed assertion, and a source is not in fact the first-person account that you are seeking to make it out to be. Let us just be really, really clear again, as the Premier has also been really, really clear: any allegations, complaints, concerns or issues in relation to unlawful, inappropriate, unsafe or criminal activity in or around our construction sites should be reported immediately to the very body that is in a position to be able to take action on it – that is, Victoria Police. There are also a range of other avenues that people can and indeed should pursue. They include the construction complaints referral service and the work of the Labour Hire Authority, which has cancelled 147 licences since its operation. That is the Labour Hire Authority which you opposed. You opposed the legislation that delivered the very body that is delivering on compliance measures around the very issues that you now say require attention. We also have a situation whereby 70 charges have been laid. Victoria Police is doing its work. We have written to the Fair Work Commission asking for it to determine the extent to which it has concerns that are backed up by issues around compliance with statutory obligations to make –

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, I am really waiting patiently, President, but on relevance, I asked the minister whether she still had confidence in Mr Devlin.

The PRESIDENT: I think the problem I have got is that the minister stated that it was not confirmed that that particular statement was made by that particular person. So if the question is on the basis of that comment, it makes it difficult. I will let the minister continue.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Harriet SHING: I will take up that interjection, Ms Crozier. You are saying that Mr Mulholland's preamble was just context. Well, I am indeed just giving you context. What I would also say is that the independent umpire responsible for approving enterprise agreements is required to be satisfied under the Fair Work Act that agreements have been made genuinely and without coercion. We have written to the Fair Work Commission looking for assurances that those matters have indeed been ticked off in accordance with the referral of industrial relations powers that we have made to the Commonwealth. Mr Mulholland, what I would say is unambiguously what the Premier has said: if there are any issues relating to criminal, unlawful, unfair, unsafe or otherwise inappropriate conduct in or around construction sites, then we would urge people to refer them to the relevant authorities. As this relates to a project that is on time and on budget – we have got tunnel-boring machines here; tunnel boring is kicking off in the middle of the year – and is within the scope of the business and investment case of 2021, I would say, yes, Mr Mulholland.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:11): Given the minister was talking about context and added context and whether they were sources or not, I will go to something on the record. During Mr Devlin's tenure on the board of Roads Australia, he contributed to a document that said that major infrastructure projects were being hit by 30 per cent cost blowouts due to entrenched industrial lawlessness and criminality. Given this advice from the SRLA interim CEO and director-general of the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority, do you still stand by your discredited nearly decade-old SRL East costings that it will only cost between $30 billion and $34.5 billion?

The PRESIDENT: I am concerned about how that is related to the substantive question or the answer.

Evan MULHOLLAND: On a point of order, President, the supplementary is perfectly related to the substantive. Both spoke about the SRL interim CEO and his comments.

The PRESIDENT: The minister can answer as she sees fit.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:12): Well, if we are talking about loops, Mr Mulholland, it is not just rail, is it? We are talking about the discourse that you have just tried to turn yourself into as far as this supplementary question is concerned. Again you seem to be confusing the nature of a direct statement of fact or an opinion as expressed and speculation, sources, reviews and reports. I want to be really, really clear with you, Mr Mulholland: the business and investment case – and again I have here a copy of it if you would like to read it – says very clearly that the cost of the Suburban Rail Loop East, between $31 billion and $34.5 billion, is on time and on budget. It is a project that continues to be backed up by Victorians at four elections, by Infrastructure Australia, by the Prime Minister, by the Treasurer, by the infrastructure minister and by this government that will deliver the homes that people need within walking distance to everywhere, from Australia's largest universities to hospitals and their jobs. Why won't you get on board?

Ministers statements: pill testing

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (12:13): I am pleased to update the house on how our pill-testing trial is saving lives and reducing drug harm. The mobile testing service saw record demand at Pitch Music & Arts Festival over the Labour Day long weekend. The service tested more than 670 samples from more than 570 attendees, a higher number than at any festival so far, and importantly, staff at the service had more than 350 harm reduction conversations about the risks of drug use, helping young people make more informed choices about the substances that they take. Concurrently, the Victorian pill-testing service continues to operate the fixed-site service in Fitzroy, ensuring that no matter what events people were attending over the long weekend,

they had access to critical harm reduction advice. Today I was also pleased to announce the final event to participate in the 18-month implementation trial for pill testing, Shadows of Wonderland, on 1 May in Port Melbourne.

At the conclusion of this event, we will begin the important work of evaluating our findings to inform a permanent pill-testing model. But the results so far speak to the importance of this service to date. The mobile testing service has tested more than 2400 samples, engaged in more than 1300 harm reduction conversations and issued five notifications for potentially dangerous substances to rapidly warn festivalgoers through social media and event signage. That is in addition to the more than 2300 samples and 1300 harm reduction conversations delivered in six months at the fixed site. We are proud to be a government that gives people the critical health information they need to make safer choices.

Duck hunting

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:15): (1271) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Outdoor Recreation. Victoria's recreational duck-shooting season commenced this morning. At Lake Leaghur shooters not only illegally shot early, they failed to retrieve wounded birds that plunged into dense vegetation before shooting more. This is also an offence. For wounded birds death is guaranteed, but wounded birds are also often still highly mobile and a net is required to capture them. When Manfred, a licensed rescuer and wildlife carer, reported this illegal activity by shooters to the Game Management Authority, they instead confiscated his net and suspended his licence. These birds are bleeding out from their injuries right now as I speak these words. Now that volunteer rescue efforts have been obstructed, will the minister urgently instruct Game Management Authority officers to search the reeds, or will these birds be condemned to a slow and painful death?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:16): I thank Ms Purcell for her substantive question and her ongoing advocacy in this area. This question will be directed to the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, who will provide a response as per the standing orders.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:17): Thank you, Minister, for referring that on. Rescuers with a game licence can be on the wetlands at any time, unlike unlicensed rescuers, who must wait until 11 am to enter the water. The Game Management Authority is now using a technicality under the Wildlife (Game) Regulations to remove licensed rescuers because they carry a net instead of a gun and a net is not an approved hunting weapon. Let that sink in: legal rescuers are being targeted because they are carrying something to help, not harm, wildlife. So my question for the minister is this: is the Game Management Authority being instructed to do anything they possibly can to keep rescuers off the wetlands so the Premier's state-sanctioned wildlife slaughter is hidden from public view?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:17): I thank Ms Purcell for her supplementary. That will also be referred to the Minister for Outdoor Recreation for a response.

Land tax

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:18): (1272) My question is to the Treasurer. In 2025 the High Court's *Valuer-General Victoria v WSTI* St Kilda Road case ruled that for land tax purposes improvements matter only if they add value at the valuation date; otherwise they are ignored. Yet in LSIO-affected Silverleaves, Phillip Island, the State Revenue Office issued a 2026 land tax notice disregarding the High Court's decision. Why did your government permit 500 land tax notices to be issued which are at complete odds with the law? Did you know and just turn a blind eye?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:18): Ms Bath, I will have to seek some advice on this specific matter from the SRO because, as you would appreciate, the SRO are responsible, not me, for issuing notifications. Your question took issue with valuations. I guess in your question it was not clear to me whether you were referring to SRO processes or valuation processes. If it is valuation processes, then that is not the SRO.

Melina Bath: It is the law – a High Court decision; law.

Jaclyn SYMES: As I said, I can get some advice from the SRO, but your question was a little unclear to me about whether you were seeking information about valuations or seeking information about SRO assessments, because they are two different matters.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:19): Minister, in Silverleaves many property owners did not know to object, while others in identical positions had their 2026 land tax notice reduced once the correct test was applied. For example, owners who objected had their inflated valuations slashed from $775,000 to $175,000 and $340,000 down to $85,000, while residents with the same planning constraints were left unchanged. This is the law, Minister, that the High Court has issued that covers Victoria. Will you now instruct the SRO and the valuer-general to immediately fix all wrongful assessments and repay overcharged Victorians, rather than forcing families to battle your government one by one? These costs are driving people out of their homes.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:20): Ms Bath, that supplementary would have been much more useful in your substantive because it answered the interjections I was making on you that you were unable to respond to in relation to your matter. The question that you asked is particularly in relation to valuations. The valuations are not done by the SRO, but people do have the right to raise objections to valuations. Individuals are encouraged to do that if they consider that there is an issue. I get briefed by the SRO – as recently as last sitting week – in relation to how many errors are made in relation to valuations, and it is very, very small.

Georgie Crozier: You're setting the parameters.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am actually answering the question, Ms Crozier. In explaining how the processes work – and there are two separate processes – I cannot instruct the valuer-general to do anything. It is not in my portfolio, Ms Bath. In relation to individual tax matters –

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, this is the law that has been delivered from the High Court. Minister, you have operation in this space. I ask you: will you now make sure that these landholders are not being overcharged by an arm and a leg on unfair valuations?

The PRESIDENT: That is not a point order. It is close to something else. The Treasurer has been relevant.

Jaclyn SYMES: On a point of order, President, because I am unable to finish answering the question: for Ms Bath's information, the matter of valuations is a matter for the Minister for Planning. She is directing her question to a Treasurer. I am happy to provide a one-pager on land tax and valuations for the member.

Ministers statements: Melbourne City Football Club

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:23): I rise to inform the house that the twinning project has been expanded to the newly opened Ripley unit at Marngoneet Correctional Centre. The Ripley unit, opened in December 2025, is a dedicated structured youth unit for young men aged 18 to 25. The unit provides them with targeted supports and case management to interrupt the cycle of offending. This expansion of the twinning project to Ripley reflects the importance of

rehabilitation programs in strengthening community safety and reducing offending. The twinning project uses a structured, eight-week sports-based model to build leadership, teamwork, resilience and respectful relationships. Participants in this program have a unique opportunity to learn important skills that help improve wellbeing, reduce incidents in custody and support positive reintegration upon release. I am proud that this program is the first in Australia to be supported by the FIFA Foundation, and I take this opportunity to thank FIFA for their support and their involvement in Victorian corrections. Their investment builds on Corrections Victoria's partnership with City in the Community, the charitable arm of Melbourne City Football Club. I know the President is a big fan of Melbourne City as well – so am I. That partnership has seen the twinning project kick off in four prisons across the state, with 113 prisoners completing the program to date. I have had the pleasure of attending several twinning project graduations, and each time I have been impressed by the commitment of everyone involved. I commend all partners, particularly Twinning Project's global CEO Hilton Freund, who joined me at the most recent Marngoneet visit; Melbourne City's head of community Sunil Menon; and the FIFA Foundation for their leadership on this very important initiative.

Liquor regulation

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:24): (1273) My question today is for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. Across regional Victoria community-run rodeos are reporting that increased security requirements imposed by Liquor Control Victoria are substantially reducing the funds available for local charities and community groups. Events such as the Buchan Easter rodeo and the Myrtleford Golden Spurs Rodeo cost around about $100,000 to stage, yet only a small portion of that funding – in some cases not even a tenth – is ultimately returned to the community organisations. Organisers have been told they may need as many as 20 to 26 crowd controllers for these events, despite similar or larger regional events having far lower security requirements. It is clear that these requirements are excessive and diverting thousands of dollars away from local charities, volunteer organisations and vital causes such as bushfire relief. Can the minister explain why these heightened security requirements are being imposed on community rodeos?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:25): I thank Mr Bourman for his question and his interest in this matter. It is a matter that has been raised with me by a number of members of Parliament, but I really do appreciate your bringing it to this chamber. Victoria, as you would appreciate, is home to a world-class hospitality sector that supports jobs and communities right across our state. Most recently we had the grand prix. We had the Australian Open before that – record crowds. But of course at these events, when alcohol is served, it is important that there are commonsense safeguards in place and responsible approaches to the service of alcohol, including preventing under-age drinking, an important part of that obligation and the balanced approach that we do take in our state. But liquor licence conditions are determined by our independent regulator. Liquor Control Victoria works with organisers to ensure conditions are appropriate for the size and nature of events. I know you have raised a couple of events there. I am aware of the Buchan East rodeo – I knew I was going to mispronounce it – because that has been brought to my attention before. I do want to say that I am pleased; I have got good news.

Members interjecting.

Enver ERDOGAN: If those across the chamber could please take a moment, I have some good news. I want to update Mr Bourman, because he cares about his community, unlike those opposite.

Members interjecting.

Enver ERDOGAN: I am pleased to share the advice that Liquor Control Victoria has worked closely with the licensees to review those conditions, and my understanding is that this year there was a substantial increase in expected crowd numbers. There is a larger crowd expected, and that is a vote of confidence in the event that they host. Notwithstanding that, my advice is that following the close

working relationship that Liquor Control Victoria has with organisers, the event this year will require the same amount of crowd control as last year. That is a good outcome: 11 crowd controllers working together with the community. I think regional communities should be able to enjoy these great local events. Being a metropolitan MP, which has been raised, I do care about our whole state. I have been working closely with regional Victoria, and we want to see these events continue to grow but in a way that keeps the community safe with commonsense regulation in place. I want to thank the regulator. I want to thank the organisers, and I thank Mr Bourman. We are all in it together.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:28): I am sure Buchan East will be happy to hear your answer. My supplementary: the government has spoken in the past of reducing unnecessary red tape. Therefore will the government allow regional communities, who have successfully managed these events for decades, to once again manage these events without needless interference from the ideology of city bureaucrats?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:28): I thank Mr Bourman for his supplementary question. I think, Mr Bourman, as I already stated, community events such as these are a really important part of regional Victoria, and I want to see them continue to thrive – and they clearly are if they are expecting larger attendances this year than in past years. Of course we want to support them, but I must say I do not necessarily agree with the unnecessary red tape in this instance. In particular, when we are talking about alcohol being served, it is important that it is done in a balanced, responsible way, and the liquor regulator is I think doing quite a good job of managing those risks and working with organisers to make sure these events can be hosted safely and securely and people can enjoy themselves. There are two rodeos you raised in this chamber; in general, people can enjoy the rodeos in regional Victoria.

Corrections system

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:29): (1274) My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, isn't it a fact that your policies have allowed a convicted paedophile to use Victoria's human rights laws to sue the state over his treatment in a women's prison?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:30): I reject the premise of Mrs McArthur's question. I think the premise is wrong. I think decisions around placements in our corrections system are based around safety and security and that is the approach taken. As the minister, I have been very clear in my expectation that safety and security are always paramount, especially when you are running a corrections system. There are professionals in place that make these decisions and weigh up a range of factors, the paramount one being safety and security.

But your question was more about impending litigation, and you would appreciate that it has never been my practice to comment on individual prisoners in our system, let alone on a matter that is litigated, for a variety of reasons – because of the independence of our courts but also not to compromise the state's position, because we are committed to running a humane and safe system and our settings are designed around that. There have been recent policy updates, which I know you are quite familiar with now and you follow closely, and I back those decisions. I have updated the policy. We have officers and professionals that make the decisions about the appropriate settings. Safety and security will always come first, but I am not going to be commenting on a matter that may be before the courts.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:31): Thank you, Minister. Well, Minister, you are ultimately responsible for the inmates in your prisons. This biological male sexually abused his five-year-old daughter, was housed in a women's prison and is now suing the state after being moved to isolation. A female inmate sexually assaulted by another biological male prisoner has already been paid off in secret. Why does your new policy fail to introduce a blanket ban on convicted sex offenders exploiting the system to enter women's prisons?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:32): There was a bit in that supplementary, Mrs McArthur, but what I will say is that I am never going to be commenting about individual placement of prisoners in this place. What I will do is update the policy where I believe it is appropriate, and I have updated the policy around these matters to make sure that safety and security are the paramount consideration. But I will say that I know the position of those opposite changes quite often, and I have noticed that the opposition leaders have changed a number of times, especially on Sky after dark. I will give credit to Mrs Deeming; she has actually been quite consistent on this matter.

Renee Heath: On a point of order, President, on two different areas: the first is that question time is not an opportunity to attack the opposition. Secondly, the question was clear: why does the minister's new policy fail to introduce a blanket ban on convicted sex offenders? I ask you to bring him back to the question.

The PRESIDENT: Repeating the question is not a point of order. On your first point of order, I was not sure where the minister was going. I do not think he actually started attacking anyone in his commentary.

Enver ERDOGAN: My goal was just to update the chamber on the shifting position of those opposite throughout this debate. I have never shifted my position. My position has always been clear: the safety and wellbeing of prisoners is always paramount in the corrections system. I did direct the department to update the policy, and that has been implemented now. We need to see how it obviously works in the system on the ground, but I understand that it has been quite positive. The focus is safety and security; that has always been my position, and it always will be. For those opposite, their position seems to be shifting every time someone gets up.

Ministers statements: housing

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:34): Most Victorians know that the only way to make housing more affordable is to build more homes – more homes, better homes, closer to services and jobs, and more social homes for Victorians who need them – and you could not find a better example than Labor's Bangs Street development in Prahran. We have built 434 new homes at Bangs Street, Prahran, and over 670 homes are under construction across the Prahran precinct. These homes are all-electric, with a 5-star Green Star energy rating and a 7-star average NatHERS rating. That means they are more affordable to heat and cool all year round.

These homes are so well built that they caught the attention of social housing and sustainable design fans Their Majesties the King and Queen of Denmark during their visit to Melbourne yesterday. As the Victorian Government Architect and I walked the royals around this particular development, we were joined by another more recent convert to the cause of building quality social housing. After her brush with royalty, this social housing justice warrior was full of praise for Labor's home-building work:

> … I actually think it is great that we have things we are proud of. Bangs Street is the best social housing I have ever seen and it was great to see it profiled.

I could not agree more with the Liberal member for Prahran. His Majesty the King of Denmark described the homes at Bangs Street as 'symbolising the journey from outdated stock to the sustainable housing of tomorrow'. That journey to deliver more and better homes to Victorians is one that could never have been started without our Big Housing Build and our Australian-first ground lease model initiative. This is the same ground lease model that the Greens and the Liberals have previously said we should 'cease pursuing'. That is why it was so surprising to see the Liberal member for Prahran praising Labor's new social housing, because if those opposite had their way, it would never have been built at all.

Mental health services

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:36): (1275) My questions are to the Minister for Mental Health and relate to the recommendations of the royal commission into mental health services. Following the alleged murder of a mental health patient by another patient at the Swanston Centre in Geelong, serious concerns have been raised about the building's design, which creates serious risks due to the layout and lack of safe spaces. Meanwhile, violence against mental health workers continues to escalate, and little attention is being paid to patient-on-patient violence and the impact on patients' families and staff. The royal commission made clear recommendations to improve safety, infrastructure and working conditions in our mental health services. Minister, what is the government doing to ensure the safety of both mental health workers and patients in Victoria's mental health facilities, in line with those recommendations?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (12:37): Thank you very much for your question, Mr Ettershank. These are really important issues that I take incredibly seriously as the responsible minister. I will come to the issues around workforce and consumer safety in a moment, but I obviously want to begin by offering my deepest condolences to the family and loved ones of that individual in the incident that you have raised. I am not going to add anything beyond that. That is a matter that is under investigation currently. It is obviously incredibly distressing for everyone involved, but it is not my intention to compromise any of those investigations by making any comment on the specifics of the Barwon Swanston Centre incident.

On the broader questions around occupational violence and consumer safety, these were matters that, as you are aware, the royal commission went into in some detail, and there has been a comprehensive program that has been run through both my department and Safer Care Victoria around making sure that our acute and subacute mental health wards are as safe as they need to be to ensure that there are not adverse outcomes for either consumers or staff. There has been significant work done in upgrading existing facilities, including gender segregation in a number of our acute facilities, and there have also been many upgrades to infrastructure.

I can point to a number of projects where the improved and new infrastructure builds are having a significant impact in a good way on the levels of occupational violence, which are coming right down. I would give the example of the Sunshine Hospital mental health facility, the new 52-bed facility, where staff are reporting that, because it is a more therapeutic physical environment, the incidence of occupational violence is coming right down. The mental health and AOD hubs in our emergency departments are another example of where changing the way in which those consumers are triaged through the system is having a really good impact on levels of occupational violence and consumer safety. Of course there is more to do, and both I and Minister Thomas have been having ongoing conversations with both the workforce and unions about the importance of continuing to focus on bringing down levels of occupational violence right across the health system, and I am committed to continuing that work with Minister Thomas.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:40): Thank you, Minister, for that response. Another key recommendation of the royal commission was to address the chronic lack of appropriate supported accommodation for people living with mental illness. While the minister's response yesterday to the question from Dr Mansfield indicates that there is some progress, the lack of beds, combined with the lack of appropriate supported accommodation, is seeing patients being discharged from hospitals into homelessness. We are aware of recent referrals that specifically discharged a patient to a friend's couch, to a shopping centre, to a hotel for three days, to the front door of the local Salvation Army service and, I think perhaps most shockingly, to a 'safe local park'. Minister, how is this consistent with the government's commitment to fulfilling recommendation 25 of the royal commission, and what interim measures are being undertaken to address this issue?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (12:41): I thank Mr Ettershank for that supplementary question. I am not sure how it relates to the substantive, but I am happy to give my best effort in the 50 seconds that I have got available for what is a pretty comprehensive question. In addition to the answer I gave Dr Mansfield yesterday about the progress towards the royal commission's recommendation around the supported housing allocation for those suffering mental health challenges, I would also point to the work of a number of my colleagues and the government's effort across the board to increase the number of social housing and community housing opportunities across the state. We have, through the Big Build and through the work of Minister Shing, seen a massive increase in the number of homes available. Of course we know that there is much more work to be done, and that will continue to be a focus of not just me but many other ministers in the government.

Government invoices

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:42): (1276) My question is to the Treasurer. The Victorian Auditor-General has just confirmed that 259,000 invoices sent to the Victorian government, valued at just under $3 million, were paid late during 2024–25. Minister, why can't your government pay its bills on time?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:42): I thank Mrs McArthur for her question. Mrs McArthur, which report are you referring to? Sorry, I missed the start of your question.

Bev McArthur: The Auditor-General's report that was tabled.

Jaclyn SYMES: Today? I will have to have a look at the report tabled today and confirm the details that you have put to me. I have not had a chance to be briefed on the report that was tabled today. Also, when we talk about financial payments, that is generally a matter for the Minister for Finance, not the Treasurer, as you would appreciate. I am continuing to get questions for matters that are for other ministers. I am always happy to help. I am actually not sure if I am always happy, but I always appear to be willing to help facilitate misdirected questions. But I can confirm, with the information that I have at hand, that I have been asked about a report that was tabled today and I have not had a briefing on that report, which would also show you that I am not the relevant minister.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:44): Thank you, Treasurer. You are in charge of the exchequer, I thought. Under the government's fair payments policy, businesses that are not paid on time are entitled to penalty interest. How much penalty interest has been paid relating to these more than a quarter of a million late invoices, remembering you would have authorised for this report to be tabled?

The PRESIDENT: The issue here is about a supplementary question when a minister or, in this case, the Treasurer has answered that it is not under her remit. In line with the minister's previous answer, I will call her to answer as she sees fit.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:45): As I indicated in my answer to your substantive question – when I was asked, through an interjection, 'Were you briefed on the report?' – no, I was not, which would probably imply that I am not the relevant minister, because the relevant ministers for VAGO reports are briefed ahead of them being tabled. But further to your question, it was also a concerning feature of Ms Bath's question, who asked if I would direct the valuer-general and if I would direct the SRO. You are saying, 'Would you direct the Auditor-General on when they can table and cannot table a report?' The Auditor-General is an independent officer, who tables his reports in the Parliament when he sees fit.

Bev McArthur: On a point of order, President – Minister, you are the Treasurer. You are responsible for the money being expended by your government. Do you not agree that you should pay your bills on time? Do you pay the penalty interest, and how much is it?

The PRESIDENT: That is not a point of order.

Bev McArthur: It was a very good question.

The PRESIDENT: Even if it was a question, you only get to ask one.

Jaclyn SYMES: Mrs McArthur, DTF were not examined in that report, therefore I was not briefed prior to it being tabled. I am sure I will have an opportunity to go and get briefed on it, but I do need to repeat for the clarity of the house that, as Treasurer, I do not authorise the Auditor-General on when he can and cannot table reports. It is terrifying that the opposition continue to think that with the exercising of powers that is how it should be done.

Ministers statements: housing

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:47): I unfortunately did not get the opportunity to discuss housing with the royals this week. However, I would love to talk about housing in this chamber, because I would love to inform the chamber about how we are helping Victorians to buy their first home. Victoria, as we know, despite those opposite being very upset about it, comfortably leads the nation in first home buyers, with almost 40,000 new loan commitments in the last year – 11,000 more than New South Wales and 16,000 more than Queensland. It does not happen by accident. We have supported first home buyers through the first home buyers fund, which was so successful the Commonwealth has rolled it out nationally. The Treasury portfolio works very closely with the Minister for Housing and Building, the Minister for Planning and other portfolios to provide concessions and exemptions on stamp duty for first home buyers. Our foreign purchaser duty ensures that first home buyers are not losing at every auction to cashed-up foreign investors, and we are making buying a home fairer by getting rid of underquoting, requiring sold prices to be disclosed and removing the need for buyers to spend thousands on multiple costly building and pest inspections.

Most importantly, on this side of the house, we know that the best way to support first home buyers is to build more homes. We are the first in the nation for housing approvals, housing commencements and housing completions. We have completed 54,000 homes in the last year alone, almost 10,000 more than New South Wales. That is almost 150 new homes every single day. Some people out there just want to price out first home buyers and advocate for tax cuts that would push up the price of homes for Victorians while lining the pockets of investors. Only this government can be trusted to build more houses so that young families can afford to live where they want. Melbourne is the most affordable capital city in the country. The Allan Labor government is committed to keeping it that way. And just a reminder: we are the world's most livable city.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:49): Minister Tierney will get answers, in line with the standing orders, from the Minister for Outdoor Recreation for Ms Purcell.

Constituency questions

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:50): (2232) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education in the other place. Recently the Allan Labor government announced a maintenance blitz for 55 more schools across our state. This is a $35 million investment through the planned maintenance program, and it is all about ensuring that Victorian students are learning in modern, high-quality environments. These practical works, ranging from painting and window replacements to upgrading emergency shelters, make a real difference to the daily experiences of

students, teachers and the broader school staff. Our government has a proud record in education, having invested $18.5 billion into our public schools and delivered 121 brand new schools since we have been in government. In the Northern Metropolitan Region our schools are integral to our communities. These classrooms are where the next generation learn and grow, and it is vital they remain in the best possible shape. My question to the minister on behalf of parents of publicly educated students is: what schools in my electorate will benefit from these latest maintenance work announcements?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:51): (2233) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. Farmers and agricultural businesses in western Victoria are heavily reliant on consistent diesel supply to maintain their operations, particularly during seeding and harvest periods. My constituents are increasingly concerned about the current uncertainty around global fuel supply chains. Noting the powers available to the Victorian government under the Fuel Emergency Act 1977, can the minister outline what contingency planning is in place to ensure continuity of fuel supply to regional agricultural communities in the hopefully unlikely event that the current situation were to deteriorate? What discussions are taking place with federal counterparts, and has the government yet given specific consideration to how essential primary production activities would be supported should a sustained disruption to liquid fuel imports occur?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:52): (2234) My question is to the Minister for Planning. The City of Boroondara, which manages around 60,000 street trees, has raised concerns with my office about achievement of the state's canopy cover goals. With little protection for trees on private land and increased development to provide necessary housing, urban canopy is under pressure. In relation to street trees, the council is concerned about how we strike a balance for electrical line safety without undermining the state's own canopy and heat resilience goals. Council says reduced clearances can be safely achieved and that protecting urban canopy is critical to cooling our suburbs, reducing heat stress and supporting biodiversity. Minister, at a time when Victorian communities are being asked to adapt to worsening extreme heat and drought, what is the government doing to achieve its own tree canopy targets and keep our suburbs cool, green and livable?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:53): (2235) My question is to the Minister for Education. How is the Allan Labor government helping families in the Southern Metropolitan Region with the cost of their kids' schooling? No child should miss out on activities or wear inadequate uniforms at school because of the cost. Labor understands this and we are helping out. Through the affordable school uniforms program we have provided 500,000 uniforms for students who need them since the start of 2024. I have had some chats to some of the parents at a couple of schools in Southern Metro who absolutely think this program is fantastic. They value the role that school uniforms play. They think it is great for their kids, but they are concerned about the cost. The affordable school uniforms program is helping with those costs and making sure that parents are supported with their kids going to school – another way the Allan Labor government is helping with the cost of living.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:54): (2236) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and I ask: Minister, will you direct the Level Crossing Removal Project to urgently revise its traffic management plan for Aspendale and ensure future works are scheduled during school holidays or at times and in a manner that do not endanger the community? This week's closure of Station Street, Aspendale's only access road, caused gridlock, safety risks and near misses outside four schools and two kindergartens, including Yarrabah School, which supports 198 students with additional needs. Residents reported minimal traffic management, blocked

emergency access and unsafe conditions for children and families. Minister, will you ensure this does not happen again and explain why these works were not scheduled during school holidays, when risks and disruption would have been significantly reduced?

Eastern Victoria Region

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:55): (2237) My question is for the Treasurer, who is not here. One of my constituents in eastern Victoria has contacted me about the fuel shortages that have impacted him in Sale. My constituent was deeply concerned to see that his local service station in Sale had run out of 91-octane fuel. Regional constituents such as this man have been at the forefront of these shortages as fuel deliveries are being prioritised for Melbourne. My constituent asks: what is the government doing to ensure that sufficient fuel supplies flow to Sale during this fuel crisis and that further shortages are avoided?

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:55): (2238) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Emergency Services, Minister Ward. In the latest round of the volunteer emergency services equipment program, how much funding has the Allan Labor government delivered to emergency services across my community of Southern Metro? The Allan Labor government takes our emergency services seriously. From first responders to crisis responders and other critical services that families and communities rely on, the Allan Labor government has a proud proven record of backing our volunteers with record investment, acknowledging that strong, well-equipped emergency services save lives. The volunteer emergency services equipment program is a clear demonstration of that commitment, working hand in hand with local groups to co-fund critical upgrades to new equipment. That is why we are investing an additional $62 million in funding the VESEP grants. That means more funding for equipment, vehicles and facility upgrades. I am proud to be a part of the Allan Labor government, which has invested so much in these services over the past few years.

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:56): (2239) My question is to the Minister for Children. Many San Remo residents are deeply concerned about the Allan government's decision to locate a day care centre on Shetland Heights Road. They say that the minister's choice is unsafe, it is noisy, it lacks adequate parking and it does not meet community needs. Locals strongly argue the government ignored a clear direction and preferred location for the San Remo Primary School and preschool precinct. The co-location would have delivered – will, should deliver, if the government agrees to it – efficiency and convenience for working families. The government refused Bass Coast council's application on behalf of San Remo Preschool, which sought to expand its facilities to meet the demand for three- and four-year-old kinder. Overwhelmingly the feedback on the current chosen site is it is unsuitable. Minister, will you commit to working with the San Remo community to establish a childcare centre in a location that best serves the communities now and into the future, knowing also that we exist in a childcare desert in this region?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:57): (2240) My question today is to the Minister for Local Government. Public libraries are the hubs of our communities. They offer so many services to local people, from baby and children story times to IT literacy for older residents and all sorts of things in between. They need sustainable funding to ensure they can continue to provide all their vital services while also growing to meet the changing needs of our communities. Minister, will you provide needs-based funding for libraries across my electorate in places like Manningham – funding that is based on population size and takes into consideration things like socio-economic disadvantage and population dispersion and also ensures that there is a no-worse-off safeguard?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:58): (2241) My question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and it relates to the Allan Labor government's new anti-price-gouging laws for petrol. We know that the role of any state government to influence oil prices is very limited, especially with the current geopolitical crisis in the Strait of Hormuz. However, there are steps that can be taken. I do wish to ask the minister how my constituents in the south-east can benefit from initiatives such as the anti-price-gouging laws, which require retailers to notify a day in advance of the maximum prices they will set for the following day – retailers can then reduce the price but not increase it above that cap – and also the Service Victoria app functionality of Servo Saver, which has already been used 265,000 times since its launch last year. Minister, how are these initiatives going to support my constituents in the south-east with the cost of living in this time?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:59): (2242) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Community groups in my electorate have contacted me to raise concerns around the inadequate access at Watsonia station. Access to the station is currently provided via a ramp from a pedestrian bridge over the rail line, and residents have raised concerns that this ramp is not compliant with modern disability access standards. There is currently only a single access route, which the Banyule City Council has raised safety concerns on, revolving around crime prevention through an environmental design perspective, as passengers leaving the trains have limited options to safely exit the station area. At a time when we are doing major works in the area, this is a really great opportunity to address this, so I would ask the minister if he will investigate and look into this and actually act on and provide proper disability access and safer entry for my constituents.

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (13:00): (2243) My question is to the Premier regarding the desperate need for fuel in northern Victoria. Looking at the Servo Saver app, it is clear that the further you are from Melbourne, the higher the price of fuel is. Ms Benham was suspended from Parliament yesterday after asking questions about the need for fuel. The Premier accused the National Party of making alarmist claims when the facts are that Robinvale ran out of fuel. The New South Wales government is taking action to deliver fuel where it is most needed and to prioritise the vital agriculture and freight industries. The Victorian Farmers Federation is right to encourage our city cousins to swap their cars for public transport to save fuel and ensure that our farmers can keep planting, harvesting and producing food. Unlike metropolitan Melbourne, in many areas public transport is simply not an option. Regional areas need fuel for transport to look after livestock, keep food on our tables and transport stock to supermarket shelves. As the federal government releases more emergency reserves, what stance is the state government taking to ensure that Victoria gets our fair share of fuel, and what is the Premier doing to address local distribution issues and ensure that regional areas like Robinvale and Wedderburn can access fuel?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (13:01): (2244) My question is to the Minister for Housing and Building. Not only is the Allan Labor government's demolition of Melbourne's public housing towers displacing residents, it is also stripping away free shared community spaces that people rely on. At 12 Holland Court and 120 Racecourse Road in Flemington, residents have long had free access to onsite community rooms to gather for women's groups, host events and celebrate cultural events. Those spaces are now closed. Residents are being pushed to use alternatives like the Djerring hub, which charges higher fees which most community groups cannot afford, even at discounted rates. Minister, constituents are contacting my office in desperation, because for them affordable and accessible community spaces are protective factors against isolation, loneliness and ill health. These spaces also strengthen social ties. Minister, what are you doing to

ensure public housing tower residents can still access shared community spaces during ongoing relocations and public housing demolitions?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (13:02): (2245) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the minister commit to funding safety upgrades for the intersection of Kilmore-Lancefield Road, Main Road and High Street in Lancefield in the 2026–27 state budget? There is a junction in Lancefield where Main Road, the C325, the Kilmore-Lancefield Road, the C324, and High Street all meet. The intersection is not signalised and has limited pedestrian crossing points, and the layout is confusing for drivers, making it a serious safety risk. There have been at least five reported crashes causing injury at the intersection in recent years, with many more near misses observed by community members but absent from the official statistics. Macedon Ranges Shire Council have requested that the Department of Transport and Planning undertake a safety audit of the intersection, and I support their call and urge the minister to allocate funding in the next state budget for major works to upgrade this intersection. After a decade of Labor neglect, Victoria's regional roads – *(Time expired)*

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (13:04): (2246) My constituency question is to the Minister for Housing and Building, and it relates to the need for crisis accommodation in the outer suburbs in my electorate. There is currently a proposal to build a crisis accommodation facility for women in the City of Hume, thanks in part to a generous donation of land by private sector philanthropist Jamie Gray. There is no established women's crisis shelter in the City of Hume, which is home to more than 270,000 people, and so it is a welcome project being supported by the Greenvale Residents Association as well as Hume City Council. With the support of the community, council and the private sector, the gap remaining is from your government, with council highlighting in particular a lack of state funding for staffing. Will the minister act to provide the necessary state funding so that this much-needed facility can proceed? I would note that this may be for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, but there are a lot of administrative orders that are quite complicated.

Sitting suspended 1:05 pm until 2:06 pm.

Bills

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:06): I rise to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026 on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. If I am honest, I feel like I am getting deja vu from the number of times we have stood in this place and talked about legislative reforms for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, known as IBAC. But there is good reason for these plentiful motions, amendments and private members bills. Non-government members are using all the tools that we have available to us to try and get government to listen to voters and finally act on integrity. Instead of admitting fault in response to reports of $15 billion missing from Victoria's major projects thanks to corruption, we have a Premier who ran a smear campaign on a respected integrity expert and threatened to end a press conference. At the same time, it came to light that the Premier sent a letter to IBAC asking them to investigate CFMEU corruption back in 2024, knowing they lacked – and continue to lack – the powers to investigate. And as recently as this week it came to light that there were other warnings about serious wrongdoing at the time. So the story continues, as does the government's woeful response. The response on the issue of corruption has been disappointing. There seems to be a real fear of owning up to fault and responding with real action. It is not about debating

exact figures on how much was lost; it is about Victorians who want to know how this corruption was allowed to occur and want IBAC to have the powers to actually investigate it. That is why, as non-government members facing a government who does not seem to want to take transparency seriously, we are forced to act.

I thank members of the opposition for bringing forward this bill for debate today. It takes important steps towards giving IBAC the powers it needs to more meaningfully address corrupt conduct. The bill expands the jurisdiction of the commission by inserting a new 'associated entity' definition. This will capture a broad range of entities and is in line with recommendation 5 of the inquiry into the adequacy of the legislative framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission. As a member of the Integrity and Oversight Committee, which oversaw this inquiry, these are issues that I am deeply familiar with and recommendations that I was proud to support in the final report of the inquiry. This recommendation was that IBAC's commissioner be given powers to investigate corrupt conduct of third-party and private subcontractors 'where there is a substantial connection between alleged corrupt conduct and government funding'. These are known as follow-the-dollar investigatory powers. Without these powers there continues to be a glaring omission in our anti-corruption laws for what is a common practice in the construction industry: the use of third-party and private subcontractors. This bill will also remove the requirement that examinations are generally to be held in private. This was an issue that was considered in the inquiry; in fact it was almost a recommendation. While I supported the inclusion of a recommendation related to public hearings, funnily enough, opposition members of the Integrity and Oversight Committee did not support it. So today I do welcome the opposition's change of heart on this issue.

The exceptional circumstances test for hearings to be held in public settings is far too high a bar. This means that only in a tiny minority of cases, with circumstances that are highly unusual and quite rare, would a public hearing be held. As I have mentioned in this place before, this issue is not new here in Victoria or nationally. The debate on the idea of public hearings only in exceptional circumstances came to a head with the establishment of the National Anti-Corruption Commission, who were set up with a similar requirement. At the time a survey by the Australia Institute found that less than one in five Australians believed the commission's ability to hold public hearings should be restricted to when it should be in the public interest and in exceptional circumstances only. This was consistent across all voting intentions. While I appreciate the need to be sensitive to the high burden placed on someone from an investigation, there also is a need for public interest and the public at large to have faith in government institutions. More public hearings will allow people to see these processes at work and hopefully build their trust in the existence of systems to identify and to respond to corrupt conduct.

I understand that the Greens will be moving two amendments on this bill relating to retrospectivity and clarifying the consequences of a finding of corrupt conduct. We support these amendments as they further speak to the recommendations of the inquiry and a proper investigation into corrupt conduct in Victoria's Big Build. Now more than ever Victorians need and deserve fit-for-purpose integrity bodies, so let us expand IBAC's powers and resource it accordingly.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:12): I rise to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026, a bill which seeks to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011. This is an important and complex area of law that demands of us careful consideration and attention to detail. The Integrity and Oversight Committee has conducted its inquiry into the adequacy of the legislative framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and has released a report that has considered many aspects of the law which governs it. It has laid out the considerations, concerns and challenges that would need to be navigated in order to enact various changes to the act. If the opposition had acted with the care, the good sense and the diligence required to amend this act, they would have heeded the IOC's report. However, evidently, based on the bill that is before us today, they have failed to do that. This bill, as a result, has glaring problems that are of considerable concern.

A series of questions do remain unanswered about how these amendments operate and the impact that they would have on the rights of the individual within the act's broader overall function. Whilst at face value these amendments would meet some of the broad recommendations of the IOC's report, this is not merely a box-ticking exercise, nor should we be treating the commission and its objectives in that manner. These amendments would leave many issues unresolved and unanswered from the report. Simply put, the amendments within this bill are underdone.

I note my colleague Mr Batchelor has already extensively gone into detail on the action that has been taken by this government as a response to revelations of corruption in the construction sector. Whilst I do not wish to reiterate or go over his remarks again, I will note that those matters which have been referred to Victoria Police have resulted in Taskforce Hawk, which has made 17 arrests and nearly 70 charges against individuals. Indeed as well we have seen the action taken by the Labour Hire Authority which has led to the cancellation of over 174 licences – action which would not have been able to have been taken by the Labour Hire Authority had the Liberal Party got its way when it tried to block and stop that legislation in the Parliament.

Regarding this bill, there are serious concerns about the way in which this bill has its purpose and the consequences the amendments would entail. The most significant flaws are the failure to engage adequately with that IOC December report, disregarding the numerous important submissions, including those of IBAC itself, and ignoring recommendations that directly address the safe and effective operation of the act. As a result, these amendments risk introducing legal uncertainty, reducing safeguards and undermining the core objectives of anti-corruption oversight.

The amendments in this bill seek to expand IBAC's jurisdiction to allow it to follow the money. It proposes giving IBAC powers equivalent to those of the Auditor-General to investigate contracts and subcontracts. What it fails to consider, though, is that the Auditor-General's powers are focused on enabling them to undertake performance audits, which are important functions to ensure that key government functions can run effectively. Entities such as Victoria Police are much better placed to investigate and address allegations of criminality and industry-specific conduct.

Unfortunately some members appear to have failed to carefully review this report's findings. By seeking to repeal section 117(1)(a) of the IBAC act, this bill would effectively be throwing out the IOC's work by overruling the provision that public hearings should only occur in exceptional circumstances. The IOC carefully considered these issues and concluded that this amendment should not be pursued. Given how much, how often and how frequently IBAC is found to be quoted by the media, by commentators and indeed by members here, it is perhaps understandable that we forget that the exceptional nature of IBAC's powers is there for a specific, exceptional purpose. As legislators, we must seriously consider the implications of these powers and any changes that we may seek to make to them.

To quote the IOC's report on its IBAC inquiry:

> IBAC's examination process is notably different than the court process for giving evidence. Aside from the abrogation of privilege discussed above, submissions have also highlighted that while witnesses in IBAC examinations are able to have a lawyer present, their lawyer is not able to speak, and there is no opportunity for cross-examination to enable a right of reply.

It continues:

> It has also been stated that '[e]xhibits used by IBAC lawyers in examinations are not provided to witnesses or their lawyers prior to the commencement of the examination, which is distinctive from court processes.

The report makes clear that IBAC examinations are not the same as trials. The standard of guilt, as a truth-finding exercise, is lower than the reasonable doubt threshold of a criminal court proceeding. We must be cognisant of these differences, the implications of IBAC's powers and the interaction that they can have on an individual's human rights, in particular where that intersects with the charter of human

rights, including the right to privacy and reputation and the right of the individual not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked.

When we are considering how we will change the IBAC act and when we consider broadening the prevalence of public hearings, the scope of who is able to be called before them in the course of an examination or any other significant amendment, we must consider the set of powers that IBAC has and the impact that these changes could have on witnesses. We have seen already what can happen when this process goes wrong. Just two weeks ago the IBAC Commissioner publicly apologised for the conduct of IBAC under a previous Commissioner, which gravely victimised and traumatised a woman who had bravely raised a complaint and had that complaint then egregiously mishandled.

The exceptional circumstances test of the act, which this bill seeks to remove, is intended to weigh the risks involved in a public examination against its merits. However, this bill, as proposed, does not change the test or the criteria in which the exceptional circumstances would be deemed to have been met; rather the bill removes section 117(1)(a) wholesale. The legislation, as it already exists, is careful, deliberate and purposeful in how it protects the rights of individuals against the potential adverse consequences of public examinations. The committee examined this question, considered the issue carefully and then made the finding that while the exceptional circumstances test in section 117(1)(a) of the IBAC act exists, which provides for an examination in public, it is critical to consider the risk associated with IBAC's public examinations. This includes reputational damage. It is for these reasons that the IOC's report recommended that section 117(1)(a) and the exceptional circumstances test for public examinations should be retained. The bill does not consider safeguards to ensure witness welfare and avoid prejudicing criminal proceedings. IBAC has also previously stated that the confidentiality of its investigations is indeed in many cases critical to preventing compromise. This bill does not address those competing interests: reputational damage, public interest, safety or indeed the IBAC's own powers to undertake its role effectively.

This is a complex area of law, and the Integrity and Oversight Committee has done a great deal of work to sift through this issue and resolve the challenges in this space. The amendments in this bill, by contrast, ride roughshod over the work and findings of that report, picking and choosing what it accepts and what it ignores, which is to say that the issues it does not even try to resolve are the implications and the consequences for human rights that would eventuate as a result. There was significant work that went into this report, and the amendments before us today frankly ignore a lot of it and indeed in some cases run completely contrary to it.

Similarly, we saw the Greens move a bill that also ignored the committee's recommendations and sought to remove the exceptional circumstances test. That bill also sought, on the face of it, to implement recommendation 24 of the report to empower IBAC to make findings of corrupt conduct. However, it then ignored the indelibly related recommendations 25 and 26 of the report as they pertain to furthering procedural fairness requirements and expressly state that findings of corrupt conduct do not amount to findings of guilt. That bill would have trampled on the protections for witnesses that the IOC recommended. This bill ignores the recommendations of the IOC to protect witnesses from harm caused by public hearings by retaining section 117(1)(a).

What the government is doing by comparison is actually carefully considering and reviewing the findings and the recommendations of the IOC's report. It will provide a comprehensive response to all of these issues so that when amendments are made to an exceptionally complex piece of law that may have the potential to have the effect of abrogating the rights of citizens, including their fundamental human rights, any steps taken will be done so in a very careful and considered way. This government is acting prudently. By contrast, the bill before us today is a half-baked affair focused on being seen to do something more than to achieve good reform through effective, considered legislation.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:23): I rise to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026. I think in essence

every Labor member of Parliament has a choice today – whether they are serious about getting to the bottom of organised crime and corruption on state-run building sites or not and whether they are for maintaining the integrity of government or not. There are clear questions that have to be answered that can only be answered with expanded powers for IBAC if we are to fall short of having a royal commission, which is probably the ultimate destination for these matters. The Liberals and Nationals want to pass this law to provide Victoria's chief anti-corruption watchdog with the powers it has asked for and needs to allow it to chase down every single taxpayer dollar rorted under the Allan government's watch. Premier Allan and Labor must choose: you either support our laws and strengthen Victoria's anti-corruption laws or you vote to continue the cover-up.

There have been a range of contributions today. I am not going to even attempt to paraphrase them, but I will address them in kind. There have been various claims of 'The best place for this is the police. If you have any knowledge of crime, report it to the police.' What happens if the state does not report it to the police? What happens then? What is the use of the police then? We know from the Metro Tunnel that crimes were not reported to the police. What is the point of referring something to IBAC if you were all along conscious of the fact IBAC could not investigate the matter to the fullest extent?

In some ways I think, logically, the Premier, whether she knows it or not, actually agrees with us, because surely when she referred this matter to IBAC her intention was for IBAC to get to the bottom of it. Surely it was not as contrived as her knowingly saying, 'I'm referring it in a way that is so constrained that it will not be able to get back to it.' When the Premier referred it to IBAC, there was no discussion of the complexities of this matter. There was no discussion of human rights issues. Nothing was complex about it then. Surely the intention was to get to the bottom of it, unless the level of disingenuousness is beyond imagination. So she wants IBAC to address this, which means she must want these powers. If she was concerned about all the other complications, why didn't she address them then? There has been ample time. We know that the warnings of corruption have been in place and received by her and other ministers of state since 2023, if not earlier, and on numerous occasions. It is now a pattern of behaviour that these warnings, variously dismissed as anecdotal and other watering-down sort of language, were there, and anyone with even the slightest intellectual curiosity would start to join the dots and say, 'We have a serious problem here.' That is in itself the most generous interpretation of the lack of action. That is the most generous, because if you look at it through any other lens, it is wilful. They are wilfully looking the other way, claiming wilful ignorance and wilful denial of what is absolutely plain for all to see in what is happening.

I think there is another really important point that is missed in all this when we say these powers are not required or we do not need a royal commission. That point is that when one of the parties implicated in corruption – and deeply implicated in the corruption – is the state itself, then the normal instruments of state are also in jeopardy and the status quo will not do. We do not want a situation like we saw in the COVID inquiry, where ministers and senior public servants either were not compelled to turn up or, if they turned up, could say, 'I don't remember. I don't recall. You'll have to ask somebody else.' You have to wonder: why are we learning more about this in our own state from a Queensland inquiry or Senate public estimates than we are learning from our own government? That is because the state is implicated in the corruption. The normal instruments should not and would not apply. This is why there should be a royal commission, but if we are not going to get to a royal commission just yet, this is the least we can do. To complain now and layer on complexity after complexity of why this is so difficult to do – let us be clear about a couple of things. This government have never hesitated to bring faulty legislation before this Council before – bail bills, machete bills et cetera – and then they tweak them and tweak them and tweak them, so that is hardly an argument that the government can apply. If they do not find this legislation perfect, that is hardly an argument from their own side.

If you want to control the passage of an issue going through our society and our state, then you should act on it. You have had plenty of time to act on it. But you cannot not act; you cannot turn a blind eye and then complain about other people doing something about it in a way you do not perfectly agree

with. You have abdicated the right to control this process. That is why you are in a minority in this chamber, because corruption is rampant in our state. It is a stain on our public institutions across the board, it is a stain on the Parliament, it is a stain on the public service, it is a stain on anyone trying to do the right thing in this state, it is a stain on unions and it is a stain on everybody that you have failed to address it not just through negligence but wilfully as the state, as the government of the day. It will not pass. It will not stand. It cannot.

If the only way we can make you accountable is to add some powers to IBAC that IBAC have been asking for for years, then so be it. That is what is going to happen. We cannot have corruption indefinitely in Victoria. We cannot have our corruption in Victoria revealed to us by Queensland inquiries. We need to get to the bottom of this for this generation and for the next generation, because not only are laws broken and lives destroyed with sexual harassment abounding, we are leaving the next generation with intergenerational debt directly borne of this corruption – directly. It is totally interlocked. $15 billion at a minimum – many other quotes say it is much, much more.

I can tell you one thing: when there is a bit of corruption in one area, it does not stay within a neat boundary. If you have walked by standard after standard on one matter, there is no doubt you will have walked by standards on every other matter that you engage with. Your tolerance for corruption can only spread. We are not just talking about black-and-white examples like what we have seen on Big Build, but the grey corruption that is rampant. The fish stinks from the head. The state of Victoria is in an appalling state. We have an obligation as elected representatives of our communities to not stand by and allow it to happen indefinitely, and the government wants it to happen indefinitely because there has been no meaningful action. No-one can deny that. Referring matters to IBAC when you know they do not have the powers is not action. Having criminal matters brought to your attention – for example, on the Metro – and not reporting them to the police is not action. Coming very, very late in the day and setting up an authority to look at labour providers – very late in the day, after it has all occurred, more than a year after you were notified of it – is not action. You know what that is? That is media management. That is perception management and it is window-dressing to the problem. No-one believes it. Everyone sees through it. We have all had enough. The community, who at times find it hard to make a direct relationship between billions and billions of dollars of waste and their everyday lives, have now made the connection. We know what price it is costing us. Of course corruption costs us at every level, and the state is implicated. The authority and the coercive power of the state is implicated in the corruption. Let us not lose sight of this. That being the case, the normal status quo will not do.

I am so pleased that we have what appears to be a majority of support in this chamber to do the right thing, because we are the only ones willing to do the right thing. It is not complicated. When you come to moral absolutes, you know what, it is easier than cancelling the Commonwealth Games. That is how simple this decision is. It needs to be done. I absolutely endorse this bill to the house.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:34): I am also pleased to talk on this bill, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026. I will start by saying that the Libertarian Party will not be opposing this bill; however, I think that both the opposition and the Greens have been remarkably overselling what this will do. In my view this bill will do very little, because what it is looking at is trying to fix the consequences of a problem without looking at the root causes. I am very supportive of a royal commission, which was brought up recently, and I think that that is a good idea because we do have a good chance of actually looking at the root causes. I am less convinced that this will do that. I have spoken many times about the root causes. I do not think anyone is under any illusions that organised crime is out of control in this state. In fact organised crime dominates the market in some markets – we know in the tobacco market, and I have spoken about that many, many times in here, which also related to the same groups that are dealing with construction and drugs and vaping and all sorts of other industries –

Members interjecting.

David LIMBRICK: Yes, waste management. There are lots of industries that are either majority run by organised crime or at least infiltrated by organised crime in this state. Many of these root causes are blatantly obvious and driven by government policy, and this is what irks me the most about the government and the Greens, for that matter, who wholeheartedly support these policies that have led us to this place and yet refuse to acknowledge what has caused it. The obvious one is tobacco. We know the root cause is tobacco excise tax. We know that with organised crime infiltration into waste management it is the waste management levy that has caused it. We know with infiltration into labour hire companies that a large cause of it is the way that EBAs are negotiated and also the government's own procurement policies. They are trying to set up procurement policies that have a social outcome; they want more women or more Aboriginal people, and these are good things that people want. But their policies have not actually resulted in what they thought they would result in; they have resulted in organised crime having new vectors to infiltrate government construction projects. Of course the largest thing of all which is related to organised crime is the size of government projects, the amount of money that the government is spending. The idea that we can spend hundreds of billions of dollars and not have corruption and organised crime involved is fanciful. Similarly, the idea that giving IBAC a few more powers is going to fix that is just as fanciful. It is not going to fix that at all. We are not going to fix this until we get to the root cause.

I want to reflect on something that I experienced in the past, and in hindsight it is more terrifying now that there have been all these revelations, especially around what happened in 2021. I will tell you about something that happened in 2021, a cover-up that happened. It was covered up by this government. It was covered up by the union movement. Back in 2021 you will remember we were right in the middle of the pandemic and there was lots of civil unrest at the time from many different sectors, and one of those sectors was the CFMEU union members themselves. There were two main concerns that they were upset about. They did not get much sympathy from the public, because the general public were looking around and saying, 'What have you got to complain about? You're still working,' because the government organised it so that construction would still keep operating, even though the rest of the economy was locked down. The government said they wanted to keep jobs. They did not worry about the other jobs, but they kept construction going – hell or high water, construction would keep rolling.

When union members started protesting, they protested at first by having their lunch out on the street. They were upset about two things mainly. They were upset about the lunch sheds being closed. They had fought for many years to have that right to have their lunch indoors in sheds and stuff, and they were pissed off about them being closed. So they decided to move tables and chairs out onto the street at their lunchbreak, and they sat out there. Actually, the leadership of the union at the time said, 'Well, it's not really a protest. They just need to eat their lunch somewhere.' It just happened to be on the tram tracks in the middle of the street. That was happening in the weeks before this.

Then the other thing that had been talked about was the prospect of vaccine mandates, and lots of people in the union movement were concerned about this, especially in the CFMEU. What happened in September one morning was there was a protest, another protest – there were lots of protests during the pandemic. This protest was very unusual and unique, though, because my team heard that there was a commotion down on Queen Street at the CFMEU office. People were not protesting against the government for once, they were not protesting against the police; they were union members protesting against their own union. This was at the CFMEU head office on Queen Street of course. My team, because we do not trust what the government says and we do not trust what the media says, went down there to see with our own eyes what was going on. I went down there and to my surprise there were a bunch of them that actually knew me and came up to talk to me. They were happy to have a witness to what was going on. I was a bit scared actually; I did not know how they would react to me being there. Anyway, I had a chat to a few of them, and basically my team and I just sat back well away from the action. We just wanted to watch what was happening and listen to people. We had to talk to a few people. Interestingly, it was not just union members; it was also contractors to government construction projects. I spoke to a few of them. They were upset about what was going on with the

sheds and vaccine mandates and stuff because they were going to lose staff and they were unhappy. It was a very weird situation where you had workers and bosses protesting against the union.

What they wanted was the union to march on Parliament, to lead them to Parliament, to protest against the sheds being closed and the vaccine mandate that was going to be imposed, and it got very rowdy. One man I spoke to came up to me and said, 'Stay away from those guys standing out the front of the office. They're not our members, they're bikies.' That is what he said to me, and I suppose I was a bit naive, I guess. I just thought maybe that was a tall tale or something. But then after that they had altercations with the union officials that were inside the office, and it got violent eventually. Interestingly, unlike any other protest I had seen, the police did nothing. They stood there and watched what was happening. They did not intervene until very, very late in the piece. Many of these union members who were protesting against their union had their chants of course, as you have at protests, and one of the chants really caught my ear. It was not about vaccines, it was not about sheds and it was not about leading them on to Parliament, it was about organised crime. They were chanting, 'Eff the bikies.' They were upset. They felt that their union bosses had sided with these organised criminals, and they were protesting against that as well. There is probably video footage of it. I saw it with my own eyes. My staff saw it as well. They were chanting, 'Eff the bikies,' and they saw them as somehow aligned with the union. I do not understand exactly how it works, but in hindsight that is quite terrifying.

What happened next was even more interesting. Keep in mind we had a group of people that were upset. They were upset about the sheds, they were upset about vaccine mandates and they were also upset about organised crime in their union; they were protesting against the union. Then something happened. The government, the ACTU and Bill Shorten all put out statements immediately – it was all coordinated. Bill Shorten called them 'man baby Nazis', the ACTU, from Sally McManus's account on Twitter I think, put out a statement saying that these right-wing extremists had been protesting against the union. Keep in mind that I saw these people and spoke to them. There were a lot of Islanders, Samoan people, Indians. They did not look like any Nazis I had ever seen or come into contact with. They certainly did not seem like right-wing extremists. They were all wearing union gear and stuff, so I did not find that. And the government itself – they all started smearing this group of people as right-wing extremists. They did not like them protesting against the union, and maybe in hindsight they did not like them calling out organised crime involvement.

I do not know why that smothering happened or why that cover-up happened, but in hindsight I think if we have a royal commission – and I think we do need a royal commission – they need to look at what was happening during that time, because if you look at the reports about when some of this corruption happened, that was smack bang in the middle of when a lot of this stuff was going down. What did those workers protesting actually know? Why were they so upset with the bikies? Obviously they had had contact with them. They knew who they were; they had seen them. They warned people like me to not go near them because they are dangerous. What was really going on there? I do not think the government has ever said anything about that. And the Greens piled in on that as well. They liked smearing everyone that was protesting here as right-wing extremists and Nazis and stuff – they love doing that. In fact the government and others used to smear everyone as right-wing extremists so much that when actual neo-Nazis showed up everyone was surprised because they were nothing like what everyone expected. They were totally different, and they are much nastier, actually, than disgruntled workers who are upset with their union.

But I think in hindsight there were a lot of mistakes made then, and we need to investigate this. I think we are not going to solve any of this until the government itself acknowledges that its own policies have led to many of these vectors for organised crime to get involved. Giving IBAC more powers is just like changing the shape of a bandaid on a gunshot wound. It is not going to stem the flow here. It is tinkering around the edges. If you want to stop it, you need to stop it at the source, at the cause, and the causes are government policies, the amount of money that they are spending and the fact that they are not asking questions about what was actually really going on at that point in time. No-one seems

to want to know, and we need to know if we are going to fix this state. We certainly need to know if the government is going to be spending hundreds of millions of dollars on this Suburban Rail Loop project and still does not even understand what the causes of this organised crime infiltration are. I think it is irresponsible to do anything other than knock that project on the head, because we do not even know how it is happening. The government keeps complaining: 'This $15 billion figure is wrong.' Well, what is the figure then? How much is it? I think even Mr Watson would concede that it is rough as guts. But what is the number? How much money needs to get siphoned to organised crime before the government gets upset about it? Is it $15 billion? Is it $1 billion? Is it $100 million? I do not know what the number is, but it sounds like it should be investigated. It sounds like it is serious, whatever the number is. Maybe it is worse; maybe it is a lot worse. We just do not know, and we need to know if we are going to fix things and get this state back on track and get our finances under control.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:47): I want to begin by saying, and I think we all agree, that Victorians deserve a strong and well-resourced and effective integrity system, of which IBAC is a part, and that is a value that this government shares without reservation. The question before us is not whether IBAC should be strong, because it should be and it is. I just want to respond first on the government's record on IBAC, because context is very important. When Labor came to government IBAC's total funding was $31.5 million. This year IBAC's base funding stands at $65.6 million. That is a 208 per cent increase on before we took office. Every single year this government has increased IBAC's base funding. IBAC today has almost 300 staff and is one of the best resourced integrity agencies this state has ever had. When members opposite speak critically of IBAC, they are simply not dealing honestly with the facts.

Turning to the substance of this bill, the centrepiece is the so-called follow-the-money power. The proposal is to give IBAC equivalent powers to the Auditor-General to examine contracts and subcontracts. I want to be precise here, because the rhetoric and the reality are somewhat at odds. Despite the name of this bill, there is a notable absence of any reference in the actual text to money, funds or dollars. What is being proposed is the extension of audit-style powers to a law enforcement and anti-corruption body. The Auditor-General's powers are designed for a specific purpose: performance audits. These are detailed forensic examinations of whether or not government agencies are meeting their aims effectively, using resources efficiently and complying with relevant legislation. That is the exact right tool for the Auditor-General. But IBAC is a different body with a different mandate. Entities like the Victoria Police and the Labour Hire Authority are far better placed to investigate and deal with allegations of criminality and industry-specific misconduct. Critically, those bodies have the powers, and they are using them. Victoria Police has already laid over 70 charges, as has already been mentioned by my colleagues; the Labour Hire Authority has cancelled over 147 licences; and Operation Hawk, established in 2024, has resulted in 17 offenders being processed, along with those 70 charges. Those charges include fraud, thefts and threats. That is not a government standing idly by, that is a government acting decisively. We have passed new laws banning bikies and criminals from setting foot on worksites. We have created a protected complaints pathway with criminal offences for threatening whistleblowers. We have also established an independent review and are carrying out every recommendation of that review. The review resulted in a construction complaints referral service, amendments to the labour hire legislation, strengthening the fit and proper person test and an alliance of state and federal law enforcement agencies to better share information. These changes, as we can see, are working. The culture on construction worksites is improving.

I want to turn now to the second major element of this bill, the removal of the exceptional circumstances threshold for public examinations. This is where I have the most serious concerns. The Integrity and Oversight Committee explicitly recommended that the exceptional circumstances test for public examinations be retained. The IOC considered that retaining this limb was appropriate when considering the risks associated with IBAC's public examinations, and those risks are real, because IBAC has extraordinary powers even compared to a criminal court. Those extraordinary powers include witnesses who have less protection. Their lawyers are not able to speak on their behalf. There is no opportunity for cross-examination or a right of reply. Exhibits are not provided to witnesses or

lawyers in advance. The threshold for findings is lower than in a criminal proceeding. We have seen tragic outcomes for persons involved in IBAC investigations under our current settings. This bill does not consider safeguards to ensure witnesses' welfare and avoid prejudicing criminal proceedings. IBAC has previously raised that the confidentiality of its investigations is critical to ensuring they are not compromised. This bill does not look at those competing interests of reputational damage, public interest, safety and serious conduct. Given the extraordinary powers that I have just described, some individuals might think twice before reporting their concerns, especially if they know that those concerns would be aired publicly. They might find it embarrassing or humiliating or experience intimidation as a result. To remove the exceptional circumstances threshold without carefully working through those tensions is not careful lawmaking. It is really a stunt masquerading as a reform.

I will just go on now to note the Greens amendment proposing retrospectivity. This is an uncapped retrospectivity. The Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee advises that all retrospective provisions should be specific, that they include the reason for a specific retrospectivity and that a date should be chosen. The committee also recommends analysis of the adverse impacts. These requirements clearly have not been met in this bill. This raises serious charter of human rights implications, including the right to privacy and reputation, the right to liberty and the right to a fair hearing. It is also possible that these changes may facilitate an increase in vexatious accusations. In fact all of these changes may provide a platform for that. It also cuts against the rule of law principles and ignores the legal principle of finality in administrative decisions. Unless these legal issues are carefully worked through, it risks giving IBAC powers that would not withstand a challenge.

This brings me to perhaps the most frustrating dimension of this debate. Both the Liberals and the Greens are members of the Integrity and Oversight Committee, which undertook hearings and produced a detailed report with 31 recommendations. You do not reform something as complex as our integrity system with a change here and a change there and call it a day. This is not paint by numbers. What Victoria needs and what this government is committed to delivering is a thoughtful, comprehensive response to the IOC's work, one that strengthens IBAC's powers where appropriate, includes the necessary safeguards that keeps our integrity system coherent and is consistent with the context within which IBAC operates. The government is working through that response, and it will be completed later this year.

This bill compromises human rights, risks the mental health of witnesses, has the potential to reduce the number of reports of corruption out of fear of public reporting, will clog up the IBAC system with retrospective powers that do not even stand up in any jurisdiction and contradicts the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee's recommendations. This bill is attempting to create a gotcha moment for the opposition rather than actual, genuine, thoughtful and careful reform. It is more about politics than about improvements. I urge members to allow the process that our government has underway to continue and also to acknowledge the responses and the work that has been undertaken, which I have referred to, to prevent corruption in the building industry and the actions that have improved the culture and conduct in the building industry to date.

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (14:59): I rise today to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026, to address the matter of significant public concern involving the integrity of Victoria's infrastructure program and the capacity of this state's anti-corruption system to respond effectively. Before I continue addressing the bill, I just want to respond to some of the contributions across the chamber. How many times have we heard this government's deflection after deflection of responsibility, hiding from inquiry after inquiry from investigative bodies that have inappropriate power to follow up. Too many times over the years we have heard of inquiries where senior officials, people in senior positions, have not turned up. They know full well the power of investigative bodies doing inquiries. Now we have seen senior officials dodge responsibilities. They cannot recall their responsibilities and cannot recall their actions time after time. What we hear today is an allegation of a magnitude of public funds, an allegation in relation to the money. IBAC investigate corruption. Clearly we know what the charter of IBAC is. They

investigate corruption of government bodies, police and government officials, employees and contractors in all tiers of governments but not third-party entities. So what they are seeking is the power to do so.

Those opposite are saying, 'Refer it to police' – how convenient when police resources have been cut by this government and you are seeing station after station across the state reduce their hours. Manpower is restrained, so how convenient it is to just say, 'Refer it to police.' Well, I will tell you one thing: when IBAC has established all of those involved, those who are responsible will be prosecuted by the police. I can assure you of that.

To go on in relation to this bill, over recent months multiple investigations and inquiries have revealed deeply troubling allegations concerning the infiltration of Victorian construction sectors by an organised crime network, including bikie gangs and underworld figures. Imagine that – bikie gangs and underworld figures and organised crime. The report indicates that the infiltration occurred primarily through the Victorian branch of the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union, known as the CFMEU, and that misconduct took place on publicly funded worksites connected with the multibillion-dollar Big Build program. The question has to be asked: has this got any weight? In all of Victoria's government major infrastructure projects, has this government continuously experienced budget blowout after budget blowout on every major infrastructure program and project?

What is more astonishing is that in recent days we have had the revelation that the Premier herself had been advised and was informed of such allegations of corruption on the worksites. An independent investigative body led by a respected barrister and administrator has estimated that the financial impact of unlawful conduct and alleged fraud may be in the order of $15 billion. Now, this is a conservative estimation, with some assessments suggesting that the total cost could be much, much higher, around $30 billion. These findings reflect claims of cost inflations, job-selling schemes, criminal profiteering and project disruptions streaming from misconduct and organised crime infiltrations. The report also questioned why so little was done to stop the illegal activities and criminal racketeering on government worksites. To put this in perspective, in today's dollars the recently opened Footscray Hospital in my electorate, the Western Metropolitan Region, cost $1.5 billion. That is in today's dollars. So we are looking at at least 10 new hospitals similar to Footscray funded across our state to address the health crisis mess or opening and staffing over 200 new 24/7 police stations to address the crime crisis we are in at the moment. These allegations do not merely raise financial concern; they strike at the core of public trust. Victorians rightly expect that funds allocated to public infrastructure and projects are used solely for public benefit and protected from criminal interference. To be quite clear, we are not looking at any small construction project, but Victoria's Big Build. You have all heard about that through the TV and all the commercials. It is a massive, ongoing state infrastructure program comprising more than 180 road and rail projects, with private firms having been given around $100 billion in public money to deliver the various Big Build projects we are looking at at the moment. It is safe to say that Victorians expect that government projects should shape the transport network, our economy, our future and our communities, and in the administration there should be transparency and accountability at every stage. Those in charge need to take ownership of and responsibility for their actions. This is not too much to ask. It is public funds, taxpayers money, in the millions and billions of dollars that we speak of here today – money that could be better spent serving Victoria's health, education, community safety and public infrastructure.

What is equally troubling for me is that I have spent numerous years serving with Victoria Police and protecting the Victorian community, investigating and apprehending criminals in major fraud cases, disrupting and stopping organised criminal syndicates, and now we hear that IBAC, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, the principal body designed to investigate corruption in this state, has stated clearly that it lacks sufficient power to fully examine financial flows associated with private subcontracts on public projects. That is as clear as mud. But what is more disturbing is that the government is unwilling to give IBAC the power to investigate, to follow the trail, to follow the money and to stop the criminal elements in government infrastructure projects. Yet it deflects and

makes excuses. IBAC itself has communicated that it does not possess the follow-the-money powers necessary to track funds once they move beyond direct government entities, particularly into complex private networks surrounding major infrastructure initiatives such as the Big Build. I worked on major fraud for many years. Do you know how long it would take to investigate all the big projects in this state? Well past the next election, I can tell you that right now. How convenient.

This illustrates not only the limitations but a misconception. It is real. It is already affecting investigations. Numerous allegations referred to IBAC could not be pursued comprehensively due to these statutory restrictions. As a consequence, significant questions remain about the extent of misconduct, the identity of beneficiaries and the true scale of the loss of taxpayers money – mum and dad's money out there. Without enhanced investigative authority, IBAC cannot complete the work the public expects it to complete. The Parliament has an obligation to ensure the anti-corruption framework is not only symbolic but operational, performing the way it is meant to, equipped with the full set of legislative tools necessary to safeguard the integrity of public expenditure.

The report before us describes not isolated misconduct but widespread, systematic issues that developed over many years under this Labor government. In some cases, officials and administrators involved in inquiries have expressed concern that early warnings were not effectively acted upon, contributing to a further deterioration in oversight. The gravity of these findings requires a response that is decisive, responsible and proportional to the scale of the risk – $15 billion at least – the scale of criminal activities and the scale of allegations of corruption, with bikie gangs and organised syndicates on government worksites. Strengthening IBAC's power to follow the money is not a political matter; it is a fundamental measure of good governance. It enhances transparency, protects public funds and supports the ongoing integrity of major projects in this state, and that is essential for Victoria's future. Therefore, I call on the Parliament to consider this legislative amendment that empowers IBAC to – just to name a few things – investigate financial flows through the entirety of contracting and subcontracting chains, access compelled financial records, conduct comprehensive examinations of private entities where public funds are involved and collaborate more effectively with all the effective bodies. These reforms are not extraordinary; these are reasonable measures and necessary given the circumstances before us.

Victoria has long prided itself on maintaining institutions that uphold integrity and public confidence. Ensuring IBAC is fully empowered to perform its statutory role is essential to preserving that tradition. Let us equip IBAC with the authority it needs, it asks for and it seeks. Let us restore public confidence in the governance of major infrastructure – and there are many projects on the way, and many have been done. Let us send a clear message in Victoria that if you misuse public funds, whoever you are, you will be caught. Misconduct and organised crime will not be tolerated. I will end it there. I fully support and commend this bill.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (15:11): It has been a very interesting debate on this bill, but I thank all parliamentary colleagues for their willingness to engage on this issue or, for some, their reluctance to engage on this particular issue. This is a necessary integrity reform to restore trust in Victoria. Public confidence in how taxpayer money is managed has been seriously damaged by the biggest corruption scandal in the history of this state. This bill is about restoring accountability. This is ensuring taxpayer dollars can be traced. It is giving integrity bodies the tools they have asked for, and it is ending a culture of denial and inaction. $15 billion has been lost to the criminal underworld and bikies. The government says that is untested. They will talk about the number and they will outrageously attack that report's author, but isn't it interesting that this government have not offered up a number of their own? They clearly know that a lot of money has been lost to corruption, to the criminal underworld, to bikies through the CFMEU; they are just not willing to offer up how much.

We have seen IBAC themselves call for these greater powers and say that their remit is currently limited to public officers and public entities and cannot be traced down through contractors and associated entities. That is what we are wanting to do in this place. This is important to actually get to the bottom of this and trace financial flows. We know that the Premier for quite a while bandied this

letter about, saying that she actually referred everything to IBAC in July 2024, only for IBAC to then make an extraordinary public declaration that it had responded to the Premier's letter by saying that it was outside of IBAC's jurisdiction. It is outside of IBAC's jurisdiction, and the Premier would have known that. Instead of saying, 'Okay, it's outside of their jurisdiction – what can I do to make sure it's within their remit?' what did the Premier do? Nothing. It is no wonder backbenchers are talking around the corridors of this place about leadership, because the Premier has shown no leadership in this scandal. This is a necessary integrity reform. IBAC has requested these powers. The government has ignored those requests. Internal briefings suggest a reluctance at senior levels. We do need to enforce the law, we need to find the money and we need to stop the rorts, and this is part of our plan to do that.

I want to thank colleagues in particular and acknowledge the Greens for the collaborative way they have engaged on this particular bill and all other colleagues in the chamber that have engaged on this bill. I think it is really important that we follow the money, that IBAC is given those powers and that IBAC is also given greater discretion to hold public hearings. That is really important. It is a default at the moment that they are private hearings. We think that is a greater transparency measure as well, and that is also part of our bill. This is really, really important, because IBAC does not have the remit to investigate these powers.

I want to talk about this briefly because it is an important bit of case law. IBAC cannot currently investigate anything that has happened on the North East Link. We know a hell of a lot of bad stuff has happened on the North East Link, and we have seen that reported in the last couple of days. I spent well over two years battling the government to release this document, a document prepared by Spark North East Link, which is a consortium that is building the North East Link with taxpayer dollars. Do you think IBAC can investigate things that have gone through that consortium? No, it cannot. In my trying to FOI Spark North East Link, the government refused the whole way through and then sent it to the information commissioner. Of course they have been starved of funds as well, so it takes about a year and a half for them to do any report saying that this is in the public interest, and it was 100 per cent a slam dunk report saying it was in the public interest. They then took me to VCAT arguing against the precedent and saying that Spark North East Link is not the government. They took me to VCAT. We had a hearing. The submissions were about to close and then all of a sudden they abandoned their case because they realised what they were arguing was wrong. It is an important bit of case law, won by me, that Spark North East Link is an arm of the government because the government is building the North East Link. So I could access this document, but IBAC cannot investigate Spark North East Link.

What did we find in this document? We found that the CFMEU were pushing surveyors offsite and not allowing them onsite. They also delayed the assembly of the tunnel-boring machines by a cumulative total of 109 days. This monthly report goes to government. What did Jacinta Allan do with this report? She claims that the first time she was made aware of all these issues was July 2024, when consistently these reports have been saying otherwise and that the CFMEU were causing issues. Why did the then transport infrastructure minister not act? If it is now case law that Spark North East Link is the government, then IBAC ought to be able to investigate that. They ought to have the ability to deep-dive and investigate that as well. I am going to leave my remarks there, but I thank all colleagues that have engaged in this process.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (23): Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (14): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 (15:26)

Ryan BATCHELOR: I have got a range of questions. I thought I would just try and get the bulk of them out of the way, if that is helpful. The bill seeks to add the words 'or person' to the definition of those who receive funds to perform a public function to determine whether something is a public function for the purposes of the act in section 6(3). What sorts of people are you envisaging being determinative of whether something is a public function?

Evan MULHOLLAND: I will just be one second. That would be for anyone who IBAC determines is within scope.

Ryan BATCHELOR: With the funding that that person receives, is there a threshold amount that you think is relevant? Is it an individual who is in receipt of a government grant, for example, which they may have received by way of disaster recovery? Are those the types of persons that you are envisaging being publicly funded and therefore subject to the expanded jurisdiction of IBAC?

Evan MULHOLLAND: That is not necessarily who we envision. But again, it is for IBAC to determine over the course of its investigation to follow that particular dollar down to where it has passed through, and that, obviously, would have to involve a level of investigation and suspicion of corrupt conduct.

Ryan BATCHELOR: So anyone in the state of Victoria who has been in receipt of public funds individually has the potential to be exercising a public function under the factors that IBAC may determine. You shake your head, Mr Mulholland, but it says:

> In determining if a function is a public function the factors that may be taken into account include –
>
> …
>
> (d) that the body –

and you wish to insert 'or person' –

> is publicly funded to perform the function.

I am just trying to figure out the extent of the scope. If someone has received a grant to assist with some land clearing, would that be a public function?

Evan MULHOLLAND: The test is not based on the person themselves. The test is corruption. It is corrupt behaviour. So the scope of any IBAC investigation would be corruption.

Ryan BATCHELOR: With respect, that is not the applicable test. This is determining what constitutes a public body, a public officer or a public function, further defined earlier in section 61(e), for example, in making a determination as to the scope of those bodies that IBAC might investigate. I am trying to figure it out as you are redrawing the boundaries of IBAC's powers. It is a fairly wide scope that would include anybody who is in receipt of public funds to perform a function. If someone receives a grant to clean up an area that is public land – it might be a park, for example – that could constitute a public function that they are receiving public funds for. Would you agree?

Evan MULHOLLAND: Mr Batchelor, it is up to IBAC to determine where they believe an issue may exist. I can very much see IBAC investigating a person where that person may have been doing, say, contract work on a construction site, say, on the Hurstbridge rail site, where we saw a huge amount of misbehaviour by lots of individuals, some of whom were not meant to be there. It is up to IBAC to determine, first, the threshold of whether what they are investigating is corrupt conduct and where they believe an issue may exist that is potentially corrupt.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Is the answer to my question yes?

Evan MULHOLLAND: Mr Batchelor can keep asking questions, and I will keep answering them in a similar fashion. As I have said, the test is not based on the person. The test is based on corrupt behaviour, and the scope of that behaviour is corruption. IBAC will determine where they believe an issue may exist.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I think it is clear that the scope of the people who may be brought under IBAC's jurisdiction here could be quite significant. The reason we ask these questions is because they are useful for the purpose of statutory interpretation to understand the limits of IBAC's powers. If IBAC is the one making the determination, the only way to challenge that is with reference to the courts. The courts will look to what the Parliament intended, and that is why it is important to get this, but I think it is clear that it is a pretty wide jurisdiction there.

I just want to go to the proposed amendment to remove section 117(1)(a). Obviously it is not a matter that was recommended by the Integrity and Oversight Committee (IOC). There were a range of witnesses who gave us some evidence as to why they did not support this change, including the Police Association Victoria. Who did you have discussions with in the development of this particular amendment?

Evan MULHOLLAND: Can you just repeat for me the amendment you are talking about?

Ryan BATCHELOR: The amendment is to repeal section 117(1)(a) of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I will be one second.

We have had consultation on this, and we have come to a view that the balance of public hearings was wrong. It was misaligned. Therefore we propose this amendment.

Ryan BATCHELOR: In their submission to the Integrity and Oversight Committee's inquiry into the legislative framework for IBAC, the police association said:

> The Association considers that public examinations should be truly exceptional and rare, as the detriment to individuals invariably exceeds any purported benefit achieved. All examinees before IBAC, including the Association's members, should be afforded the fundamental right to respond to allegations in a private setting that protects their reputation and preserves their dignity and wellbeing pending the outcome of the investigation by IBAC. There exists no compelling justification for public examinations in circumstances where identical investigative outcomes can be achieved through private examinations without jeopardising reputations, prejudicing subsequent legal proceedings or undermining public confidence in the integrity of the investigative process.

Did you have consultation with the police association prior to putting this amendment to the Parliament, and if so, what was their view?

Evan MULHOLLAND: As I said, we have had consultations. I will not go into a list of who with, but I will say this is about removing a provision requiring certain exemptions to be held in private, therefore enabling greater flexibility in the conduct of hearings. It seeks to change the exceptional circumstances rule involving public hearings when a public hearing is in the public interest. This new power will change the default level of when a public hearing can occur. It should be in public, not just where it is. There is a balance of when public hearings occur, and this bill seeks to strike that right balance, because we believe, as I have said, that balance is misaligned.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Will this amendment affect both the public sector corruption and police oversight jurisdiction that IBAC has?

Evan MULHOLLAND: The intention is to give IBAC greater flexibility in order to hold public hearings.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Is that a yes?

Evan MULHOLLAND: As I said, Mr Batchelor, the discretion powers are there. This is the power to change the exceptional circumstances rule for public hearings, and it is intended to give IBAC greater flexibility when public hearings are in the public interest.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I will take that as a yes. The IOC, in respect of public hearings, did not recommend this change but recommended a series of other changes to strengthen oversight by Integrity Oversight Victoria in terms of increased notification of the exercise of coercive powers and also the publication of hearing guidelines. Those are recommendations 8 and 9 of the report. Is there a reason why you have not included additional safeguards in the bill for the exercise of these coercive powers, which include the abrogation of the right to self-incrimination and the ability for lawyers to raise questions during proceedings and for witnesses to have evidence given to them prior to them being questioned on it, potentially in public? Is there any reason why you did not think that additional safeguards were required, as recommended by Integrity Oversight Victoria and the Integrity and Oversight Committee?

Evan MULHOLLAND: Mr Batchelor, we are always happy to take suggestions for further IBAC reform on board. As you know, the Liberals and Nationals have a great history when it comes to integrity in the creation of IBAC after calls from the public for greater transparency in government following the defeat of – and under – the Brumby government. So we have a proud record on this, and we are always looking for more ways to improve our integrity and oversight bodies. As you have noted, we have had a lot to say in this particular space, but I would note the matter that we are dealing with is quite urgent. It is quite urgent because there has been a report before a royal commission in Queensland that has found that $15 billion, at a conservative estimate, has been funnelled through the CFMEU to the criminal underworld and bikies.

What we are dealing with is urgent, and the Premier has rejected calls to enable IBAC to have these powers, regardless of the fact that they actually have called for them. But also she was the one bandying around this letter saying that she had referred it to IBAC, so it was all good, and she only found out in July 2024 – we know that is not the case. But then IBAC, in an extraordinary public statement, actually put out a statement saying that they had advised that it was not within their jurisdiction. I think the urgency here is making sure these powers are within IBAC's jurisdiction, because I think all Victorians agree. Something like 75 per cent wanted a royal commission and believe that this issue is a very serious issue, so we are doing what the public is asking of us, which is dealing with the urgent matters that are before us.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I am conscious of time, so I am going to try and get through the questions I have got quickly, because these are significant changes to a body that has significant coercive powers that I think the Parliament should consider properly. Mr Mulholland might like to actually answer some of the questions. On the retrospectivity amendment that you have proposed, what is the date, therefore, of effective operation of the proposed changes should that amendment be included in the bill?

Evan MULHOLLAND: Do you mean the end?

Ryan BATCHELOR: The date from which conduct would be subject to IBAC's jurisdiction under the retrospectivity amendment that you have proposed.

Evan MULHOLLAND: That would be from the commencement of IBAC.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Do you have a date?

Evan MULHOLLAND: I would have to check *Hansard* for when the IBAC legislation received royal assent – I believe it was 2011 or 2012 – but it is from the commencement of IBAC.

Ryan BATCHELOR: The reason I asked was because it does not appear that this amendment has been considered by the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulation Committee (SARC), which has some matters that it likes to specify or request of those who seek to introduce retrospective laws, including that they should be specific and that they should articulate why a particular date was chosen and understand the effect of retrospectivity. It worries me that you do not know what date the law that you are proposing comes into effect, so do you know the date that these amendments would apply to conduct in the state of Victoria which could now be subject to the jurisdiction of IBAC?

Evan MULHOLLAND: I believe IBAC, despite being established in 2012, became operational in early 2013. Mr Batchelor, as you were just discussing and as we all know, interpretation can often be left to the committee stages of a debate on legislation. As we are discussing now, it is quite clear from the author of the bill that this retrospectivity clause is intended to go back to when IBAC first started its jurisdiction. I am being quite clear, and I will also say it is a bit rich for Mr Batchelor to suggest further IBAC reform when he just voted against this current IBAC reform.

Ryan BATCHELOR: So the follow-the-money powers, as you describe them, would apply to decisions taken by government in 2013 and 2014 as well as any decisions taken post that point?

Evan MULHOLLAND: Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Again, I am just conscious of time. In the formulation of this particular amendment, I was right that it did not go through any of the SARC processes. Is that correct?

Evan MULHOLLAND: Mr Batchelor, this issue we are debating requires a deep level of urgency that the government has not been very keen to act on – particularly when this entire chamber voted for a royal commission and particularly when this entire chamber just voted to give IBAC further powers that it has called for, which it has told the Premier that it does not have. So I think this does require urgency from the Parliament to get this bill through and pass it into law, because the status quo is not an option. We have had, as a conservative estimate, $15 billion lost to the criminal underworld and bikies while we are having to merge health services, cut a whole bunch of programs and increase taxes, which Victorians are paying the price for. To see their money fly out the door to the criminal underworld – it does require answers. I know some on that side of the chamber believe it does not, but it actually does require deep thought and answers. And that involves giving IBAC the powers it needs to be able to follow taxpayer dollars where they go.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 5 agreed to.

New clauses 5A to 5C (15:49)

Sarah MANSFIELD: I move:

1. Insert the following New Clauses to follow clause 5 –

'**5A Definitions**

In section 3(1) of the **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011**, the definition of ***relevant offence*** is **repealed**.

5B Corrupt conduct

(1) In section 4(1) of the **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011** –

(a) in paragraph (e), for "or (da) –" **substitute** "or (da).";

(b) **omit** "being conduct that would constitute a relevant offence.".

(2) Section 4(1A) of the **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011** is **repealed**.

5C Conduct occurring before the commencement of this section

At the end of section 11 of the **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 insert** –

"(2) This Act as amended by the **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Act 2026** applies to and in respect of conduct all or part of which occurred before the commencement of this subsection if the conduct would have been corrupt conduct within the meaning of this Act as amended by the **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Act 2026** had this subsection been in force at the time the conduct occurred.".'.

This bill, as I said earlier, gives IBAC two of the three critical powers it needs to get to the bottom of the Big Build corruption fiasco. It gives them the follow-the-money power and the ability to hold public hearings, but it does not expand the jurisdiction of IBAC to be able to investigate so-called grey corruption. The Greens' two amendments today propose to go that extra mile to give IBAC the teeth it needs to give Victorians the full picture of how the $15 billion was lost. This first amendment here is about expanding IBAC's jurisdiction. IBAC's jurisdiction is currently limited to corrupt conduct linked to serious indictable offences or common-law crimes such as bribery and misconduct in public office. Without expanding these powers, a vast body of corruption allegations will go uninvestigated, and Victorians will never know how $15 billion or potentially more of their taxpayer money was squandered through graft and greed. Our first proposed amendment seeks to expand the definition of 'corrupt conduct' so IBAC is no longer restricted to investigating serious indictable crimes or common-law offences like misconduct in public office, bribery or perverting the course of justice. This would empower IBAC to identify, investigate and expose corrupt conduct of public officers and dodgy third parties that does not constitute a criminal offence but that still damages citizens' confidence in public administration.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I am just interested, Dr Mansfield, in the expansion of the public sector jurisdiction of IBAC proposed in this amendment and what impact that is likely to have on IBAC's police oversight jurisdiction, given the operations of section 15(1A).

Sarah MANSFIELD: The intention of this amendment is that it is a standalone. There is a separate section of the act that deals with police oversight, and this does not interact with section 5. This will expand jurisdiction, and it deals with corruption under section 4 of the act.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Okay. I raise the issue because it came up in the IOC's last set of hearings that one of the reasons why there have been some deficiencies – and we heard this from Inner Melbourne Community Legal and the Police Accountability Project – is that there is a concern that the operation of section 15 of the act, by prioritising public sector corrupt conduct, is diminishing the resources and attention that IBAC provides to police oversight. There was quite a lengthy discussion at the IOC, particularly with some key witnesses, about the way that under existing rules the prioritisation that was required by section 15 to public sector corruption over police oversight is skewing IBAC's ability to undertake its police oversight jurisdiction. The proposed amendment that you are moving here would, in removing the criminal offence requirement in conjunction with the retrospectivity requirement, massively expand the scope of IBAC's public sector corruption jurisdiction, which I understand to be the intent. I am trying to understand the consequences and the extent to which there has been consideration given to the impact of these changes that you are proposing here on the police oversight functions that IBAC undertakes.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I am fully aware that these amendments will expand the workload of IBAC, and therefore IBAC needs more resources so it can undertake all of those functions adequately, including its police oversight functions. If there is concern that those functions are not adequately being undertaken by IBAC, even currently, because of resource limitations, then I think that is yet another example of why IBAC desperately need more resources so they can do their job properly.

Ryan BATCHELOR: This amendment will change the definition of corrupt conduct in section 6. What impact will that have on other acts?

Sarah MANSFIELD: Mr Batchelor, our amendment does not affect section 6.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Interesting. No, that must have been one from last week. You mentioned in your contribution – and I raised this in the contribution last week – the difficulty in making definitions with clarity about what would constitute grey corruption. Do you have any further clarity about the sorts of matters I raised last week – I will not go through them again – matters about specific conduct that you think would form part of the widened scope of corrupt conduct here? Do you have any further clarity in response to the questions I raised?

Sarah MANSFIELD: The expanded jurisdiction does seek to extend the definitions of 'corrupt conduct'. It removes the requirement that the conduct must also constitute a relevant offence where it is defined as an indictable offence or specific common-law offence like bribery, misconduct in public office or perverting the course of justice. But the expansion of the definition of 'corrupt conduct' from our amendments will mean that IBAC can investigate and make findings of corrupt conduct consistent with the existing definition in section 4(1) without the conduct having to also meet the threshold of being a relevant or indictable criminal offence. Section 4(1) of the act retains numerous sections defining corrupt conduct, including acting dishonestly, breaching public trust, misuse of information or obtaining a direct benefit in the person's role as a public officer or office holder. I also refer you to section 15(1A) of the IBAC act, which states that:

> In performing its functions, the IBAC must prioritise its attention to the investigation and exposure of corrupt conduct which the IBAC considers may constitute serious corrupt conduct or systemic corrupt conduct.

So I think you could potentially define the grey corruption that we are trying to capture here – or soft corruption or just corruption, as we do with this amendment – as any conduct that falls within the retained legislative constraints of the IBAC act if our amendments were to pass. I might anticipate that your next inquiry about that is 'Well, is that too broad a definition, and how do we deal with some of the uncertainty around that?' I am comfortable with the definition of corrupt conduct put forward by these amendments, which is very similar to the one used by the National Anti-Corruption Commission. We think IBAC should live up to its name as a broad-based anti-corruption commission and not be a narrow-based one. We consulted widely on this change, and we have done it over many years – this is not just a recent thing. While nearly all experts admittedly have a different opinion on the exact wording and the legislative framework to adopt, all agree that change is long overdue and necessary in Victoria. I will quote Associate Professor Yee-Fui Ng and Dr Stephen Gray in their evidence in the IOC report, which I know you are familiar with, Mr Batchelor. They said there is 'no consensus', that 'there is no single perfect model or design' and that 'there is no definitive framework that specifies the granular detail for institutional design'.

Further, I point you to existing section 4(1) of the act, which I have gone over some of. Essentially this provides clear guidance to IBAC to prioritise serious and systemic corrupt conduct in determining a policy of what corrupt conduct should be investigated, which will exclude petty or trivial issues. IBAC will be able to determine what it believes meets that threshold.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I appreciate Dr Mansfield's clarification. I do think, as I mentioned in my second-reading contribution, there are considerable challenges associated with drawing the boundaries around what terms like 'grey corruption' and 'soft corruption' mean, and I think there is a lot of blurriness there that is not particularly helpful.

I will just come back – sorry, I misspoke earlier when I said section 6; I meant section 4. The definitions in section 4 of the IBAC act have consequences in other pieces of legislation. I am interested if this amendment is intended to affect the operation of other acts and other agencies, and if so, what those effects might be.

Sarah MANSFIELD: We are comfortable with the changes to the definitions that they make, and if they broaden the definitions of corrupt conduct and there are consequences in other areas, then that is something that we are comfortable with.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I am conscious of time, so I have got one more, just on the special reports. Following the conversations we had last week, an addition seems to have been made to the amendments that you have proposed this week, which appear to respond to recommendation 26 of the IOC's report and the concerns that IBAC put to the IOC about the need for safeguards with the publication of special reports, and particularly the clarity that there is a statement that the finding of corrupt conduct is not a finding of criminal liability or that they are liable for a disciplinary offence. Can I just confirm that your intention is to make sure that the special reports will make clear that they are not those things, consistent with IBAC's recommendations?

Sarah MANSFIELD: Mr Batchelor, this is actually with respect to my next amendment, which I have not moved, but I am happy to answer this. Yes, your understanding is correct. This is a clarification amendment. Our understanding is that IBAC already do this, but it is to provide clarification so that they can provide some of those additional comforts and protections to those who may be subject to an investigation and a report.

Ryan BATCHELOR: And just a last one on that. The other was recommendation 25, which talks about procedural fairness for those who are mentioned in special reports. Where are those protections that IBAC suggested were required and that the IOC recommended in recommendation 25?

Sarah MANSFIELD: We have limited our amendments to what we see as the absolutely essential things that we need to get on with now. We are very open to broader amendments to the IBAC legislation and would welcome them if you or the government were to bring them forward.

Council divided on new clauses:

Ayes (8): Katherine Copsey, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

Noes (29): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

New clauses negatived.

New clauses 5A and 5B (16:11)

Sarah MANSFIELD: I move:

1. Insert the following New Clauses to follow clause 5 –

'**5A Special reports**

After section 162(6) of the **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 insert** –

"(6A) To avoid doubt, subsection (6)(a) does not prohibit the IBAC from including in a report under this section a finding or opinion that a specified person has committed or engaged in corrupt conduct.

(6B) However, if the IBAC includes in a report under this section a finding or opinion that a specified person has committed or engaged in corrupt conduct, the IBAC must include in the report a statement that the finding or opinion is not a finding or an opinion that a specified person is guilty of or has committed, is committing or is about to commit, any criminal offence or disciplinary offence.".

5B Matters to be included in annual report

After section 165(6) of the **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 substitute** –

"(6A) To avoid doubt, subsection (6)(a) does not prohibit the IBAC from including in a report under this section a finding or opinion that a specified person has committed or engaged in corrupt conduct.

(6B) However, if the IBAC includes in a report under this section a finding or opinion that a specified person has committed or engaged in corrupt conduct, the IBAC must include in the report a statement that the finding or opinion is not a finding or an opinion that a specified person is guilty of or has committed, is committing or is about to commit, any criminal offence or disciplinary offence.".'.

I discussed these amendments briefly in response to Mr Batchelor's questions. IBAC has long adopted a conservative interpretation of the IBAC act in order to avoid breaching section 162(6), given that the definition of 'corrupt conduct' is confined to serious indictable offences or common-law offences. This is precisely why Victoria's anti-corruption commission has until now stopped short of making formal findings of corrupt conduct. To address the constraint, this amendment makes clear that any such finding is not a finding of criminal guilt but rather a jurisdictional determination. I commend these amendments to the house.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I would like to thank Dr Mansfield for putting forward these amendments in the constructive way in which she has done, but as discussed, the Liberals and Nationals will not be supporting these amendments at this time.

New clauses negatived.

New clause 5A (16:12)

Evan MULHOLLAND: I move:

1. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 5 –

'**5A New section 200 inserted**

After section 199 of the **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 insert** –

"**200 Transitional provision – Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Act 2026**

This Act as amended by the **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Act 2026** applies to and in respect of conduct all or part of which occurred before the commencement of this section if the corrupt conduct concerns a public officer or public body within the meaning of this Act as amended by the **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Act 2026** had this subsection been in force at the time the conduct occurred.".'.

This amendment is simply to have a retrospective application of the entire bill. I would like to particularly thank the engagement that we have had with the Greens on this particular part, which is what we requested in the bill but certainly clarifies that that is the determined intent of the amendment.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I thank Mr Mulholland for putting this amendment forward and likewise acknowledge the constructive way he and Mr Newbury have worked with us on this particular amendment. As members will see, we have an identical amendment, so we believe that this is an important change. As I have said, as a matter of public policy, IBAC should not be barred from investigating corruption to the tune of billions of dollars because those who engaged in the corrupt conduct did not know at the time that IBAC might uncover their misdeeds. This retrospective power will allow them to go back and look at things like what has gone on on some of the Big Build sites. So we are very supportive of this amendment.

New clause agreed to; clause 6 agreed to.

Reported to house with an amendment.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (16:15): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (16:15): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.25, the bill will be transmitted to the Assembly with a message requesting their agreement.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:16): I move:

That the consideration of notice of motion, general business, 1351, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Cohealth

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (16:16): I move:

That this house notes that:

(1) a federal government review into Cohealth's funding has just closed, with the report due mid-March;

(2) regardless of the outcome of the review, Victoria cannot afford to lose Cohealth services in Collingwood, Fitzroy and Kensington;

(3) Cohealth will have to begin wrapping up services at the end of April, if no funding is offered before then;

(4) staff and patients deserve certainty that they will be able to continue to deliver and access free, integrated health care at their local community health centre;

(5) community pressure resulted in an emergency $1.5 million from the federal government in 2025 to keep Cohealth operating until 31 July 2026;

(6) no funding or support has so far been offered by the Victorian state government, including infrastructure support to keep their services operational in Collingwood;

(7) Infrastructure Victoria has recommended that the Victorian government increase community health funding from 0.3 to 3 per cent of their health infrastructure budget;

(8) community health centres play a critical role in Victoria's healthcare system, and Cohealth's closure and reduction in services would be disastrous and result in increased poverty, disadvantage, poor health and hospital overloading;

(9) operational funding for primary and community health funding is a shared responsibility between federal and state governments;

and calls on the federal and Victorian Labor governments to commit to long-term, sustainable funding for community health and infrastructure funding for Cohealth in Collingwood.

I rise to speak in support of the motion standing in my name on Cohealth, because this is a test of whether we are prepared to fund the parts of the health system that actually prevent harm, keep people well and reduce pressure on hospitals, or whether we will once again wait for vulnerable people to be in crisis and then act too late. The independent review of Cohealth's general practice and related services has now closed to submissions and is in its final stages, but regardless of what the review says, the underlying problem is already clear: Victoria cannot afford to lose Cohealth services in Collingwood, Fitzroy and Kensington. That is because Cohealth is not just another GP provider. It is a large-scale community health service delivering accessible, wraparound, team-based integrated care to tens of thousands of people with complex and intersecting needs. It cannot just be replaced by a couple of new private GP practices.

In my 2023 adjournment matter on community health, I said that community health services target the root causes of health inequality, intervene early and keep people out of hospital by providing care as a collaborative team. That remains exactly the issue before us now. Cohealth's own submission to the review says it provides services for fair, local, coordinated primary care to people with complex needs and that the current funding system does not support longer team-based care for complex clients.

The numbers alone make the case for long-term investment. Cohealth's closure and service reduction would affect more than 12,500 community members who rely on affordable and accessible integrated care. The clinics were only recently kept open because of intense community pressure, which forced the Commonwealth to provide an emergency $1.5 million package in late 2025 to keep GP services operating until 31 July this year while the review took place. Hundreds of locals attended community meetings in Richmond and Kensington, and the Parliament itself passed a Greens motion calling for a rescue package. That should have been a signal to Labor that people understand exactly what is at stake here.

But short-term extensions are not a solution. If funding is not confirmed by the end of April, Cohealth will have to begin wrapping up services again, and we will be back to square one. That means staff and patients are now living with profound uncertainty. People do not know whether they will be able to keep seeing the clinicians that they trust, whether they will have to retell often deeply traumatic stories to new providers, or whether they will instead end up in an emergency department because there is nowhere else to go. That is not just a rhetorical concern. I mean that seriously. Cohealth's own client survey found that local services are critical, especially for older people and those with complex needs; that 77 per cent preferred services in one location; and that 46 per cent said they would go to an emergency department first if they could no longer access Cohealth for medical care. Cohealth's policy submission says approximately half of its clients would seek care at a hospital or emergency department if they could not get an appointment at Cohealth. This is exactly what integrated care is designed to prevent – fragmentation, avoidable deterioration and unnecessary hospital use. If you think hospitals in the city and inner north are busy now, just wait to see them inundated with people in need of complex emergency care if Cohealth closes.

The broader system evidence points in the same direction. Infrastructure Victoria reported last year that for the financial year 2023–24 around 546,000 emergency department visits in Victoria could have been avoided if people's health needs had been managed in primary care or the community health sector. It is estimated that this would have saved public hospitals about $554 million per year in emergency department expenditure alone. It also found that primary health care, social support and health promotion programs keep people well, manage chronic conditions and prevent acute deterioration that requires hospital care. This is not a marginal part of the system, this is how a functional health system works – and yet community health continues to be treated as an afterthought. Infrastructure Victoria has recommended increasing community health infrastructure funding from 0.3 per cent to between 1.5 and 3 per cent of the state's health infrastructure budget. It is still a minuscule amount compared to the whopping amounts that are spent on shiny new hospitals. And I am not saying we do not need some of these new hospitals, but I think our priorities are a little bit out of whack if we cannot afford to spend a little bit more on community health infrastructure. As I have

said in this place previously, community health centres play a critical role in our healthcare system, despite receiving just 0.3 per cent of our health infrastructure spend. Cohealth has been requesting support from the Victorian government since 2019 to rebuild the Collingwood centre. As my motion says, no funding or support has so far been offered by the Victorian government, including infrastructure support to keep services operational at Collingwood. That is an accurate description of years of neglect.

We also know that the funding problem is structural. We know the Medicare bulk-billing model is not appropriate for the complex, time-consuming care community health centres so often provide to vulnerable patients. The current funding model fails to reflect the true cost of caring for people with complex needs – that these clients require longer consultations and substantial work that cannot be billed for. In fact the Strengthening Medicare Taskforce itself identified that Medicare does not effectively support team-based integrated primary care. This is not a failure of Cohealth, it is a failure of governments. We currently have Labor governments at state and federal level to reform Medicare to be able to do the kind of care they know people need. We could be getting on with this. This motion is asking for something very basic and very reasonable. It asks state and federal Labor governments to stop treating community health like a dispensable add-on and instead recognise it as core health infrastructure. Operational funding for primary and community health care is a shared federal and state responsibility. Health infrastructure funding is plainly a state responsibility. If Cohealth is allowed to shrink or close, the consequences will not disappear; they will be shifted onto other people who are already doing it tough and onto hospitals that are already under enormous strain. That is bad policy, it is bad economics and it is bad public health.

I urge the house to support this motion to send a clear message: Cohealth services in Collingwood, Fitzroy and Kensington must not be lost. We need long-term, sustainable operational funding for community health, and we need infrastructure funding for Cohealth in Collingwood, because if we are serious about prevention, about health equity, about keeping pressure off hospitals and about saving money, this is exactly the kind of service we should be investing in, not allowing to disintegrate.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (16:24): Thank you, Dr Mansfield, for the opportunity to comment on this important topic of community health. Regardless of whether Victorians live in Collingwood or Koroit, community health services are a critical part of our health landscape. I want to start by pointing out that under the agreement with the Commonwealth government, Cohealth will continue to deliver GP services through to 31 July this year. The Commonwealth and Victorian governments' independent review is ongoing, and it is important to let that process and these independent, expert-led processes take place. It is wrong to pre-empt the findings and recommendations of this report. That review of Cohealth's general practice service model, organisational governance and finances is intended to find long-term solutions and ensure patients continue to get the care they need.

Community health centres are quite unique to Victoria. Our government has a proud record of supporting independent community health organisations. Independent community health organisations are unique to our state, as I said, and they receive funding from multiple levels of government. Government departments have funding streams. This reflects the multidisciplinary work that they do and the mix of responsibilities for health funding under the Australian federal system. The Allan Labor government continues to provide them with significant funding. Cohealth received $68.3 million from the Victorian government in 2025–26 across Department of Health and Department of Families, Fairness and Housing programs. This includes funding of $14.9 million for community health programs and $6.02 million for child protection and family services, plus homelessness support. More broadly, we invested $188 million last year alone to support the delivery of care across the state.

In contrast, part of the cause of the demise of general practice, not just at Cohealth but also across the state and across the nation, if we have a look at the federal coalition's record between 2013 and 2022 when they were in government, support for Medicare was contracted for families wanting to visit the

doctor back to concession card holders and children. What was a universal service under Hawke and Keating et cetera became a two-tiered system. To my friends across the chamber here: your friends in Canberra implemented a rebate freeze in real terms, reducing over time the value of the rebate and causing an increase in the amount that patients have to pay. This had the desired effect, as intended by the coalition government, of reducing bulk-billing. This freeze of the rebate in 2014 stripped $8 billion out of the Medicare system. GPs could no longer afford to bulk-bill. This is essentially the journey of Cohealth, whose patient cohort consists of a significant proportion of low-income people. The impact on Cohealth patients was devastating. I am very, very thankful to see that we now have a federal Labor government reinstating its commitment to universal health care, and in doing so it has introduced a number of initiatives, not least of which is the introduction of incentives for bulk-billing. Medicare and GP visits were run down under the federal coalition government, and this had significant impacts in Victoria. Victoria had to invest to cover off on the impacts, because when you cannot afford to go to the doctor, you leave your health issues behind or delay responding and you end up in emergency departments, which then become overcrowded with a whole range of issues that could easily be dealt with in a general practice.

Despite the fact that primary health care is the responsibility of the Commonwealth government, no other government has invested in accessible health like the Allan Labor government. This government has invested to mop up the primary health care mess created by the Abbott–Turnbull–Morrison Liberal governments. We have invested in improving statewide access to affordable health care close to home. We have delivered 29 urgent care centres in partnership with the Commonwealth, including in Warrnambool, where bulk-billing had pretty much contracted back almost entirely to state government funded agencies like WRAD, Western Regional Drug and Alcohol Centre, and Brophy Family and Youth Services. Also, $27 million was included in the last budget for 12 urgent care clinics across our state. These clinics are giving more Victorians access to the free health care they need when they need it in their neighbourhoods. I notice one has opened up in the Northcote community recently as well. It is very, very welcome. Open seven days a week, they accept both walk-ins and bookings. They are staffed by GPs and nurses who can treat a range of urgent but non-life-threatening conditions, such as sprains, broken bones, cuts and mild infections.

In my home town the benefits of an urgent care clinic have been fantastic, and it has taken significant pressure off the local emergency department. It is a hugely important part of improving access to health in the regions, taking pressure off the emergency departments. Across the state more than 800,000 visits have been made to urgent care clinics since they opened – more than 7500 people every week. It just goes to show you that money is a barrier to seeking health services and that the sooner you get to the doctor, the healthier you remain. I think 7500 people every week using urgent care clinics is very indicative of the inaccessibility of primary health care.

We also now have more than 870 pharmacies participating in our community pharmacy program. Over a quarter are in rural and regional Victoria, and women are benefiting from that. Over 25,000 consultations have been delivered to women for treatment of an uncomplicated urinary tract infection and over 14,000 for a resupply of the oral contraceptive pill. The Allan Labor government will be investing an additional $18 million in this year's budget to make the program permanent. These investments are reducing the cost of living for Victorians and making it easier to access local services, reducing the burden on bulk-billing GPs. Victorians know that when it comes to their health, the Victorian Labor government are on their side and the federal Labor government are on their side.

As reported by the ABC on 16 October 2025, the closure of Cohealth general practice services is driven by the Commonwealth's primary care funding model. The model is inadequate to meet the needs of Victoria's most vulnerable patients. We welcome the Commonwealth's decision to invest $1.5 million to continue GP services while this review is underway. The Commonwealth has an obligation to support organisations like Cohealth to work through business or operational challenges to maintain access to bulk-billing GPs. The Victorian government, along with other state and territory governments, lobbied the federal government to make changes to Medicare in order to encourage more

bulk billing. Our proposals include a tripling of the rebate and additional quarterly 12.5 per cent incentive payments for eligible services.

In conclusion and in contrast, that is the kind of approach that we take; instead the Liberals cut, and the Greens lob things from the sidelines. When they were last in power, the Liberals and the Nationals cut health and education, and it was Victorian families that paid the price. We can see that 7500 people per week are actually benefiting with the return of those services that we have put back in place. Now the Liberals have their $11.1 billion budget black hole, so it is hardly likely that there will be further investments in Cohealth should they gain power. They sold off the Mildura and Latrobe hospitals and prepared the Austin for sale, but luckily that was stopped. There were hospitals closed in Koroit, Mortlake, Murtoa and Macarthur. I could go on, but I will not.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (16:34): I have just been listening to Ms Ermacora and her contribution to the motion put forward by Dr Mansfield, number 1336 in her name, regarding Cohealth. Just last October we were debating a similar motion around Cohealth and the shutting down of the services because of the lack of investment by the Allan Labor government. There has been concern for many years around the infrastructure and the ability for services to be sustained within that service alone in Collingwood. I listened to question time in the other place today, where the minister was asked a question about this. She was talking about the review that was being done and that was meant to be completed in mid-March, or about now. I am not sure if that actually has been completed, but it must be very imminent. I think everybody is looking forward to that report coming out. As I said back in October when I was supporting Dr Mansfield's motion, this government has failed to recognise the needs this clinic meets, because they are not simple. Ms Ermacora just indicated that urgent care centres are the panacea and that they are there for sprains, cuts and bruises. These are far more complex patients. Some of them have got drug and alcohol addiction or very complex mental health needs, and they need sufficient time and they need a holistic approach to their care and a continuity of care that cannot be provided in an urgent care centre. That often is the case. I want to come back to the urgent care centres in a minute.

Ms Ermacora also spoke of the expansion of the community pharmacy program, and I am in support of extending the scope of practice where it is safe to do so and being able to provide the care that people require. Again, this community health centre is providing a lot of advice around pharmacological support and medicines and the like. I do take on board some of the concerns that have arisen with the college of GPs around some of the government's community programs where there have been some significant concerns and failures. I will just read out a couple. They said:

> One patient I saw was on estrogen + progesterone MHT (and clinically needed to have endometrial protection). The pharmacy did not have the progesterone product in stock so they told the patient they could just continue with estrogen alone.
>
> A second patient, a primary school age boy had pretty obvious impetigo. The parents had taken him to two pharmacies. The first said it was eczema and sold them steroid cream. A few days later without any improvement they went back and were then told to use tea tree oil. A week in when they saw me the kid had uncomfortable impetigo lesions on his genitalia, and had been going to school all week.

There are many examples showing up where this program is not the panacea that the government is stating it is.

I want to just go back to the urgent care centre issue. I am aware of one of my colleagues that took their son to an urgent care centre next to the Alfred. He had come off a bike and had grazes all down his arms, and they wanted to just have it dressed – pretty simple, actually. They rang me, and I said I would do the dressing for them, because they rang me to tell me that the child was referred out of that urgent care centre and back into the emergency department in the Alfred. How utterly ridiculous when it was just a few grazes. Urgent care centres have a place, but they are not doing what the government is telling the Victorian public that they are doing. Often patients turn up and they are closed because they are not open for the hours when they need to be seen.

I will just get back to Cohealth, though, and the importance of continuity of care and the importance of community-based care. I was just listening to Ms Ermacora around what the government is doing. I note that she continually failed to state that the Labor government has been in power in this state for the best part of over a decade – far too long, in my view; we need a change, and I am hoping Victorians will make that change in November to get this state back on track – as well as at a federal level, for many years, and still we get this blame game. Look, could we just stop and fix the problems? You talk about funding shortfalls, and you go back to the Kennett era. I mean, it is quite pathetic. We are living in 2026, where we have got a debt that is just eye-watering, where interest repayments are $20 million every single day – over $1.7 million every hour and increasing. This is a failure of this government's administration. It is why we are in the pickle we are in in Victoria, and it is why Cohealth has not got any funding certainty from the Victorian state Labor government. It is quite a disgrace.

I want to go to a letter I received from a doctor, who spoke about the work they do and the importance of the work they do. It says:

> … as a practising GP of more than twenty years at the cohealth Kensington site … many of us working in the clinics find ourselves in a period of waiting and uncertainty.
>
> … the past few months have inevitably brought a deterioration in workforce morale and patient confidence.

That is a result of the government's inaction and decisions. The letter continues:

> For many, community health general practice often provides the anchor that coordinates care across a fragmented system. If these services were reduced or disrupted, the risk is more than inconvenience. It is fragmentation: patients repeating their histories, medication errors occurring, preventive care being missed, and acute services absorbing preventable demand.

And that really was highlighted in Dr Mansfield's contribution around the acute system and what would happen to those 12,500 patients at Collingwood Cohealth. Where are they going to go? They are going to end up in the emergency departments of St Vincent's, at Royal Melbourne, Royal Children's, Eye and Ear or wherever because of ailments that could have been treated and advice that could have been given in this community health setting.

I say again that the government have themselves to blame for this – no-one else. They have gone rushing to the federal government to get some funding to bail them out because the state has no money. The health budget is being cut. You go and speak to any CEO of a health service now and they will tell you about the funding restrictions they are under and the huge demands that have been placed upon them. And what is going to happen? It will be elective surgery that cannot go ahead because it is activity-based funding. That is what they are asking to be cut. So make no mistake, we have got 64,000-odd people waiting for surgery, and that is as a direct result of the failures and mismanagement of this government's administration. It is very concerning. In fact it is more than concerning; it is alarming to see the deterioration of the state, whether it is health, whether it is community safety or whether it is potholes. I have gone off here, but it is the deterioration of the state I am talking about.

In health, when you want the health and wellbeing of your citizens to be able to be supported, I am a little bit fed up of the blame game from this government, given the enormous $200 billion debt and rising that we are facing and the enormous interest repayments. With the interest rates going up yesterday, that is going to put more pressure on the Victorian government to pay back that interest that Victorian taxpayers have to pay before they pay for any services. Those interest repayments have to be paid before anything else gets done, because they have racked up this debt because they are so hopeless in managing a budget. Vulnerable patients that need these services and quite rightly expect these services are going to be the ones that suffer. This government might talk about how they care, but they actually do not care about or understand their actions and what they are doing. So they have run to the federal government to bail them out. The federal government has said, 'Well, you've got till 31 July to sort it out. Let's have a look at this review.'

In the last few seconds, I do agree with Dr Mansfield and want to support her motion and the very valid points that she has raised and say again:

> no funding or support has so far been offered by the Victorian state government, including infrastructure support to keep their services operational in Collingwood …

That says it all. That is my point. There are many other very good points in this. On the basis of that, the Liberal and Nationals will be supporting Dr Mansfield's motion.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (16:44): I rise to speak in support of this motion from Dr Mansfield on the urgent need to secure the long-term future of the Cohealth Fitzroy, Collingwood and Kensington facilities. These services form a critical part of Victoria's community health system, providing essential, affordable and trauma-informed primary care to thousands of people who rely on stability and continuity for their health care. For many years Cohealth has been sounding the alarm that the current funding model for community-based general practice is no longer fit for purpose. Medicare in its present design funds short standard consultations, yet the reality in community health is vastly different. Many patients present with complex physical, psychological and social needs that require extended appointments, multidisciplinary input and coordinated care planning. The mismatch between funding and service needs has grown steadily, leaving Cohealth with an unsustainable gap between the cost of providing care and the revenue available to support it.

Recently, temporary Commonwealth support has allowed these GP services to continue operating while a broader review takes place. That interim review is welcome, avoiding any immediate and damaging disruption to care. That independent review is now examining Cohealth's clinical model, governance arrangements and financial structures. The findings will hopefully help guide a long-term solution, but temporary measures cannot be mistaken for lasting reform. Without decisive action now, we risk facing the same crisis again once the short-term funding expires.

The impact of GP service withdrawal would be devastating for the people who attend these centres, who often live with multiple chronic diseases and ongoing impacts of trauma or face challenges such as homelessness, unstable housing, addiction or mental ill health. For many their GP is the cornerstone of their health journey – the clinician who understands their history, their circumstances and their barriers to care. Losing that continuity is not a simple administrative inconvenience; it can mean the difference between stability and crisis, between life and death. The closure of Cohealth would place additional strain on hospitals already under significant pressure and increase the risk of late presentations, preventable complications and poorer health outcomes.

Just as concerning is the cascading effect that the loss of GP services would have on the broader integrated care model that defines community health. These centres do not operate as standalone general practices; they offer wraparound services, bringing together GPs, nurses, counsellors, pharmacists, allied health practitioners, mental health workers, alcohol and drug specialists and more. However, it is the GPs who initiate referrals, manage medications, lead multidisciplinary case discussions and provide the medical oversight necessary for integrated care to function. GPs are the clinical anchor in this model. When GP services are compromised, the entire ecosystem becomes unstable. We have already seen examples of counselling and pharmacy services and pathology services being cut or relocated because the loss of GP capacity weakens the model that sustains them. Without strong GP services, the other parts of community health cannot flourish.

I wish to highlight ongoing community concerns regarding governance arrangements across the sector. Community health was built on a foundation of local participation and accountability. Over time, however, decision-making at Cohealth seems to have shifted further away from the communities they serve. At recent forums, staff, patients and local residents have expressed their distress at feeling disconnected from processes that directly impact their health care. Restoring community involvement, transparency and partnership must be prioritised to rebuild trust in that system.

Then there is unmet demand. Many community health centres, including Kensington, where I have been a resident for some 30 years, have struggled for years with limited GP availability and lengthy waitlists. It is clear that demand in many inner-urban areas exceeds supply, so there is a need to plan, not merely to preserve existing services but to expand capacity where possible. In Kensington, even as population grows rapidly due to densification, the number of GPs available to the community has actually dropped. This is insane, particularly given that the redevelopment of Kensington housing estate included a large dedicated older persons' building, as well as major age-friendly retrofits to the two towers, specifically undertaken because of its proximity to the community health centre only a couple of hundred metres away.

Closing or reducing services in high-need communities will only push more people into crisis and leave even fewer options for those with the greatest barriers to care. This is why the forthcoming recommendations of the independent review are so important. We have an opportunity to design a GP service that genuinely supports complex care while also expanding capacity to provide general bulk-billing services. A new funding framework must include a stable base for the fixed costs of multidisciplinary work, flexible support for longer consultations, recognition of the extra time required for trauma-informed and culturally safe care and incentives that reward positive outcomes rather than high-volume, low-complexity throughput. This is the type of model needed to sustain and strengthen community health now and into the future.

The government needs to act decisively. First, we must ensure that GP services at Cohealth continue beyond the expiry of the temporary funding. Continuity must be guaranteed so that patients and staff are not forced back into uncertainty and the closure of services effectively becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Second, we must embrace a modernised funding model that reflects the realities of community-based care and incorporates the findings of the independent review. Third, we must invest in the infrastructure required for safe and effective service delivery, recognising that ageing buildings and outdated facilities can no longer support the demands placed upon them. Fourth, the integrity of the integrated care model must be protected. General practice, counselling, pharmacy, allied health and mental health services cannot be separated without undermining outcomes. Fifth, we must restore strong community governance structures to ensure that local voices and expertise guide the evolution of community health. Finally, we must expand GP services where demand is greatest to ensure that no Victorian is left without timely and appropriate care.

Community health is one of Victoria's greatest social assets. It supports people who would otherwise fall through the cracks. We know that if these GP services disappear the cost will be borne not only by those most in need but by the entire health system. We have the opportunity now to prevent that, to strengthen the foundations of community health and to ensure that every Victorian has access to the care they deserve. No Victorian should be left without the health care they need – not today, not next year, not ever.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (16:53): Thank you very much for the opportunity to rise and speak on Dr Mansfield's motion regarding Cohealth, and I do thank her for bringing this motion before us. I want to begin by acknowledging the significant and deep concern this issue has raised amongst my constituents in the Northern Metropolitan Region. Since the news broke regarding Cohealth's general practice services, my office has been heavily engaged by residents in Collingwood, Fitzroy, Kensington, Footscray and the other surrounding areas who rely on Cohealth each and every day. I have met with community leaders and advocates, frontline workers, the union and other people who have been impacted by this.

We must remember that community health is more than just a medical appointment; it is about the social, emotional and cultural determinants of health being addressed all in one place. I have seen the outreach work that Cohealth does firsthand, joining their workers to meet with homeless folks in Melbourne, and I know that their presence on the ground is vital. I have seen it and know very much the impact that it has. For many in my electorate – the parents, the elderly, people from all walks of life – Cohealth has been a vital hub for integrated, culturally safe and compassionate care for decades.

I deeply understand how important this issue is, and to have that looming question of 'Where do I go and who do I see?' is something these people should not have to go through, because they deserve better. I have heard so many stories about how these health organisations are part of people's lives, their sense of community and how they connect.

Independent community health organisations do an incredible job treating the most vulnerable in our community. They offer a depth of services across mental health, dental, physiotherapy and child and family health care. These services are designed specifically for easy access, addressing common and low-risk health concerns to reduce the overall burden on our hospital system, and that is why for many Cohealth is the only place they feel safe and supported enough to seek care. It is not just about a doctor's appointment but about providing a place where the most vulnerable feel comfortable coming back time and time again to get the help that they need. We know that these types of local community health centres are a distinctive and important part of Victoria's healthcare system.

However, to address this issue effectively, we need to be clear about how these services are structured. Independent community health organisations are exactly that – they are independent. They receive funding from multiple levels of government and remain autonomous in their management structures and day-to-day decisions. Their boards and management teams are responsible for the decisions they make, and they are ultimately accountable to the communities that they serve. It is important to note that Cohealth's decision to close certain GP services was based on federal funding arrangements. In a previous contribution that I made on a motion that Dr Mansfield brought to this place last year on Cohealth, I made mention of how many times the federal model is like putting a square peg in a round hole – a reality I saw firsthand at Merri Health as the former deputy chair. Before entering Parliament I sat on deliberations around funding models, the Medicare benefits schedule and the payment system and how, for community health, it just does not work. It was clear that the system can be inadequate to meet the needs of vulnerable patients. I recall asking the very question 'What is the average appointment time for Cohealth?' and let me assure you, it is much longer than in other areas. That is why I know from those conversations about MBS modelling that the current federal system is just not enough. These calls for reform have been going on for a very long time. I know because I have been in those conversations.

Cohealth's own leadership have confirmed that they cannot afford to continue running all their bulk-billing GP services because these exact challenges with the current Medicare model are as yet unaddressed. We must note that GPs, primary care and the Medicare system are all the direct responsibility of the Commonwealth. If the Commonwealth's current funding model does not actually recognise how complex these services are and if it has not seen the reality of the care that has to be provided in these settings, then it is incumbent on that level of government that is responsible to step up and do something about it. They need to listen and think about different ways of supporting the very unique circumstances of service users in community health. The Commonwealth has an obligation to support organisations like Cohealth to maintain access to bulk-billing GPs, just as it has done with its recent changes to GP bulk-billing right across the country.

In terms of our track record, the Victorian government supports having more GPs, and more GPs that bulk-bill and are accessible. It is our government, along with other state and territory governments, that has lobbied the federal government for a long time to address challenges within the Medicare system to encourage more bulk-billing, including tripling of the rebate and the additional quarterly 12.5 per cent incentive payments for eligible services from the start of November. We welcome the Commonwealth decision to invest $1.5 billion to ensure Cohealth's GP services continue until 31 July this year, and I want to emphasise very clearly that through this agreement with the Commonwealth Cohealth is required to deliver GP services until that date.

In 2025–26 the Vic government is providing Cohealth with $68.3 million across various health and social care programs. This includes $14.9 million for the community health program that helps fund services such as the general counselling service and over $6 million for child protection, family services and homelessness support. We are ensuring that vital services remain stable and all clients of

Cohealth's alcohol and other drug services will continue to receive care from alternative Cohealth sites. The specialised Bourke Street clinic has not been impacted, and I think that is important to note. We are also making health care more accessible through our urgent care clinics and the community pharmacy program – I spoke about that earlier today – which reduces the burden on bulk-billing GPs. Now 22 mental health and wellbeing locals are already supporting more than 35,000 Victorians to access free care without a referral, and we are continuing to support community health. The Victorian government is supporting community health by investing $188 million last year alone to support care right across the state.

I do want to mention an update since Dr Mansfield's motion last year in that our government and the Commonwealth have commissioned an expert review of Cohealth's general practice service model, its governance and its finances. We are trying to find long-term solutions to ensure patients continue to get the care that they need. The independent review is being led by Professor Stephen Duckett AM, a pre-eminent expert on health governance, innovation and reform. Professor Duckett is being supported by Professor John Furler, a GP and researcher, and Ms Jane Seeber, who has extensive experience in working for community health organisations, their finances and their operations. The review is focused on the overall service model at Cohealth's general practice, including the clinical service model, the operations, governance and financial viability in the context of the overall operations of the organisation. I will repeat: this is an organisation that the state government funded to the tune of $68 million. The intended outcome of the review is the development of options that support the continuation of these services to the community. It is an important piece of work – absolutely no doubt about it – that must be left to run its course. Instead what we see with this motion before us is an attempt to pre-empt Professor Duckett's report and undermine his expertise and that of his fellow review panellists and the significant amount of work that has been done to understand the root causes behind Cohealth's challenges in delivering GP services, some of which I mentioned earlier in my contribution and some which I am sure will come out as we undertake more consideration of the findings. The review is ongoing and it is important that we let these independent expert-led processes take place. It is really wrong to pre-empt the findings and recommendations of this report. I am certainly not going to be running roughshod over community submissions, Cohealth's own submission, bulk-billing data, insights and expertise. On one hand what we hear is that independent expertise is critical when it comes to health, but on the other what I am seeing is attempts to undermine the very independent expertise of Professor Duckett, amongst others.

I am interested in ensuring that Cohealth has the right structures, the right governance, the right processes and the right finances in place so that it thrives as an independent community health organisation and not in using this as a political opportunity like so many others. This matter is not going to be resolved by spreading misinformation and disinformation about organisations like Cohealth. Many vulnerable Victorians rely on these services, and misinformation only seeks to further that harm. Even today I saw in question time, as was mentioned by Ms Crozier, a question asked by Ms de Vietri trying to again pre-empt the review that has yet to be seen certainly by the community as a whole. I am not going to stand by and see fearmongering take place when really it is people's lives that are very much on the line. I want to assure constituents that I hear their concerns – it does hit home for me. I believe in community health, this government believes in community health, and our government knows that our community absolutely needs it. I am going to stand by my community because the people that deserve patient-centred care deserve to be at the very forefront of our decision-making, and that is what they are today and every day. I look forward to continuing my work with the health minister and our federal colleagues to get a true outcome for Cohealth.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:03): I rise to support Dr Mansfield's motion on Cohealth. This is an extremely important motion, and I want to start by acknowledging the incredible work she has done, and we are supporting this. It was interesting – I want to pick up on some comments made by members of the government. One member of the government said this – I am not joking – when Georgie was speaking about why this is important. Ms Ermacora actually yelled out and said, 'Well, the Liberal government would cut that anyway.' So I wanted to respond to that, and the first thing I

will say is: it is pretty hard to cut something that is not funded. Dr Mansfield points this out in point 6 of the motion:

> no funding or support has so far been offered by the Victorian state government, including infrastructure support to keep the services operational in Collingwood …

I want to talk about something else. Just yesterday Labor took the scissors out and they began to cut, cut, cut. I will speak first about the cuts to VicHealth, and the reason I want to talk about the cuts to VicHealth is that VicHealth very much talk about the social and economic determinants of health. Their whole mantra really is that you should build some guardrails so people do not fall into the river, rather than going downstream, rescuing people and trying to pull them out when they are in trouble. This is a very smart idea, and it is based on the Ottawa charter that says one of the key indicators as to whether you will have good health or ill health is whether or not you are economically secure. That is why Cohealth in areas like Collingwood, Fitzroy and Kensington matters, because our healthcare system is so under pressure that it cannot keep up with the demand in Victoria because the Allan Labor government has completely mismanaged it. Not only that, the cost of living is so out of control in this state. There are more taxes and charges in Victoria. Over 60 new or increased taxes have come into play since you lot have been in government. It is very hard for people to even put food on the table, let alone pay for private health insurance. It is just about impossible for these people.

What I did want to pick up on – and I just jotted down a few notes while I was listening to Ms Ermacora as she spoke about the Liberals and cuts – is: isn't it interesting that just yesterday the Labor government cut Recycling Victoria. They are merging with the EPA. They are getting abolished, and they are moving their functions to the EPA. They cut it. Another thing that Labor cut just yesterday was the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council. They cut it regardless of the fact that one of the biggest issues facing coastal areas in Victoria is coastal erosion. This affects not just people living on the coast, it affects tourism. I just want to call this out because it just goes to show that what they say is not even close to what they do. They can gaslight. They can bag people out. They can blame us for cuts, but I am just going to take you through a few that they led the way on and did themselves.

That is Recycling Victoria out and the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council out. We have got another one here: the Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority. It has been merged with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. They have been abolished, and they have been subsumed by that body – another cut. There are a few more. The Victorian Public Sector Commission Advisory Board – cut. Let us just keep going. The Victorian Government Purchasing Board has been abolished, and they have transferred their functions to another body – cut. There is another one. This one is very important, by the way. I think this is important. Here is another one for you: Road Safety Camera Commissioner Reference Group – cut. Then let us go to one that is very close to my heart – I would say close to everyone's heart in here; everyone stands and supports it, every single one. On one hand, you are saying, 'We support mental health.' This is one of the biggest issues that is facing the next generation. Well, guess what they have done: mental health and wellbeing commissioner – cut. Let us not stop there. Here are a few other things that this government has cut just recently. Police recruitment – do you reckon it is up or down, team? It is down. It has been cut. What about the Children's Court?

Harriet Shing interjected.

Renee HEATH: Hey, at least we're honest, Minister. What about the Children's Court? Cut. What about health? Cut. What about mental health in this?

Harriet Shing interjected.

Renee HEATH: What would you like? Call a point of order, actually. All right, you are not calling a point of order.

Mental health – cut. What about community housing projects and programs? They have been cut. Let us talk about the 44 housing towers that you have bulldozed. I tell you what: getting rid of 44 housing towers over the next decade or so is not just a cut; that is a demolition. Let us just keep going through.

Members interjecting.

Renee HEATH: It is so nice to have a bit more energy in the chamber. It is nice to see you actually have some passion in here. What about community housing programs that are not being continued? Plenty of those have been cut. VicHealth – I have gone through that; VicHealth has been cut. Maternity services across the state have been cut. What about fisheries officers? Cut. Here is another one: road maintenance and roadside maintenance in Victoria under the Allan Labor government have been cut. And here is another one –

A member interjected.

Renee HEATH: No, this a good one that you have overseen. What about the big cut from the Victorian budget of $15 billion that under your watch has been cut from the public purse because corruption has been able to go wild in this state. That is just my little response to Ms Ermacora's throwaway comment about how we are going to cut a program that has not been budgeted – I wanted to point that out.

I commend this motion to the house, because I tell you what, Cohealth helps people in communities. It absolutely does that. Staff and patients that have been there for many, many years need these services. The other thing is it also makes families feel secure, knowing that they have a Cohealth service. You guys might not know that, because right now in Victoria people are not financially secure. There is crime and there is a crime committed every 6 minutes, so they are certainly not secure in terms of their safety. I wanted to raise that. In the interest of time, that is just a few of the Allan Labor government cuts that I have been able to go to, to respond to some of what I believe is disingenuous and dishonest rhetoric coming from the government.

Joe McCracken interjected.

Renee HEATH: It is misinformation, thank you, Mr McCracken. So thank you to Dr Mansfield for bringing this important motion to the house. I commend it.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (17:12): I think I am exhausted before I even start, having listened to all of that. But if we want to talk about cuts, if Dr Heath wants to talk about –

Harriet Shing interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: We will cut to the chase, Minister Shing. Twelve hospitals in country Victoria are what the Liberals closed. We know the Liberal Party's health record: they close and privatise and shut down hospitals. It is this side that builds them. It is this side that invests in health care, and Victorians know that. They have seen it time and time again, and Cuts McCracken is over there trying to hide away from the history that they have of health cuts in this state. Victorians can clearly see there is an $11 billion budget black hole that the Liberals have, and we know how they will fill that: they will fill that by cutting services.

I am proud to be part of a party that has invested in health. In fact just this morning the mobile women's health bus was out the front, an incredible fit-out that is getting out to regional and rural Victoria, meeting women in place with free health care to assist them. We have got our virtual emergency department, what we are doing in schools from a health perspective – with Smile Squad, Glasses for Kids, our Get Active Kids vouchers and the breakfast club programs – our community pharmacies, the community sports programs, our active transport and our bike paths. Dr Heath would be well versed with the rail trails all throughout eastern Victoria, with one of the longest rail trails in the Southern Hemisphere – even from a tourism perspective, we are getting people active and out in their community. At our community health centres in eastern Victoria, we are even supporting them to open kinders from that early stage, that early education, that early connection into our community, into our community health groups, from start all the way to finish.

I was out with Minister Stitt in recent months at the public aged care facilities that are being built in eastern Victoria. They are incredible in keeping people ageing in their local communities and giving workers first-class facilities to work in. I have been out with the bush nurse and others at Goongerah. Our community groups, our community gardens – the fresh produce that they are growing and getting out to the community, whether that is cooking, whether that is food or the paddock to plate to ensure that locals have fresh, healthy food. Of course there are our major projects like Frankston hospital and others where we are investing in big health infrastructure. You can see from just some of the examples I have touched on, whether it is preventative, whether it is the touchpoint of community health or whether it is primary health care, that it is all there. This government knows how important it is that it is accessible and affordable for all Victorians. We know independent community health organisations are unique to Victoria and do an incredible job treating some of the most vulnerable in our community. It is important to note that community health organisations receive funding from multiple levels of government and multiple government departments and remain independent from government in their management structures and day-to-day business and decision-making.

We want more GPs in Victoria. We want more GPs in Victoria who bulk-bill. Despite GPs, primary care and Medicare being the responsibility of the Commonwealth government, no other government has invested in accessible care like the Allan Labor government. The Commonwealth have an obligation to support organisations like Cohealth, and the Commonwealth and Victorian governments have commissioned an independent review of Cohealth's general practice service model, organisational governance and finances to find long-term solutions and ensure patients continue to get the care they need. The review is ongoing, and it is important we let these independent, expert-led processes take place and not pre-empt findings.

Community health organisations play an important role, and the Allan Labor government invested $188 million last year alone to support the delivery of care across the state. I think it is important to reinforce the fact that it is Labor governments that invest in health care, it is Labor governments that invest in healthcare workforces and it is Labor governments that ensure that healthcare workers are paid. Where we have workforces that are female dominated, we ensure that there is pay equality for those workforces. It is Labor governments and only Labor governments that will do that work to ensure the workforce and the community's healthcare needs are met. I will leave my contribution there.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) incorporated the following:

I rise to speak on the motion in regard to the CoHealth site in Collingwood, Fitzroy and Kensington.

It is important to acknowledge the significant impact of community health organisation within Victoria's health care system.

They are unique to our state, and they do an incredible job at treating some of the most vulnerable in our community.

The Allan Labor Government knows the importance of affordable primary care for all Victorians.

CoHealth organisations provide a wide range of essential services that support people in their local communities.

They deliver a mix of State, local government and federally funded services.

By providing services locally, they help ensure that people can access healthcare earlier and more conveniently, often preventing the escalation of health issues that might otherwise require more extensive treatment.

But to be clear, independent community health organisations are just that – independent.

Their business decisions are made independently of government, and each organisations board and management is responsible for the decisions they make.

The Commonwealth has an obligation to support organisations like Cohealth to work through business or operational challenges to maintain access to bulk billing GPs.

Which is why we welcomed their decision to invest $1.5 million to ensure GP services continue to 31 July 2026.

However, there is a lot of fearmongering going on at the moment.

Through its agreement with the Commonwealth Government, Cohealth must continue to deliver GP services through to 31 July 2026.

An independent review of Cohealth's general practice service model, organisational governance and finances has been commissioned by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments.

In order to find long term solutions and ensure patients continue to get the care they need.

This review is ongoing and it is important we let these independent, expert led processes take place.

It is wrong to pre-empt the findings and recommendations of this report.

The Allan Labor Government continues to provide funding to support the delivery of community health services across the state.

In the last year alone, $188 million was invested to support the delivery of care through community health organisations.

This funding supports services that are often delivered in partnership with both state and federal programs.

Community health centres are often the first point of contact for patients seeking healthcare and helps ensure that people receive timely diagnosis, treatment and ongoing management of health conditions.

And nothing demonstrates this government's commitment to supporting our health care sector more than the 2025/26 State Budget.

Which has been putting investment in frontline care as a top priority.

The Victorian Government will provide cohealth with $68.3 million in 2025–26.

This includes funding for a number of programs, including $14.9 million for programs delivered via the Community Health Program and $6.02 million for child protection and family services, plus homelessness support.

The Allan Labor Government have implemented a range of initiatives to support the delivery of primary care services and to strengthen the broader health system.

These include investments aimed at improving access to urgent care and reducing pressure on hospital emergency departments.

These urgent care clinics provide treatment for situations that are urgent but not emergencies.

Patients presenting with conditions such as mild infections, burns, suspected fractures or sprains can receive care in these clinics rather than attending an emergency department.

The aim of these clinics is to relieve pressure on hospitals while ensuring patients still receive appropriate and timely care.

Funding has also been provided to support these GP-led urgent care clinics so they can continue delivering these.

This Budget invests $27 million to continue 12 Urgent Care Clinics across our state, giving more Victorians access to the free healthcare they need, when they need it.

29 Urgent Care Centres, in total are now delivered in partnership with the Commonwealth.

More than eight hundred thousand visits have been made to UCCs since they opened.

Allowing emergency departments and hospital services some reprieve to focus on more serious cases.

While patients with less urgent conditions still have affordable access to appropriate care.

Another component of the primary care system that has increasingly played a role in supporting patients is the work undertaken by pharmacists through pharmacy-based care.

Community pharmacies are often one of the most accessible points of contact within the healthcare system.

For many people, a local pharmacy is available with or without an appointment and provides an opportunity to seek advice and treatment for a range of common health concerns.

The Community Pharmacy Program, introduced just this year by the Allan Labor Government, allows pharmacists to consult on certain aliments.

They can provide treatment or advice for specific conditions assisting in relieving pressure on GP clinics by ensuring that patients with straightforward or minor conditions can receive timely care.

A consult from a pharmacist is a free service in which you can get professional advice.

In doing so, pharmacy-based care helps ensure that general practitioners are able to focus their time on patients who require more complex medical care.

With more than 870 pharmacies participating in our Community Pharmacy Program across the state.

Providing over 59,000 services.

Over a quarter of those which are in regional or rural Victoria.

This type of care does not replace the important role of general practitioners, but it can complement the work of GP practices and community health services.

By providing additional access points within the health system, pharmacy-based care contributes to a more integrated approach to primary healthcare.

Giving the community quicker access to expert opinions on minor concerns.

Women are benefitting the most with over 25,000 consultations delivered to women for treatment of an uncomplicated urinary tract infection, and over 14,000 for a resupply of an oral contraceptive pill.

The Allan Labor Government will be investing an additional $18 million in this year's budget to make the program permanent.

The Allan Labor Government wants a more accessible health care system.

A system that extends to regional communities and make it easier for Victorian's to get the treatment they need no matter where they are.

Supporting the primary care workforce more broadly is also an important element of strengthening healthcare access.

We have delivered 22 Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals across 24 locations.

Which have supported more than 35,000 Victorians to access free mental health care and support close to home – without making them jump through hoops like a GP referral or meeting eligibility criteria.

These services are supporting Victorians with cost-of-living expenses and convenience and making it easier to access local services for common, low risk health concerns reducing the burden on bulk billing GPs.

A grants program was established to encourage doctors to specialise in general practice.

Through this program, financial incentives were offered to support doctors undertaking GP training.

Around 800 grants of $40,000 were made available through this initiative, with approximately 400 grants allocated in 2024 and a further 400 in 2025.

These measures were designed to encourage more doctors to enter general practice and help strengthen the primary care workforce across Victoria.

By supporting the training of new GPs, these initiatives aim to improve long-term access to primary healthcare services.

This was all about supporting doctors to specialise in General Practice in order to help strengthen the primary care sector, and in doing so help improve health outcomes for all Victorians.

Another core example is how this government gave exemptions from the payroll tax to bulk billing GPs starting this financial year.

Now if a GP clinic is bulk billing for its patients, those instances are exempt from the payroll tax, lightening the tax burden from these businesses.

We are focused on strengthening care across Victoria's healthcare system, whether it is through our public hospitals or through our community health partners so that every Victorian can get the essential care they need close to home.

The Victorian Government has outlined a plan to create more connected health systems through the Health Services Plan.

This plan seeks to strengthen the primary care sector and improve coordination between different parts of the health system.

The Health Services Plan focuses on building stronger connections between specialised health professionals, hospitals and community health services.

By improving coordination and communication between these services, the aim is to ensure that patients can access the care they need more easily and more efficiently.

The plan also recognises the importance of ensuring that health services are available closer to home, particularly for people living in regional and rural communities.

By investing in local health service networks, the goal is to create a more resilient and well-resourced healthcare system that can respond effectively to the needs of the population.

The Allan Labor Government will continue to provide funding for our frontline health services.

We saw during the COVID-19 pandemic, how quickly an overwhelmed frontline care workforce being overrun with the virus led to system-wide issues with pressure and under-resourcing.

When we invest in the various aspects of our health system, it not only takes pressure off other areas, just as how Urgent Care Clinics are taking pressure off GP Clinics, but it also delivers more effective primary care for Victorians.

President, the Allan Labor Government is proud of its record when it comes to investing in our health system, and in particular when it comes to supporting community health programs and organisations.

We have always put our health system first, and we will always advocate for Victorians to get the very best.

We will always back in our front line and primary care services.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (17:17): I thank members for their contributions to this debate, which at times became quite wideranging and, I think, drifted a fair way from the actual motion. But I think what I grasped from most contributions is that there is broad support for the work of Cohealth and recognition of the need to ensure that we continue to fund Cohealth and that it continues to be able to deliver for the communities that it currently serves. I hope that this motion will serve as a prompt to the government to look at what more they can do to provide financial security, stability and certainty for Cohealth, in particular with respect to infrastructure funding, which is a state responsibility, and remove some of that uncertainty that is currently hanging over those key community facilities. Spending money on community health is one of the best investments you can make in our health system. The return on investment is huge because of the quality of the care and the avoidable harms and hospitalisations that result from the sort of care that is provided by these facilities. I really urge the government to take heed of this motion today and ensure that they act and listen to the people who are living in these communities, who desperately want their services to continue.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:19): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Statements on tabled papers and petitions

Department of Treasury and Finance

2025–26 Budget Update

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:19): Today I rise to make a statement on the *2025–26 Budget Update*, which was tabled in December last year, and particularly to use it as an opportunity to talk about the state of the Victorian economy. As both the budget update and also some of the economic statistics that have been released since the budget update demonstrate, there is a really positive outlook for the Victorian economy. Victoria's economy is growing. Our unemployment rate is low, business investment is up, wages growth is strong, and it all means that Victoria is on a path of strength. We do know that there are global factors weighing on economic circumstances right around the globe; we know that in the face of economic headwinds being driven by conflict around the globe the underlying strength and resilience of the Victorian economy is going to become increasingly important. We know that households are facing increased costs from the interest rate rise that we saw yesterday. Clearly the effects of increased petrol prices are being felt right across the community. We know that households are feeling these effects. When we head into periods of economic uncertainty

caused by external events, we have got to make sure that our economic settings and our economic performance are coming from a place of strength, and this Victorian economy is exactly in that position.

The economic and fiscal overview in chapter 1 of the budget update tabled in December last year shows that Victoria is leading the nation when it comes to the strength of the jobs market and growth in business investment. The Victorian economy is 12.7 per cent larger than before the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant recovery from that health and economic crisis which impacted on economies across the globe. In per-capita terms over that same period, our economy is 4.1 per cent larger – economic growth here in Victoria. Our approach to fiscal management, our five-step fiscal strategy, is working; the budget update shows that the government has achieved or is forecast to achieve each of those steps – more jobs for Victorians, higher wages and stronger business investment.

The latest figures from the ABS, released last week, show that the unemployment rate, seasonally adjusted, in January in Victoria was 4.2 per cent, a figure that is far below the 6.7 per cent unemployment rate that the Liberals presided over when they were last in government and below the 20-year unemployment rate average here in Victoria of 5.5 per cent. Employment in Victoria is being boosted by record-high participation rates in share of working age and the record highs in the share of working-age Victorians in employment in 2024–25. A lot of that is being supported by the policies of the Labor government. Free TAFE, as one example – celebrating its seventh anniversary – is giving Victorians the qualifications and the skills that they need to take advantage of business investment in this state and to take advantage of the job opportunities in this state, and that is because of deliberate decisions that this Labor government has taken to invest in TAFE and invest in skills, and those investments in skills and TAFE are leading to Victorians being in work and participating in the labour market in record numbers. It is not just in Melbourne. Regional Victoria has the strongest employment growth in the nation. The jobs that the Victorian economy has created are here in Melbourne and in the regions, the strongest regional jobs growth in the nation.

I have mentioned the fact that 2024–25 saw real wages grow. One of the reasons that we are seeing such a strong performance of the Victorian economy is because businesses are investing. Investment in Victorian business has grown by 15 per cent in the last three years compared with 10 per cent for the rest of Australia. The economy is growing. Victoria is in a good economic position. There are some headwinds in the global economy which are obviously creating uncertainty. Households are facing interest rate rises and petrol increases, but the fundamentals we are seeing for Victoria are that business investment is up and unemployment is low.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Community Consultation Practices

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:25): I rise to speak on the report of the inquiry into community consultation practices, which was tabled on 3 March. I was a member of that committee, so I know exactly what the committee heard from community members. The committee heard that stakeholders were highly critical of the Victorian government's engagement strategy and their unwillingness to listen. Finding 2 of that report says:

> The Public Engagement Framework is not consistently applied to all engagements conducted by Victorian Government departments and agencies.

In some cases we heard that major decisions were made without any consultation or community engagement at all. A good example of that is actually the Central North renewable energy zone, which covers a very large area between Shepparton and Bendigo. When that came out, it aroused significant opposition from farmers and locals, who stressed the importance of protecting the irrigation district and productive farmland within the draft zone. Following concerted community efforts, the zone was significantly reduced in size. This is a situation where they actually listened about that area. However, to compensate for the reduced size in that area, the final Victorian transmission plan included in the

zone a completely new area that included land from the east of Shepparton from Pine Lodge through to Glenrowan, a very, very large area of land. No-one at all had been consulted about this. The only people who knew about it were the energy developers who had pushed the government to include the area. The farmers did not know about it. This is their land, and they did not know about it. They were not consulted. Local councils did not know about it. This was a complete failure by the government to engage with the local community on what was a very significant decision. Knowledge of this change only became widespread after I issued a media release slamming the government for completely bypassing community consultation in order to satisfy developer interest.

Back to the report: many submissions were also highly critical of engagement that involved top-down sharing of information rather than genuine consultation where people had the opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process. Finding 7 of the report says:

> Engagement processes should be designed to seek community input at a point when it can and will be meaningfully utilised.

When people share their views in good faith but later on find out it was a waste of time because the design was already fixed, it completely erodes trust for future engagement. But this government does not understand that, and they do this time and time again. People deserve to be told beforehand if aspects of the proposal are not negotiable. Do not waste their time telling them that they can have input when you are not going to change anything and you are not even going to listen to them. Far too often consultation is a sham, a box-ticking exercise that comes after the final decisions have already been made. In particular we heard from people in regional Victoria around solar and wind transmission lines, and they were highly critical of the lack of consultation with their communities and the lack of opportunity to have input into decision-making.

This Labor government is also arrogantly cutting local communities out of major changes to planning rules and development proposals. We all know about the Riddells Creek Amess Road proposal. Riddells Creek is a small town in the Macedon Ranges. It has about 4500 people at the moment, and this will change the whole town. The developer who recently won approval from the Minister for Planning for a development will basically double the size of that town. It currently has 4500 people in it. They are going to build 1360 new homes on the edge of that town and accommodate another 3800 new residents. In contrast to the town's existing country charm, this development will pack over 3000 people into a mid-density suburb, with homes on lots as small as 100 square metres and an average size of only 300 square metres. Now the government has also come out with another proposal which completely bypasses the local council for a huge development in Clarkefield that will almost join Riddells Creek and Clarkefield together. Clarkefield currently has a population of 303 people, but this will develop over 220 hectares of housing that will develop about 2000 lots.

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Modernising Myki

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:30): I rise tonight to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's Office's *Modernising Myki* from March 2026, just released this week in Parliament. I have the deepest respect for VAGO, but I really think that the topic, modernising Myki, is a bit of a misnomer, because for as long as I have been alive – and that is quite a long time – and as long as Myki has been alive it has been on the back foot in terms of modernisation. It was supposed to modernise and replace Metcard. I even remember coming in from the country and using that from time to time. But fancy modernising something that has been dogged by a botched rollout for the past 20 years. As I said, it replaced Metcard. It was around $1 billion in budget, but it rapidly became notorious back in the day for cost overruns and delays. We have seen that even previous VAGO reports from 2007 and 2015 referenced audits around the plagued name of Myki. One of the things that the government also just does not seem to get right – whether that is the former Bracks and Brumby governments or this one – is software rollout issues. Again, it consumed a whole lot of blowouts with faulty readers and poor reliability setting the tone for decades to come.

One of the things that I often think about – I digress slightly from Myki – was a thing called Ultranet. It was going to revolutionise the interaction between educators, teachers and students. It had the most massive rollout – I was a teacher at the time – and they had this whole song-and-dance show. It was like a spectacular and it was 'I'm an Ultranet girl and I live in an Ultranet world.' Well, the first day that we went to log on and use it – millions of dollars for that campaign, mind you – all across the state in the public system, it crashed and died, and then they just packed up Ultranet and put it away in the bottom drawer. It died a sad death. Maybe unfortunately for Myki, Myki never died because it kind of had life support systems going on for many years, and now the government is about to refresh it. Let me see: in 2023 the contract changed and we saw that the government was now going to bring out something that New South Wales has had for years and years, and that is a tap-and-go system. My goodness, if you go up there, they used to have the Opal system and they may still have it. When I go to visit my family up in New South Wales, I tap my credit card or I tap my debit card. It works on any sort of –

Members interjecting.

Melina BATH: I see I am firing up the folks on the other side. I have hit a little nerve. Let me tell you what the Auditor-General says:

> The myki modernisation project is on track to meet its reset timeline.

So it is already going to blow out until 2028. It is going to cost more money – $138 billion. The Auditor-General says this:

> But it did not resolve known issues before awarding the project contract.

What a shock that is for this side of the house – that the government did not resolve contract issues.

> This led to early disputes between DTP and the main contractor, which resulted in a contract standstill –

again, no surprise here –

> and project reset.

This extended the project timeline by 18 months and then out to $136.8 million. That is what the Auditor-General says. And further:

> The project's overall value for money is uncertain.

Well, again, there is no shock to anyone on this side of the house that this current Labor government cannot manage money. It certainly cannot manage simple things like Myki rollouts or the new contact payments. Let me just in my last 30 seconds give you a snapshot from Gippsland, in my electorate, of what we see. What we see is that for the poor old people – wonderful people – that live in the country it has never extended that far. It extends to Traralgon, and thank goodness for that, but does not extend down into all of the towns around South Gippsland. You do not get that; you get old-fashioned paper-clipped copies. You do not get contact, you do not get Myki; you just get a bit of old paper, and Lord help the person if they do not have the right cash sometimes, because they cannot get on the bus.

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2025–26

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:35): I was looking forward to doing a statement on a report on school funding tonight, but I just cannot resist the opportunity to talk about budget initiatives for the Department of Transport and Planning in last year's budget papers, in particular the modernisation of the Myki system. Indeed I am delighted to rise to be able to advise Ms Bath that not as of some point in the future but in fact as of Monday this week you can already actually use contactless tap and go to travel on four rail lines in Victoria, on the Seymour line, on the Ballarat line, on the Craigieburn line and on the Upfield line, because – I am sure Mr Welch will be able to tell you this, Ms Bath – this is what generally happens with software and technology rollouts. You do the background work –

Melina Bath interjected.

Michael GALEA: We do not want an ultranet. That sounds like a delightful story. Ms Bath, my only disappointment in your contribution was that you did not actually play out the jingle and the song and dance for us, but I hope we can look forward to that in future discussions. With any sort of technology rollout you do, you open up to the trial period, you open up to a small market, you iron out any bugs, and that is exactly what is being done right now. In fact it is very much on time. I was with the Minister for Public and Active Transport just last year when we were announcing the design of the new free youth Myki – another initiative in the Myki space – with a wonderful young man, Charlie, whose design was selected for the graphic design of the new Myki cards. In fact the minister was asked at a press conference when the system would be rolled out, and she said it will be on a few train lines from early 2026. Indeed here we are in early 2026, and that is already now up and running. I am very much looking forward to seeing the outcomes of the trial on the Craigieburn, Upfield, Ballarat and Seymour lines before it then gets rolled out progressively to other rail lines and then to the tram network, bus network and regional network as well. It is a great initiative to see, and much as Ms Bath might like to say that we are somehow back in the Dark Ages, there are actually very few cities worldwide that have this technology. I admit there are a few that already have it up and running, but we are determined not to have a debacle on our hands but to actually do it properly. That is why we have taken the time to do the work properly. It has been rolled out; the trial is in.

I did find it interesting that Ms Bath talked about the so-called issue of Myki limping along, saying that she was not sure why Myki had not been put to death. That is probably because it is working. It has been working for 16 years. I do not know the last time Ms Bath took a train on the Gippsland line, but certainly I use the train regularly, and the Myki works. It does its job; it taps on, it taps off and it does what it is meant to do. If you would like to do that, Ms Bath, I entirely encourage you to. Indeed, when you are catching the Gippsland line to the city, you may well note that the Gippsland line still terminates at Southern Cross. I note some questions that were put to the Parliament last year, a bit of a National Party scare campaign of 'The Gippsland line isn't going to go all the way. They're going to stop it at Pakenham. They're not going to run the trains into the city once the Metro Tunnel opens.' The minister gave a very clear answer that the trains will still continue to run all the way in to Southern Cross. Then what did we see? The result of that very clear answer from the minister was that we saw Ms Bath telling the *Pakenham Gazette*, 'We don't know if the trains are still going to run to the city. They might finish at Pakenham.' We do know in fact now that the Metro Tunnel is up and running – it has been up and running for several months, with the summer start in December and now with the big switch, and performing by all accounts very well. We still see V/Line trains –

Melina Bath interjected.

Michael GALEA: I have caught a V/Line train to the city since that time, Ms Bath. Since the time of the Metro Tunnel opening I have caught the Metro Tunnel many times as well. Indeed on one occasion from Pakenham I was able to catch the V/Line as well, as we still have that delightful fare anomaly that allows Pakenham passengers to use the V/Line. Indeed it did not terminate there. It went all the way in – I got off a bit earlier – to Southern Cross. It is terrific to see the investments that this government is making in our public transport network, whether you are in inner Melbourne, whether you are in the outer suburbs like mine, seeing the 798 and 831 buses upgraded, the Metro Tunnel opening, or whether you are seeing the Gippsland line upgraded with more services on the Gippsland line, just as there are more services on all regional rail lines in all directions of the state.

Melina Bath interjected.

Michael GALEA: Well, no, not Leongatha, Ms Bath, because your lot actually closed the Leongatha line, if you recall, back in the 1990s. I was not going to mention Jeff Kennett – I know Mr McIntosh walked into the room – but it was actually your side of the house, Ms Bath, that closed the Leongatha line unfortunately. But we will continue to invest in rail services and coach services –

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, the speaker is provoking this side of the house, and I ask you to ask him to desist.

The PRESIDENT: I think his time is going to expire in 3 seconds.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Community Consultation Practices

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:40): Let us bring some decorum back into the chamber. I am pleased to rise to speak on the report from the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into community consultation practices 2025. This is a report that contains 55 findings and 26 recommendations arising from extensive public hearings. It has a number of findings around the practices of government consultation or poor practice in government consultation, particularly where that consultation includes closed and leading questions, constrained response options, scope manipulation, concealing what cannot be changed, failure to build on prior consultation findings and tokenism and box-ticking in the design. These were serious findings of failure within government consultation methodology, and I wanted to see how seriously the government was going to take its own report, as it was a Labor majority committee – it was voted for and supported by Labor members. So I went and compared this to the existing Blackburn activity centre consultation that is taking place online right now. This is what I found: 16 clear areas where they breached the findings and the recommendations of their own report. I will give some examples – as many as I can give in the time I have got available. Finding 7 is:

> Engagement processes should be designed to seek community input at a point when it can … be meaningfully utilised.

Finding 8 is:

> When seeking public participation on a decision, it is important to be clear on what can and what can't be changed.

Recommendation 5 is:

> … input … should be sought at a point when it can be meaningfully used.

In the Blackburn activity centre consultation, people are being asked to define the future of their suburbs, and I found that the survey never discloses which decisions within the survey have already been made and where nothing is going to change. There are questions in there about how the Blackburn activity centre will be established – that is not under review. Rezoning form overlay and house choice and transport zoning will occur – that is not revealed. Deemed to comply track approval pathways will apply – that is not revealed. The Victorian government's housing targets for activity centres are fixed policy – that is not revealed. The closing statement – only the statement at the very end of the survey – confirms that this consultation is only about the detail. It just says, 'Your feedback will help us understand if we have the plans right and if there is anything we have missed,' so it is a candid admission that the plans will be finalised and implemented regardless of community feedback.

If you want a practical example of that, today the government released its height limits for 25 activity centres where in some cases the heights are actually higher than what they surveyed on. In Brunswick they are going to be 20 storeys instead of 16, so all the community feedback that was based on a 16-storey ceiling meant nought, because it is now going to be 20 storeys as well. The Blackburn consultation says, 'There is no opportunity to actually express opposition to the activity centre in principle.' There is no such option. So the survey's architecture systematically excludes principled opposition. There is no question that asks: do you support the establishment of an activity centre? Should the current planning controls be retained? Do you consider the scale of the proposed rezoning appropriate for the neighbourhood? Question 4 in the Blackburn survey says:

> To what extent do you support change in your area to deliver more homes?

Even the most negative response – 'strongly against' – is framed as an opposition to change and to more homes rather than to opposition to the specific program. A respondent who supports housing growth generally but objects to this specific proposal mechanism or scale has no way to express that position. There are others, and I will not have time to go through them all. It is a sham consultation, and it completely breaches the findings of the report handed down.

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Modernising Myki

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (17:45): I certainly have a lot in common with my Nationals colleague Melina Bath, because I am also speaking on the Victorian Auditor-General's Office *Modernising Myki* report that was tabled today. I am not surprised by it, because we do know the importance of public transport and that it is lacking in regional areas. I did attend the briefing that VAGO provided today, and it was very interesting indeed. It did mention that their findings from this report are that the projected value for the money is uncertain. What they found was disputes led to a contract standstill – apparently there was a standstill for six months – and the project reset extended the timelines by 18 months and led to a $136.8 million rise in costs.

It is interesting when you look at the map of the areas that are V/Line without Myki services, boy oh boy. Northern Victoria certainly features in this – Swan Hill, Echuca, Shepparton, Wodonga – and other areas: Bairnsdale, Maryborough, Ararat, Warrnambool. There is plenty of work to be done in these areas. When you look at the timeframe, by 2027, phase 3, new tap-and-go payments are to be launched for concession fares and Myki is to be expanded to all regional areas. But it is very concerning when the Auditor-General's office looked into this, because they found DTP, the Department of Transport and Planning:

> … does not have detailed plans for Phase 3 and Phase 4, so it is not clear how it will manage upcoming tasks and challenges.

It goes on to say:

> These phases are due to be ready by mid to late 2027. But they are more technically complex than earlier phases. DTP and CVTS have not started detailed planning for these phases. This includes planning with V/Line to expand the new system to regional areas.
>
> As this work hasn't started, the department cannot be reliably assured that these future phases will be delivered on time and with expected functionality.

That should send alarm bells to anyone living in regional areas who is waiting very, very patiently for their public transport while this government continues to spend billions of dollars in Melbourne. I know places 10 minutes from Bendigo, suburbs with thousands of people, that still have no bus service even. VAGO, when they looked into this and the cost of fare collection, looked at how much it costs per dollar of fare. Well, it costs 26 cents to actually collect that fare with all the costs that have gone into it. Other similar systems they found were 10 cents out of the dollar for a fare collection. So there is a big, big difference there.

I think it is time that the Minister for Transport fast-track – excuse the pun – services, particularly public transport to regional areas. But I know under Labor governments, time and time again they want regional Victorians to be very patient. 'Wait for your service, because we're focused on Melbourne.' Well, all I can say to regional Victoria is: it is time to be patient and wait for the election in November, when I hope we will see a change of government.

Petitions

Waste and recycling management

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (17:49): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

I want to begin by acknowledging the people who brought this debate before us. We have now in this place in this term of Parliament debated four petitions about various waste-to-energy infrastructure. This is only because the community has been loud and relentless in their fight to stop these burning trash towers. Thank you to the thousands and thousands of people who signed this petition, many of whom are here watching in the gallery today and worked tirelessly to get out there and engage with their communities on this important issue. I do want to say sorry that you have all been forced to do the work this government should have done by scrutinising and demanding better. Community after community is being forced to fight simply to stop enormous industrial trash fires being built in their backyards. The message to this government could not be clearer: Victorians do not want these waste incinerators. Frankly, who could blame them? These facilities burn hundreds and thousands of tonnes of rubbish every year. They create air pollution, toxic emissions, noise, truck traffic, contamination risks to land and water and potential long-term health consequences that communities will be forced to live with for decades. Many of the substances these facilities would burn – such as mercury, lead and dioxins – have no safe level of exposure. Those are just the local impacts.

Globally, waste-to-energy, in particular in the form of incineration, is one of the most expensive forms of energy generation. Very little of the energy embedded in things like plastic products is recovered by burning them. Recycling products saves far more energy overall. Waste incinerators function much like fossil fuel power stations, except that burning waste can actually release more carbon dioxide per megawatt hour of energy produced than burning coal. In the middle of a climate emergency, this government have found something that can be more emissions intensive than coal, and they are backing it in with unbridled enthusiasm. This is completely reckless public policy. Communities throughout Victoria are rightfully upset, and all this government has to say to them is 'Burn, baby, burn.' But the unfortunate reality for this government is that we simply cannot burn our way out of climate change.

We know what waste incinerators do to our environment and human health, and yet this government are ready to load up the trucks – except, of course, when it is in their own electorates. The incinerator development in Lara seemed to lose its steam when the Deputy Prime Minister and the state member for Lara wrote to the then Victorian planning minister opposing the development. They opposed it because, to quote the member for Lara, 'It lacked any social licence.' Of course, although there are many other proposals outside their electorates that do not have social licence either, they voice no such opposition to those. The member for Lara is correct, though: there is no social licence. These ring-of-fire projects also directly contradict this government's own policy on waste reduction and achieving a circular economy. There seems to be no plan to reduce waste, let alone improve recycling practices to facilitate the 'circular' in 'circular economy'. If we allow these incinerators to be built in Victoria, we will have a circular economy in name only.

But perhaps the most perverse aspect of this policy is that the incinerators need to be fed 24/7. This means we will be buckled into a system that depends on endless extraction, production, consumption and incineration. Local councils will be locked into contracts, forcing them to feed the beasts that are poisoning their communities. While we need to be reducing waste, these facilities depend on us producing more of it. That is not environmental policy and that is not a spoke in the circular economy, that is a policy dumpster fire.

Waste reduction has been neglected by governments for decades now. Instead of believing better things are possible – which they are – this government are burning the evidence of their utter failure and clumsily trying to greenwash it by calling it waste to energy. But communities are seeing through

it. If this government are serious about protecting public health, tackling the climate crisis and building a real circular economy, they need to place a moratorium on waste incineration projects. This is a choice: we can either invest in waste reduction or build a future where we are forced to burn it. That choice seems pretty simple to me, and the broader Victorian community has spoken up to say the same. We need a moratorium on waste incineration projects now.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (17:54): The government will not oppose this motion. I will also, like Dr Mansfield, acknowledge everyone who is here and everyone who is watching, who has signed on to this petition. My name is Tom, for those of you who do not know me. I am incredibly passionate – for anyone who has had to sit in this chamber and listen to me – about decarbonising our economy and looking after local environments. I assure you that members of the government are listening and are passionate about these things too. That is why we have world-leading, jurisdictional, emission reduction targets. It is why we are working on electric vehicles getting pollution out of our streets and recycling programs like the container deposit scheme. I am sorry to make this is too much about me, but I am also secretary of the Parliamentary Friends of Landcare. I am very passionate about Landcare and its local plantings. There are many, many things we have to do. I can see some members in the gallery rolling their eyes at me because I know that is a little bit about me, but I am passionate about that. And there are members of the government who have passionately listened to communities. Dr Mansfield mentioned Lara. I know that Ella George has worked incredibly hard for her community of Lara. Josh Bull has spoken numerous times in Parliament, is repetitive in the caucus and works hard with communities. What I want to assure you is that government members and the government are listening to community, hence Lara is not proceeding.

It might be the right time to talk about the fact that anyone who wants to develop and operate a waste-to-energy facility in Victoria must obtain all required regulatory approvals before they can commence construction and operation. Waste-to-energy projects are governed by multiple pieces of legislation in Victoria, including but not limited to the Environment Protection Act 2017, the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the Environment Effects Act 1978 and the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021. When seeking planning approval a proponent must demonstrate that a waste-to-energy facility is consistent with relevant policies and controls relating to environment, economic and social impacts in line with the Victoria Planning Provisions and the Planning and Environment Act. So there is a process that companies must go through. My understanding is that in Sunbury there is not even an application on the table for consideration, and the application in Lara was knocked back.

The reason why I raise the work that the Labor government has done over a decade, whether it is decarbonisation, which affects our entire global environment or local environment, is that faced with the likes of Tony Abbott in Canberra, Lily D'Ambrosio and other members of this government have stood up and made very, very difficult decisions when communities did not want to hear the word, talking about action on climate change, about renewable energy and about circular economies, and we have gone about making those decisions. With due respect to the Greens, they are not a party of government, and we know that the Liberals and the Nationals opposite, if they have half a chance, will laugh in the face of it, whether it is consumer protections, whether it is emission reductions, whatever you name. In the debates we have in here regularly, whether it is around trying to move gas out of households, whether it is, as I said before, on EVs, whether it is on energy generation, they laugh in the face of it.

The main thing I would like to get across in this contribution is there are processes that must be followed, and as we have seen, the facility in Lara is not progressing. There are members of the government that are that are very, very strongly advocating within the government, and in Sunbury there is not an application on the table. Thank you for your time. Thank you all for being here. I will leave my contribution there.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:58): Petitions are one of the very important ways that the voices of Victorians can make their way into this house. By virtue of the many petitions that we have

had this year, I think every Wednesday, when they hit a trigger – over 2000 signatures or 10,000 electronically – then there is 30 minutes of debate. I appreciate all people who are passionate enough to put their stamp on and sign the petition, and for that reason the Liberals and Nationals do not oppose petition debates, and indeed we always participate in them.

I think this one is a very interesting one, because across Victoria communities are certainly confronted with twin challenges. If we look at the populations naturally rising in Victoria, we have increasing waste streams and we also have an energy system that is evolving and certainly a transforming energy landscape. With any recycling it is important to use it in the hierarchy of reduce, reuse and recycle, and provide as much opportunity as we can to recycle. I think that is where government focus needs to be. We have talked about recycling in other committees, putting a great focus on that, from organic waste to all sorts of industrial recycling that can occur. But one of the things that cannot occur often is red bin recycling, when there cannot be any further recycling of that red bin waste, the non-recyclable household waste. I think that is the point that different parties have different positions on. I want to be agnostic in terms of the utilisation of that red bin waste. It goes to landfill normally. We know that, again, our landfills, our tips, are getting larger and larger and larger, and they are emitting, over time, carbon dioxide and methane as well. This is an issue and this is a problem.

But one of the things that I want to talk about is that energy from waste is not necessarily entirely evil, as some would have it, but it is about the location. There are many evolved highly organised circular economies in Europe. Indeed there are certain energy-from-waste facilities in the major city of Paris in France. They can be highly evolved, but it is the question of where they should go. I want to pick up some points around consultation. There are people that live in Sunbury and Bulla where they firmly believe – and I respect that belief – that they have not been consulted and that it is not appropriate to put an energy-from-waste facility there. Energy from waste should never be imposed on a community where there is not that social licence, so I put that on record very strongly. I think that we have seen this, we have seen the absence, and we understand this deep frustration that community has in terms of that lack of social licence. There are going to be many trucks. It is in a heavily populated township where there are houses. This is not the place for an energy-from-waste facility.

But on the flip side, I will speak to something in my electorate. I heard Mr McIntosh – he covers off the Eastern Victoria electorate as well as me; I am Melina Bath – and what he did not mention was a facility that Australian Paper is trying to get up. It is called the energy-from-waste facility, and it uses a lot of gas. For over 80 years we have had Australian Paper producing white paper and now cardboard paper – very important in this modern world. It is producing paper, and it uses gas that produces CO_2 emissions. Now, these are state-of-the-art facilities. It has been working on this for 10 years, and it has a very high social licence in the valley. It is out of town. It is off and away from major roads. There is a train track that runs there that can carry that red bin waste that cannot be recycled any further, and the facility would reduce CO_2 emissions by more than 540,000 tonnes every year, equivalent to 50,000 cars off Victorian roads. It would divert up to 650,000 tonnes of waste annually and create more than 1000 jobs. That is important to me. It is in my electorate. There needs to be balance in this, and I commend this petition for this debate to be had.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (18:03): I rise to speak in support of this petition that has been tabled by Dr Mansfield. Victoria is running out of landfill. The sensible thing would be to increase recycling. Look at the ACT, which has a resource recovery target of 90 per cent and is investing in local recycling. Recycling here in Victoria has flatlined. In 2020 the Victorian government set a target to divert 80 per cent of waste from landfill by 2030. According to the Auditor-General just recently, six years on literally no progress has been made – nada, zip. Worse still, instead of investing in recycling initiatives, the government is banking our recycling funds. The sustainability trust fund grew from $76 million in 2022 to $545 million in 2025. That money is being used to offset debt, not expand recycling. What is the government doing? It is basically contracting multinationals to torch our waste – 'Burn, baby, burn,' as Dr Mansfield says.

Wouldn't it be great if government actually did the job of governing rather than outsourcing problems to the private market? But no, relying on market mechanisms is their go-to. It saves them the trouble of developing policies that instead improve the lives of Victorians. I have accused this government of many things, but this policy is so mind-bogglingly dumb that I am almost lost for words – and as those who know me know, that is a very rare thing. For example, they have not investigated the relative technologies that could be applied to the incineration process – 'Let the market decide.' They have not mandated that the incinerators be built near train tracks. Instead, they are happy for thousands of trucks to traverse our suburbs, with B-doubles daily rolling past childcare centres, schools and shopping centres – 'Let the market decide.' They have not set any minimum standards for the new incinerators – 'Let the market decide.' Victorians are angry that the Allan government wants to dot incinerators around Melbourne's outer suburbs. It is a ring of fire.

To put this in some perspective, the Allan government has issued 11 waste-to-energy licences, with only five incinerators planned for the entire rest of Australia. We are, frankly, disgusted that the government will not release documents on the waste-to-energy tender process. This may be about rubbish, but it is time for the government to come clean. The ACT has banned incinerators. The New South Wales government has banned incinerators in metro Sydney, allowing them only in four outlying regions. But in Melbourne's suburbs, these billion-dollar incinerators will burn rubbish 24 hours a day, seven days a week for decades to come. There is obviously currently an inquiry coming up to look into this proposal, and I think it is fair to say that the communities affected by these proposals demand an undertaking from this government that there will be no processing of development applications and operating licences until this inquiry is complete.

Victoria's incinerators are not proposed for well-heeled suburbs like Brighton or Toorak. Instead, it is the suburbs of working people that are in the firing line. Take my region – Sunbury, the town forced to take the West Gate Tunnel's 1.5 million cubic metres of soil, is now proposed to burn 750,000 tonnes of waste; Wollert near Epping, 760,000 tonnes; Laverton, 280,000 tonnes; Dandenong, 100,000 tonnes; and Maryvale, 650,000 tonnes. I am delighted that Sunbury MP Josh Bull has joined the ranks of traumatised government MPs who have realised what a disaster this proposal will be. Incinerators are cheap and convenient ways for the government to privatise waste disposal and handball the problem to multinationals from the Middle East, Asia and Europe. How sad is it that a Labor government believes the suburbs overwhelmingly populated by working-class people are the natural home for rubbish fires. Shame on this government. I commend the motion and the petition to the chamber.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (18:08): I thank my fellow members for their contributions to this debate. Although I think there were, again, some wideranging topics explored through this debate, the essential ask of these petitioners is that we have a moratorium on waste incinerators, and I think that is a very reasonable ask. Mr Ettershank in particular highlighted significant concerns with these facilities, and it is astounding that the government continues to push ahead with this agenda despite mountains of evidence and despite mountains of community opposition. I do not accept the proposition put forward by Mr McIntosh that we should accept this because Labor are slightly better on climate than the Liberal Party. I mean, that is absolutely ridiculous. This is Labor policy. You cannot blame this on the opposition over there. Labor policy currently is to burn thousands and thousands of tonnes of rubbish in these incinerators. They have on multiple occasions lifted the cap on the amount of waste that can be burnt in incinerators to allow more of these private companies to set up in communities that do not want them there because they are rightly concerned for their futures. They do not want these facilities there, not because they do not want to find a sustainable solution to rubbish; it is because it is not a sustainable solution to managing our rubbish, because it is something that is going to harm our climate and it is going to harm our health, and ultimately it is actually undermining our efforts on waste reduction and recycling in this state. Once again I thank the petitioners. Keep at it. We have obviously got a long way to go to shift this government, but member by member we will get there.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (18:11): I move:

> That the house do now adjourn.

Public transport fares

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (18:11): (2417) I am pleased to be able to ask a question of the Minister for Public and Active Transport. This relates to the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report that I referenced earlier, *Modernising Myki*. The report finds a number of interesting insights and that the project's value for money was uncertain, and it also points out that there are a number of areas in regional Victoria that are without any Myki service. In northern Victoria that includes Swan Hill, Echuca, Shepparton and Wodonga. I was very concerned – and I referenced this earlier in my statement on reports – that the Department of Transport and Planning has not started planning for future delivery phases. It is pointed out that the rollout of the tap-and-go system is meant to be launched for concessional fare Mykis and expanded to all regional areas in 2027. But DTP, according to VAGO's report, does not have detailed plans for phase 3 and phase 4, so it is not clear how it will manage upcoming tasks and challenges. I will just quote from the report:

> These phases are due to be ready by mid to late 2027. But they are more technically complex than earlier phases. DTP and CVTS have not started detailed planning for these phases. This includes planning with V/Line to expand the new system to regional areas.
>
> As this work hasn't started, the department cannot be reliably assured that these future phases will be delivered on time and with expected functionality.

The action I seek is for the minister to review the findings of this report and particularly to note recommendation 3, which references formally recording progress against key phase milestones and reporting to government at minimum on a quarterly basis. It goes into a bit more detail there. But I think it is important that the government and the minister fast-track detailed plans for the rollout of tap-and-go across the state and focus on upgrading public transport connections across regional Victoria, because currently we lack a lot of public transport. As I have said in this chamber many times, places very close to Bendigo do not have public transport. There are no bus services in places like Marong, Strathfieldsaye has no service on a Sunday and Sedgwick and Mandurang have few to no bus services, yet we are being asked to wait a long time for these services. I ask the minister to fast-track them.

ADHD services

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (18:14): (2418) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas. Life-changing reforms are being introduced this year to allow GPs to diagnose and treat ADHD. The action I seek is an update on how these changes will make ADHD care more accessible and affordable for Victorian families.

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (18:14): (2419) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is to reverse the decision to abolish VicHealth. Health promotion fights the influence of big businesses that make billions in profit from products that cause preventable diseases, like big tobacco, alcohol and junk food. Late last year Labor announced they were abolishing VicHealth, Victoria's only health promotion foundation. VicHealth work on SunSmart campaigns, they help people quit smoking and vaping and they take on the major corporations who benefit from making us sick – industries like big tobacco and junk food companies that old parties are too timid to oppose. Now Victorian Labor is absorbing VicHealth into the Department of Health, taking away its independence and ability to stand up to big corporations, so it is effectively disappearing. Our governments spend billions treating preventable diseases. VicHealth's budget is just 0.15 per cent of our state's health budget, but the behaviours they promote, support and

provide can keep hundreds, if not thousands, of Victorians from the pain and costs of preventable diseases like cancer and chronic illnesses. Minister, VicHealth saves us money and a lot of pain.

School violence

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (18:15): (2420) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, concerning an alarming report that outer metropolitan regions in the growth corridors are experiencing a significant number of assault and sexual offences on school premises. This issue is particularly relevant in my electorate, such as in Wyndham City Council, which recorded 315 offences last year; additionally, Hume City Council, covering suburbs around the northern area of Sunbury, reported 226 offences, including 53 assault-related crimes and 19 sexual offences. So the action I seek is for the Deputy Premier to collaborate with the Department of Education and implement measures aimed at halting the rise of school-based violence in Victoria, especially in hotspots within the growth corridors. These serious offences such as theft, burglary, sexual offences and common assault pose a risk to the safety of students, teachers, parents and visitors to our schools. More action must be taken to address the violence and hold perpetrators accountable in educational institutions.

We know that residents in the outer suburban areas of Melbourne have less access to essential services compared to those living in inner metropolitan regions. This is particularly evident in availability of transport, health and youth services, which can be challenging to access. More services being available to our youth in outer metropolitan Melbourne could help alleviate some of the issues we are facing in our schools. Parents entrust the education system with their most valuable responsibilities, their children. Their trust underscores the importance of maintaining high standards of care, safety and professionalism in our schools. The department must maintain uncompromised, zero-tolerance policies on these matters. Consistent enforcement is crucial in preserving the credibility and integrity of our education system. If the Allan government does not address the underlying cause of why young people behave inappropriately, the cycle of reoffending will persist. The growing proportion of young offenders within our crime crisis underscores how sustained inaction has allowed this issue to escalate, so I implore the Deputy Premier to provide a detailed response on these concerning issues and outline his plan to address the rising crime within our schools as a matter of urgency.

Pick My Park

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:18): (2421) My adjournment is for the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts. I am incredibly pleased to note that through the Pick My Park grant program, the City of Stonnington were successful in their application for their project titled 'A green pocket for Porter'. The Allan Labor government has invested $250,000 into this project to transform the open space between Grattan and Porter streets into a green link with seating, enhanced planning and improved walkability, in turn creating a more inviting environment for relaxation and community gatherings. This area is located a couple of minutes walk from my electorate office in Prahran, and I am pleased to note the City of Stonnington will be revitalising such an important space for the community. The Pick My Park program supports the Allan Labor government's housing statement commitment to development, quality parks and open spaces accessible for new homes being built, with $17.8 million invested into 97 spaces in this first round alone. The action I seek is for the minister to visit these spaces alongside me and see the importance of green spaces in high-density areas.

Animal welfare

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:19): (2422) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Agriculture. After meeting with the president of the Victorian Herpetological Society in June 2024, I raised an adjournment matter related to the regulations for enclosures for reptiles. I will not go over all the details, but the general essence is that the current rules mandating specific enclosure sizes are not fit for purpose. To put it in plain terms, taxpayers are currently funding enforcement officers to go to private homes and businesses and measure the size of enclosures and enforce rules that do not even make sense and are not based on the best scientific evidence for what would be a safe enclosure for the wellbeing of the animals. In her

response the minister noted that stakeholder and community engagement would occur under the new proposed animal care and protection legislation to ensure that the regulations were fit for purpose. Well, that has not happened, and we still have authorised officers going around measuring enclosures, not checking if animals are healthy and well cared for but getting a tape measure out to tick off some paperwork against bad rules written years ago. One business that contacted my office said that five authorised officers rocked up on a Sunday. Maybe the Treasurer should pay attention here, because it seems like some agencies have plenty of money. Instead of fixing the problem of bad regulations, we seem to simply have more enforcement of the bad regulations – it is really not good enough. My request to the minister is to stop the raids and instead get to work on updating the regulations.

Youth crime

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (18:21): (2423) You would think that the most basic, fundamental purpose of a government is to keep its citizens safe from harm, but Labor is continuing to fail Ballarat locals who actually fear for their lives. Sophie – the name given to a single mother of three who wished not to be identified – said her voice was hoarse from screaming as she tried to stop what she saw unfold on 10 March this year. She said:

> There was a group of young boys chasing [a man], and the ringleader was holding a machete …

A Victoria Police spokesman is quoted in local media, saying:

> … a group of unknown males, one armed with a machete, approached a man in his 40s …

Sophie, who is a witness, said:

> … it's crazy, it's disgusting, and everybody's scared.
>
> You don't expect to see it at five o'clock in the afternoon in the middle of Ballarat, when people are at work and parents and children are around …

Another witness, a single mother of two, said she is struggling to sleep at night. She said:

> I am so tempted to pack up my girls and take them to a country town. It's terrifying …
>
> I will not let them catch buses. I will not let them go in town. I will not allow them to go anywhere if I'm not with them …

How is any family, any parent, any young person supposed to live a normal life when they are always living in fear? Figures from the Crime Statistics Agency reveal that incidents involving offenders aged 10 to 17 were up 47 per cent on 2024 figures, from 443 incidents to 651 incidents in Ballarat – that is the highest it has been for a decade. Sophie outlined another incident in January involving her son and her nephew, who were riding scooters and ended up being assaulted. She said:

> They just punched them in the face, held a machete to their throats, cut my nephew on the face, and damaged their scooters and stole things off them. They got in their cars. They drove off …

The whole machete thing is so real and it is so scary, so my question is to the Minister for Youth Justice. Minister, youth crime is real. It is not just statistics. It has a very real impact on real people. People in the community – my community, your community, the Victorian community – are afraid. They are afraid of machete violence. They are afraid of youth gangs and violent attacks. They do not recognise their own state and their own communities anymore. Minister, you have presided over the worst decline in community safety in living memory, combined with an escalation of youth criminal activity. Minister, this is an utter failure, and the action I seek is simple: resign.

Public transport

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (18:24): (2424) The action I seek today is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport to make public transport in Melbourne free for the next month as immediate cost-of-living relief. Petrol prices are spiking, and people across the state are feeling the pain. In a cost-of-living crisis, people should not be forced into petrol car dependency and paying high fuel prices just to get to work, to get the kids to school, to get to the shops or to attend

appointments. The Allan government can and should act now to provide immediate relief. The Greens are calling for free public transport in Melbourne for the next month, and we know that this can be rolled out easily. Making public transport free could save a commuter household up to $500 across the month, and for families, young people and renters already being smashed by rising costs, this would make a real difference.

This proposal, though, is about more than immediate relief. Petrol price surges show exactly why governments need to help people move away from dependence on expensive petrol cars. But just telling people and supporting people to switch to electric vehicles is not enough – not everyone can go out and buy a new car tomorrow. Many people, though, could go and catch public transport tomorrow and many people could ride a bike tomorrow if safe infrastructure was there and we had frequent, fast and affordable services on PT. While making public transport free for the next month, the government should also be working on longer term changes that we need to help people save money and travel more easily – running trains, trams and buses more often; reforming our bus network; investing in safe bike lanes instead of standing by while they are ripped up; and helping people switch to electric vehicles. Public transport fares in Victoria keep rising year after year. Other jurisdictions are not doing this. We know governments can choose to make public transport cheaper and more accessible. What is missing in Victoria is not the capacity to act but the political will. Minister, you can and should make public transport free for the next month, tomorrow.

Alexandra District Health

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:26): (2425) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to advise the Alexandra community and wider Murrindindi shire as to who will now lead the merger of Alexandra and Eastern Health services. Last November the local community was blindsided by the announcement that this merger was even being considered by the boards. Community consultation was brief, was far from transparent and, from my understanding, became a little ugly. These two health services are like chalk and cheese. Alexandra District Health is a single-site rural health service serving one shire, an important player in the wider area's economy with about 120 staff. That is in contrast to Eastern Health, which is a multihospital metropolitan system covering Melbourne's entire east, with more than 1500 beds and thousands of staff. Understandably, many within the Alexandra community were very fearful about the takeover. They did not see this as a merger; they saw it, as I mentioned, as a takeover – a 25-bed rural service swallowed up by a 1500-bed metropolitan giant. Despite those concerns, in early February both the Alexandra District Health and Eastern Health boards formally recommended a voluntary amalgamation. The selling point for much of this was improved services and greater efficiencies. While Alexandra District Health may have its financial challenges, it is nothing like the massive budget deficit within Eastern Health.

And Eastern Health is not the only one – there are many services with massive budgetary problems. Just last week in the lower house the minister was questioned over the decision to change the orthopaedic and urology services from Maroondah and Box Hill hospitals. In the usual ministerial bluster, she championed Labor's investment in health – another fallacy – pounding the desk that Labor does not cut frontline services. No-one in Alexandra needing those services and living in the hope that the merger would bring about improved access to these specialities would have been happy with that throwaway line. Cutting orthopaedics and urology seems like cutting frontline health services to everyone but the hapless Minister for Health.

Amid the blindsiding amalgamation and cuts to health services in the region, we now learn that the respective CEOs of both health services are on their way out the door. It seems that the architects of this hostile takeover have stepped aside. The CEO of Alexandra Hospital is retiring next month, and the CEO of Eastern Health has already departed – God knows where he is. Many in the Alexandra community were unaware of the leadership change at Eastern Health and want to know who will be leading them through this period of change and uncertainty. This is a deeply sensitive and highly contentious proposal. News like this only adds to the anxiety of a community already shaken by the

Longwood fires, and they deserve to be treated with respect and to understand who will be leading this now newly formed health service.

Medicinal cannabis

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:29): (2426) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to support greater investment in medicinal cannabis research, including into its potential use as a treatment for opioid use disorder. Supplying controlled release opioids in a regular manner in the community has been a longstanding treatment for opioid use disorder. However, the Victorian Department of Health is currently working with Harm Reduction Victoria on opportunities to improve our pharmacotherapy services. I would like to talk about one such opportunity. Preliminary evidence shows that medicinal cannabis could play an important role as an emerging therapy for opioid use disorder. However, further research is needed to develop reliable evidence and understand the various nuances of how medicinal cannabis could be used alongside existing treatments. We should work hand in hand with our federal counterparts to fund these areas of emerging research and ensure that the TGA guidelines support us to do so. For too long stigma and criminalisation have made it far too difficult for many kinds of research to be done into cannabis. When research was done, it often assumed a negative outcome. Even now understandings of the numerous medicinal purposes for cannabis use are still evolving. While we are slowly getting there, there is still a long way to go when it comes to building the research base for the many uses for medicinal cannabis. The frustrating part of this is that we already know what the research will tell us. I, as a cannabis consumer, know that it does benefit my health and what it does for others. That is why it is so frustrating that we have to fight tooth and nail to have it taken seriously and receive the research funding it deserves. For a condition as debilitating as opioid use disorder, medicinal cannabis could be a game changer. But we do not know what we do not know, and until the funding and the research are there, we are not doing all that we can to help people who are suffering. So I ask: will the minister support greater investment in medicinal cannabis research, including in its potential use as a treatment for opioid use disorder?

Government invoices

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:31): (2427) My adjournment matter for the Minister for Small Business and Employment concerns the Auditor-General's report *Timely Payments Performance* tabled today. As Shadow Minister for Small Business, I want to make Victoria the best place in Australia to do business. The first improvement should be the government paying its bills on time. They do say the right thing. They even changed the rules. Under the fair payment policy agencies must pay invoices for contracts under $3 million within 10 business days, with penalty interest for late payments. But as ever with Labor, that is where it ended – the announcement, the Facebook post, the piece in the paper. In reality nearly one in five invoices covered by the policy were paid late last year from 1.4 million invoices worth $9.6 billion. For a small business a late government payment is not a filing error; it is a missed payroll or an angry landlord.

Worse, the Auditor-General casts doubt even on the 81.5 per cent claimed compliance, finding the publicly reported data neither complete nor accurate. The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions and the Victorian Small Business Commission, the very bodies responsible for this policy, do not check the data agencies provide. They just publish it and hope no-one checks. Some individual findings beggar belief. In the last financial year Museums Victoria took an average of 38 days to pay suppliers – only 22 per cent within the 10-day limit. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing admits up to 71 per cent of its transactions have incorrect receipt dates. These are systems failures, not administrative oversights. Labor wrote the rules, they broke the rules and now the Victorian Auditor-General's Office has shown nobody was even checking whether the numbers add up. In question time today the Treasurer told me she had not read the report. It is no wonder the bills are not getting paid. CFMEU mates and dodgy operators get looked after while honest small businesses are left chasing their own money. The Allan Labor government already makes it harder for small business than anywhere else in the country. Crushed by taxes, drowning in regulation, hit by

retail crime, struggling through a cost-of-living crisis, the last thing they need is their biggest customer treating invoices as optional extras. What I ask for, Minister, is an independent compliance audit of all 39 agencies under the fair payment policy in a public report and for the results to be released within six months.

Regional parks

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (18:34): (2428) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action that I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the long-awaited public land act. Exploration drilling for gold is being carried out in the beautiful forest along Yankee Road in the Wombat State Forest south-east of Trentham. This is not part of the newly legislated Wombat–Lerderderg National Park, but it is an area the government has committed to making a regional park. In fact it is one of seven regional parks, 11 nature conservation reserves and 18 bushland reserves that the government agreed to create or expand as part of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council investigation into the central west that remain unfulfilled – a council which I might add is soon to be abolished by the government. That is almost 15,000 hectares of public land that the government promised to protect five years ago that remains unprotected state forest. It is land that is home to some of our state's most at-risk wildlife: greater gliders, the brush-tailed phascogale, the powerful owl and mountain skinks. The minister has assured my constituents that the remaining parks will be created through so-called administrative processes, but that power does not yet exist. Where it is very likely to exist is in the yet-to-be-introduced public land act. We know the legislation is written, and it is critical that the government prioritises it and the creation of the remaining regional parks before the end of this parliamentary term.

Rochester swimming pool

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:35): (2429) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Community Sport, and the action that I seek is for the minister to provide funding in the 2026–27 state budget to build a new aquatic facility in Rochester. Rochester has now been through its fourth long, hot summer without a town swimming pool, which was destroyed in the October 2022 Victorian floods. Swimming pools are vital community assets in rural towns. They ensure kids learn to swim and provide a crucial fitness facility in towns that often lack alternatives. They also play an important function as focal points for socialising and community gatherings. Rochester pool provided a place where families could cool off during the sweltering summer heat when the temperature can get above 40 degrees for days in a row, as it did this summer. Without a local pool to swim in, kids are drawn to unsafe waterways like private dams, channels or the river, which all pose serious safety risks. All four local schools in Rochester strongly support a new pool for the town. They have spent thousands of dollars bussing students to Echuca for swimming lessons, and while flood recovery funds have so far subsidised swimming lessons, when those funds run out the schools estimate that lessons will cost around a hundred dollars per student, putting them financially out of reach for many.

Consultation by Campaspe Shire Council has revealed that a new pool is a top priority for the community, and in December council voted to endorse the final design for the new Rochester aquatic facility. It will feature a 25-metre pool for swimming laps and sports carnivals, a water play area for younger children, a kiosk, new change rooms as well as grassy open space for relaxing and enjoying the sun. The total cost is estimated to be $12.9 million. Campaspe council have committed to investing $5 million to bring their vision to life, but they cannot do it alone. Council is asking the Victorian government to contribute about $4 million towards the construction of a new aquatic facility that will serve Rochester, as well as surrounding communities, long into the future. I have many times in Parliament called for the state government to invest in a new pool for Rochester. The Treasurer herself said at the Echuca regional sitting in 2024 that this was:

> … a project as a local member that I am pretty sure I will get behind.

Yet the last two state budgets have passed with not a single dollar for the Rochester pool. She has the ability to allocate this money, and she has not. Meanwhile the Allan Labor government have wasted $15 billion on corrupt CFMEU contracts on Big Build projects in Melbourne. This project is about more than swimming; it is a symbol of renewal and optimism.

Country Fire Authority Charlton brigade

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (18:39): (2430) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is for the immediate funding of a fit-for-purpose replacement CFA station at Charlton. The Charlton CFA station is a 95-year-old piece of history. Ninety-five years ago it would have been a state-of-the-art building fit for purpose. Fast-forward to today, and it is so outdated that the new tanker Charlton CFA received in 2021 cannot fit in the station and must be stored offsite. This is completely outrageous. It causes delays for volunteers responding to emergencies, putting lives at risk. This station also falls short of modern operational standards, with no private changing areas for female volunteers, only two toilets and no showering facilities. Female and male volunteers must all change together in an open space. This station functions as a group headquarters for six local brigades, making it vital for district fire responses. During large-scale events this station is used as a base for multiple crews and appliances, and it is simply unable to cope with the demand. This puts the comfort and safety of volunteers at risk. The air conditioning is substandard in the office parts of the station, and the training room is not big enough to facilitate the requirements of the brigade. In 2022 a parcel of land was purchased with the sole purpose of constructing a new fit-for-purpose CFA fire station in Charlton. To date, nothing has been done – not a plan, no funding, nothing at all. For four years this land has been sitting vacant while the government sits on its hands. This vital piece of infrastructure must be funded and built for the comfort and safety of the Charlton CFA and community. Minister, the action I seek is for the immediate funding of a fit-for-purpose replacement CFA station at Charlton.

Youth crime

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:41): (2431) My adjournment debate this evening is for the Attorney-General, and it is in regard to the tragic death of Kaiden Morgan, a young Morwell man who passed away at the end of a machete attack in September last year. I have spent time with his mother and extended family and, in doing that, this is her adjournment tonight. She and her family are deeply grieving, as you could imagine. There is no greater loss than to have a phone call from a dying son and not be able to stop that death. Ms Johnston has asked me to call for retrospectivity to apply to recent youth justice reforms so that her son's case reflects stronger penalties. Her house is blazoned with 'Justice for Kaiden'. Now, I know, Attorney-General, and you know, that retrospective criminal laws cannot be applied under section 27 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. I acknowledge this Parliament cannot alter those penalties for past conduct. However, Ms Johnston's advocacy raises serious and legitimate concerns around respect and the fact that this should not have to happen again, that a parent should not have to go through this devastation.

So what Ms Johnston has asked, and I ask the Attorney, is to initiate a targeted review of Victoria's response to violent youth offending. It is a catch-all. The request is to look at sentencing adequacy for extreme youth violence, including gross violence offences and attacks involving machetes; the effectiveness and enforcement of statewide machete bans – a raw and real look at if this is being effective; and youth violence prevention and early intervention measures, if they are working. Given the ever-increasing escalation of youth violence in our streets, Kaiden's mum wants to know: what is the government doing? And finally, the targeted review should include improved involvement of victims and their families in shaping future justice reforms, ensuring lived experience is meaningfully incorporated into policy. These are the requests that Kaiden's mother wants, and I ask the minister to take them seriously, earnestly, and respond in a very timely manner.

Responses

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (18:44): There were 15 adjournment matters to 11 separate ministers, and written responses will be sought in accordance with the standing orders.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6:44 pm.