Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Thursday 19 March 2026

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

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

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Ben Carroll (from 28 July 2026)

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023 to 28 July 2026)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Gabrielle Williams (from 28 July 2026)

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023 to 28 July 2026)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

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

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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

David Southwick (from 28 January 2026)

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

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O'Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Anthony Carbines (from 15 April 2026)

Mary-Anne Thomas (to 15 April 2026)

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

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

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

Members of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Andrews, Daniel[1]	Mulgrave	ALP	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marsh, Anthony[9]	Nepean	Lib
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren[2]	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim[10]	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim[11]	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan[12]	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden[3]	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will[4]	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam[5]	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam[6, 7]	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole[13]	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel[14]	Prahran	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib
Lister, John[8]	Werribee	ALP			

[1] Resigned 27 September 2023
[2] ALP until 29 April 2024
[3] Sworn in 6 February 2024
[4] ALP until 5 August 2023
[5] Resigned 13 February 2026
[6] Greens until 1 November 2024
[7] Resigned 23 November 2024
[8] Sworn in 4 March 2025
[9] Sworn in 2 June 2026
[10] Resigned 6 January 2025
[11] Died 19 September 2026
[12] Resigned 7 July 2023
[13] Sworn in 3 October 2023
[14] Sworn in 4 March 2025

Party abbreviations

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

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Thursday 19 March 2026

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

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

The SPEAKER (09:34): General business, notices of motion 25, 26 and 71 to 74 and order of the day 7, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Statutory Rule 17 under the *Geothermal Energy Resources Act 2005*

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 13.

Motions

Motions by leave

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (09:34): I move, by leave:

> That this house notes that there is more drama than a *Married at First Sight* dinner party in the Liberal Party –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: I remind members that interjecting across the chamber is disorderly, and it will be treated as such. The member for Mordialloc, without assistance.

Tim RICHARDSON: I move again, by leave –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bulleen can leave the chamber for half an hour. The member for South-West Coast can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Members for Bulleen and South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.

Tim RICHARDSON: I move, by leave:

> That the only crew with more drama than a *Married at First Sight* dinner party is the Liberal Party, which has changed leaders six times in seven years and been captured and hounded by One Nation to its oblivion.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:36): I move, by leave:

> That this house condemns the Premier for wagging the IBAC vote yesterday but forcing her colleagues to attend – gutless.

Leave refused.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (09:36): I move, by leave:

> That the house condemns the member for Brighton for his clear disdain for regional Victorians, calling us out-of-towners and saying that regional Victorians do not deserve a voice.

Leave refused.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bentleigh for ramming up to 20-storey towers in people's backyards and stripping locals of their right to object and further notes that only a Liberal–Nationals government will restore choice and give Bentleigh residents a real say on what is being built in their neighbourhood.

Leave refused.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the opposition – living up to their name – opposed and attempted to block the Allan Labor government's landmark buyer protection reforms, which will protect working Victorians from crushing debt and stress caused by dodgy building work.

Leave refused.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Box Hill for ramming up to 20-storey towers into people's backyards and stripping locals of their right to object and further notes that only a Liberal–Nationals government will restore choice and give Box Hill residents a real say over what is built in their neighbourhood.

Leave refused.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Ashwood for ramming up to 20-storey towers into people's backyards and stripping locals of their right to object and further notes that only a Liberal–Nationals government will restore choice and give Ashwood residents a real say over what is built in their neighbourhood.

Leave refused.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the Liberal candidate for Nepean did not even want his own party to win and asks the Leader of the Opposition why she is putting people up who do not even support the Liberal Party.

Leave refused.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Dandenong for ramming up to 20-storey towers into people's backyards and stripping locals of their right to object and further notes that only a Liberal–Nationals government will restore choice and give Dandenong residents a real say over what is built in their neighbourhood.

Leave refused.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That the house notes that Jess Wilson and her Liberal Party have no plan to deliver more social and affordable housing through their housing policy platform and that a Liberal government will abandon the most vulnerable Victorians.

Leave refused.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Niddrie for ramming up to 20-storey towers in people's backyards and stripping locals of their right to object and further notes that only a Liberal–Nationals government will restore choice and give Niddrie residents a real say over what is built in their neighbourhood.

Leave refused.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That the house notes that the Victorian Liberal Party are happy to support more towers when it benefits their developer mates and donors but have refused to support the towers redevelopment program.

Leave refused.

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Frankston for ramming up to 20-storey towers into people's backyards and stripping locals of their right to object, and further notes that only a Liberal–Nationals government will restore choice and give Frankston residents a real say over what is built in their own neighbourhood.

Leave refused.

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Liberal Party's opposition to the Allan Labor government's groundbreaking bioprotection reforms and the introduction of rectification orders which compel builders to go back and address faulty work, protecting Victorian families.

Leave refused.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Essendon for ramming up to 20-storey towers into people's backyards and stripping locals of their right to object, and further notes that only a Liberal–Nationals government will restore choice and give Essendon residents a real say in what is built in their neighbourhood.

Leave refused.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that, despite years in opposition, the Victorian Liberals have failed to articulate any credible plan to support jobs, housing or cost of living but instead have an $11.5 billion black hole to cut out frontline services because they are too busy fighting each other to fight for Victorians.

Leave refused.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Pascoe Vale for ramming up to 20-storey towers into people's backyards and stripping locals of their right to object, and further notes that only a Liberal–Nationals government will restore choice and give Pascoe Vale residents a real say over what is built in their neighbourhood.

Leave refused.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the Liberals and the Greens are so desperate to oppose new homes for Victorians they have teamed up over 60 times throughout the parliamentary inquiry –

Leave refused.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Ivanhoe for ramming up to 20-storey towers into people's backyards and stripping locals of their rights to object, and further notes that only a Liberal–Nationals government will restore choice and give Ivanhoe residents a real say over what is built in their neighbourhood.

Leave refused.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Leader of the Opposition for her announcement this week that she will tear up Labor's activity centres, cutting 300,000 new homes and blocking young people from owning a home close

to jobs, schools and public transport, and secondly, condemns the Greens for campaigning against Labor's housing plan, including voting against and campaigning against the women's housing project at Harvest Square in Brunswick West.

Leave refused.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Footscray for ramming up to 20-storey towers into people's backyards and stripping locals of their right to object, and further notes that only a Liberal–Nationals government will restore choice and give Footscray residents a real say over what is built in their neighbourhood.

Leave refused.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That the house condemns the Shadow Minister for Housing for claiming to 'want every Victorian to have the best opportunity to own their … home' whilst also owning 16 properties of his own. I call on the member to create the opportunity by selling these properties and making them available to home buyers.

Leave refused.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Northcote for ramming up to 20-storey towers into people's backyards and stripping locals of their right to object, and further notes that only a Liberal–Nationals government will restore choice and give Northcote residents a real say over what is built in their neighbourhood.

Leave refused.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the Liberal Party described one of their most senior members as 'unempathetic, unprofessional, irresponsible', and the Leader of the Opposition endorsing this behaviour demonstrates the overall culture she wants in the party.

Leave refused.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Oakleigh for ramming up to 20-storey towers into people's backyards and stripping locals of their right to object, and further notes that only a Liberal–Nationals government will restore choice and give Oakleigh residents a real say over what is built in their neighbourhood or on their farm.

Leave refused.

John LISTER (Werribee) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the Victorian Greens are trivialising the once-in-a-generation redevelopment of the high-rise towers to profit and fund their re-election campaign.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Preston for ramming up to 20-storey towers into people's backyards and stripping locals of their right to object, and further notes that only a Liberal–Nationals government will restore choice and give Preston residents a real say over what is built in their neighbourhood.

Leave refused.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Broadmeadows for ramming up to 20-storey towers into people's backyards and, in her words, 'creating vertical slums', and further notes that only a Liberal–Nationals

government will restore choice and give Broadmeadows residents a real say in what is built in their neighbourhood.

Leave refused.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (09:46): I move, by leave:

That this house commends the Premier on her interest in marine safety, as demonstrated by her personal commitment to anchoring.

Leave refused.

Business of the house

Adjournment

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (09:46): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 31 March 2026.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Tullamarine Community House and Men's Shed

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:47): Men's sheds are community spaces where men can come together to connect, share skills and support one another in a relaxed and welcoming environment. They provide a place where people can stay active, work on practical projects, learn new skills and enjoy the simple things, like having a yarn and a cup of tea together. For many men these spaces are really important. They offer a sense of purpose, friendship and belonging, particularly during times of change. Men's sheds play an important role in supporting health, wellbeing and community connection. Recently I had the opportunity to visit the Tullamarine men's shed, where many of my residents from Airport West and Niddrie are proud members. The Tullamarine Community House and Men's Shed has a long and proud history in the area, established in 1987 as a not-for-profit organisation. The Tullamarine men's shed has received state government funding over the years, including $60,000 to develop the shed and, most recently, $16,600 to enhance its safety through the installation of a dust extraction system, thanks to the Allan Labor government. This funding has made a meaningful difference to improve the facilities. I want to give an important shout-out to the vice-president Alan Dyer, who proudly showed us around. In particular I want to thank Melrose Pizza. It was wonderful to meet Alexis and Russell Harris, who happen to be constituents of mine in Airport West. They put the pizzas on for free, and it was a great afternoon. Thanks also to manager Cheryl Hildebrandt for the invite and president Peter Agnew for helping to keep this vital program running. To all the volunteers and members who keep the men's shed running: your work does not just build projects, it builds community. Thank you for making a real difference in people's lives in Melbourne's north.

Paynesville Road, Bairnsdale

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:48): Since 2023 I have raised the issue of the Paynesville Road surface with the minister. Correspondence with the minister indicated that geotechnical inspections and work had taken place in the area of concern where the road surface was already cracking. It is known locally as the Paynesville roller-coaster. When you are going along this road, you are going up and down. In seeking an update on those 2023 geotechnical studies and where things were at, I was very surprised to find in the latest correspondence from the minister that in fact that was not the area that had been inspected. It was a flat area of road a couple of hundred yards further towards Bairnsdale that was inspected. So nothing has gone on in relation to this area of concern that many, many locals are wondering about. It is very close to the Mitchell River, and the concern there is that there is

undercutting. I would encourage the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to actually inspect the section of road where the problems are very, very visible, and get some answers so that we can get it fixed.

Fuel supply and prices

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:49): I also want to mention our very important seafood industry. Not only in Victoria but specifically in my electorate with the fuel shortages, there has been a lot of discussion, quite rightly, on supplying our farmers, but we also need to look after the farmers of the sea. They are a critical industry and governments at all levels need to ensure fuel supplies to that sector.

Mill Park electorate health services

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:50): I am very pleased to advise the house that the new Mernda urgent care centre at the Mernda Community Hospital is now up and running. Open from 12 pm to 8 pm Monday to Friday at 35 Flourmill Drive in Mernda, the new urgent care centre can be used for patients who need assistance with sprains, minor burns, minor fractures, infections, paediatric urgent care and other low-acuity urgent needs. It offers fast treatment for non-life-threatening illness or injury, with no appointment or referral needed – just walk right in. Last week I had the opportunity to visit the urgent care centre and saw firsthand how many people were using it. I spoke with nurses about the kinds of ailments that locals have already presented with, including kids with fractured arms and sprains.

In addition to the new facilities at the Mernda Community Hospital, there are also major upgrades underway at the Northern Hospital in Epping. The Northern Hospital expansion is well and truly underway, with the new upgrades to the emergency department adding an additional 200 treatment spaces capable of supporting an additional 30,000 emergency patients annually. The new buildings will also include a paediatric emergency centre, an inpatient unit and other treatment hubs dedicated to catering to our community. It was great to visit the site to see the works going on. These are just some of the fantastic ways that we are making sure that health care is close to where people live, affordable and accessible.

St Mary's Primary School, Hampton

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:51): St Mary's Primary School is a wonderful school at the heart of Hampton. The school is over 100 years old, having celebrated their centenary in 2024. The current school leadership of principal Steele Anderson, deputy principal Ev Whatmore and president Rachel Imbesi are putting the school in good stead for the future. But having been built in 1954, the school requires modernisation and has developed a multistage modernisation plan that deserves support. The first stage will see upgrades to security, structural works to walls and insulation and make-safe needs in the central staircase. But major needs, including stage 2 upgrades to the main building, where significant roof works on the 70-year-old building are needed, will require support. It is time for St Mary's Primary to receive its fair share.

Land tax

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:52): At times the law is really unfair. The family of a wonderful constituent in my community who is quadriplegic have sought a land tax exemption. Despite being known to many government departments, because of the Land Tax Act 2005 the State Revenue Office will not recognise him as disabled unless he has been assessed by Services Australia. In good conscience we need that law changed.

Byron Street, Elwood

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:52): Elwood residents are concerned about traffic in Byron Street, specifically traffic banking up near the Brighton Road end of the street. Residents have suggested the removal of the island near the corner of Byron Street and Brighton Road. The traffic

island was clearly installed at a time when traffic was minimal and now acts as a bottleneck device that is a significant contributor to congestion. We need action on the issue now.

Macedon electorate schools

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (09:53): The Gisborne Secondary College trades hub is complete. Last Thursday I had a sneak peek at this fantastic $5.8 million new facility delivered by the Allan Labor government. It was fabulous to see kids hard at work in the hub, discovering the rewards of working with timber and some of the skills that are required to master carpentry. This modern, hands-on learning environment is ensuring young people can develop practical skills that will set them up for future careers in trades and technical industries.

On Friday I dropped in at Kyneton High once again to check out the trades hub which was delivered by our government in 2019. This hub provides specialist learning areas for trades such as engineering, construction and automotive. Hot off the grand prix, I met with some aspiring motor mechanics keen to get to work on their automotive skills. At Daylesford College our government has delivered a $10 million upgrade that delivers new food tech, textiles and technology spaces.

These investments, along with the Head Start apprenticeships and traineeships program and the vocational major, are about ensuring every young person has an opportunity to shine in our government school system while building the skills and capabilities that our economy needs. Our government will always back our tradies of the future, ensuring they have opportunities at schools and TAFE.

I would also like to give a shout-out to and congratulate Daylesford College student Matthew Hunt, who was awarded the prestigious Hansen Scholarship to Melbourne University for his outstanding academic achievements.

Crime

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (09:54): The story of Victoria's crime crisis is a story of denial, delay and serious government failure. Year after year the Allan Labor government has denied Victoria's crime crisis, victim shaming victims of crime as whingeing, and, when we call it out, calling our warnings alarmist and irresponsible. Typical Labor – when the truth does not suit them, they bully and berate those who speak out. Remember when they claimed machetes were not a problem; when we moved to ban them four times, Labor voted it down every single time. Then, as an election looms and after years of denial, the Premier finally concedes there is a crime crisis. Their solution – $13 million machete bins funded by the taxpayer. How is that working out? Then there is bail – Labor weakened the laws and told Victorians 'we're all good.' Meanwhile, youth crime has surged to record levels, with repeat offenders on bail driving the crisis. The truth is that under this Premier, Victoria now has a hundred less police officers than we are used to, with over 2000 vacancies in the force, with damning results: opening hours cut at more than 40 police stations, closing some stations for five days a week, having to choose between putting PSOs at train stations or shopping centres, all because of the shortfall of the government's own making. In the wake of 22-year-old Aidan Becker being stabbed to death at Mernda station, this is not good enough. Victorians deserve a fresh start.

Lesley McCarthy

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (09:56): I rise to give my heartfelt thanks to Lesley McCarthy for her tireless work at the Rotary Club of Flemington, Kensington. Whenever there is a local event, you can be sure that Lesley will be there, working tirelessly at the rotary barbecue, raising vital funds for this club. Lesley is just one of those people that makes things happen. She is a natural-born leader and a powerful mentor for those who seek a leadership role in the club. She has been wonderful in terms of nurturing new people coming through and guiding them through that process. Lesley is just one of those people who always, always brings out the very best in people, and she makes a profound

difference, not just in our community but at a global level. Lesley has played a vital role in delivering vitally needed medical equipment into countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka. Equipment that would normally just go to landfill is being repurposed to be able to provide that critical support for these communities. Lesley is just the best of us, and I am just so incredibly grateful and indeed thankful for how she has made our community a better place.

Marg Healy

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (09:57): I also want to give my thanks to Marg Healy at the moment. Marg has worked incredibly tirelessly for me, for our branch, locally. She is just one of those people who is reliable, dependable, thoughtful, considered. She and John are a great double act. They are a dynamic duo. And Marg, I just want you to know that we are all thinking of you at this time. We have got great hope and confidence that you will prevail. Take care.

Fuel supply and prices

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:57): The conflict in the Middle East is another wake-up call for Victoria when it comes to our ability to produce food and have it transported to where the consumers are in a timely manner. Despite being a member of the International Energy Agency and obligated under that agreement to hold 90 days of net oil imports, Australia has not met this target since 2012 because of declining domestic refinery capacity and rising imports. We have barely half the targeted reserves with only 30 or 40 days of supply. Yes, it would be expensive to build the reserve to 90 days, but what is the cost if our food supply chain collapses because crops cannot be planted or harvested on time? Our ability to feed the nation relies on having fuel when it is needed. Our farmers cannot produce food without fertiliser, which is also mostly imported and now in short supply and has more than doubled in price because of the conflict in the Middle East. We sell LPG cheap overseas and import expensive urea. Again, a wake-up call that we need to become more self-sufficient in fertiliser to be able to feed the nation in the event of world shocks like war. Heed the wake-up call, build our strategic fuel reserves and start manufacturing urea instead of exporting our LPG cheaply before there is another world crisis.

Webster Street, Dandenong, level crossing removal

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (09:59): I rise to update the house on the important progress being made on the Webster Street level crossing removal project in Dandenong, a project that is already delivering very real and meaningful benefits for my community. With the boom gates removed in December last year, the Cranbourne and Pakenham line to the Sunbury corridor is now completely level crossing free alongside the Metro Tunnel, unlocking turn-up-and-go services along that corridor. Accessing public transport is easier than ever for passengers in my community. It means more trains, more often, shorter waits on platforms and of course a smoother trip to work, study or home with even more connections to some of this state's brilliant health and education opportunities. For road users, though, the benefits will also be really significant. The new road underpass connecting Lonsdale Street with Cheltenham Road and Hammond Road is taking shape. When completed later this year, this is going to save over an hour of boom gate down time in the morning peak and will improve travel times for up to 10,000 drivers each weekday. Big congratulations to the team working on this project. They are powering ahead, and this is going to be a great win for my local community.

Government performance

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (10:00): We are seeing more and more mismanagement, waste and corruption under this Labor government. This week the government have agreed to pay $125 million due to their COVID mismanagement. I was not an MP during COVID – probably a blessing in disguise – but I was running my own small business and know how hard it was. This is on top of $15 billion of CFMEU corruption, tens of billions of dollars of major project cost blowouts,

nearly $600 million not to host the Commonwealth Games and $1 million an hour of interest payments due to the debt levels this government has got us to. Then the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026, which was passed with the support of all parties in the Council yesterday, was shamefully blocked by this Labor government last night, and the Premier did not even bother showing up for the vote. It does not matter who is in charge of this Labor government, this has all happened under their watch. We have seen continued mismanagement, waste and corruption. These are taxpayer dollars that could be spent on crucial services and infrastructure in our communities, whether it comes to education, health, potholes on roads or so much more. We need a change of government this November to ensure that the Victorian people have their money looked after, that they are looked after and that we are spending on the crucial services and infrastructure that they need.

Ramadan

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:02): As Ramadan comes to an end, I wish the Muslim community in my electorate a Ramadan mubarak. This is a time for reflection, a chance to gain a clearer understanding of what guides you when comfort is removed. At the many iftar dinners I have attended I have seen firsthand the generosity and open-heartedness of the Islamic community. Thank you to the Premier, the Australian Islamic Centre and the Australia New Zealand Lebanon Chamber of Commerce and Industry for hosting some of the events that I attended.

International Day to Combat Islamophobia

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:02): With the passing of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia on Sunday, it is a moment to reflect on experiences in our local community. In recent years Islamic Australians have faced a rise in attacks, hate and vilification, and it must be called out and must be confronted. Islamophobia has no place in our multifaith community. I recognise that the ongoing conflict in the Middle East is adding to the distress of those with ties to the region. The Lebanese community living in my electorate are deeply affected by what they are seeing, and they have my full solidarity during this confronting time.

International Women's Day

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:03): On a happier note, last Friday I was joined by a number of amazing women across my electorate at my International Women's Day morning tea. From arts and culture to community sport and environmental conservation, these are women who are playing a vital role in driving the local organisations that keep our community connected.

Education funding

Tim READ (Brunswick) (10:03): The Victorian number plate is dishonest because it brags that we are the Education State when it should say an education state of emergency. Stacked up against every other state, Victoria sits dead last in per-student public school funding and our teachers are the lowest paid in the country. The Allan Labor government is short-changing our students by about 13 cents in the dollar below the minimum standard for our kids to get a basic education. Victorian Labor is denying $2.4 billion of promised schooling resource standard funding through to 2031. In 2026 alone, that means $650 million less for our underfunded public schools and teachers. Every other state except Victoria has a timeline to reach 100 per cent of the headline schooling resource standard funding rate by 2034. The ACT is already above 100 per cent and Tasmania and Western Australia will reach it next year, but Victoria is trailing at the back of the pack. Last week hearings began for the Greens-initiated inquiry into public school funding in Victoria, and it is not a moment too soon. Our teachers will be striking next week, and no doubt that will be an inconvenience to some parents. But the greater

inconvenience will be to future generations if the Allan Labor government does not act now to fund education properly.

Oakleigh electorate government achievements

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:05): In politics results matter, achievements matter, so while we see the other side of politics fraternising with the One Nation party and offering no more than press releases and social media reels masking as solutions, can I take the opportunity to reflect on just a small sample of what Labor governments have achieved in the last 11 years in my electorate of Oakleigh: every level crossing removed; brand new and upgraded stations; over $150 million invested in upgrades across our local schools; a massive widening of courses at Holmesglen TAFE in our own electorate; building the Victorian Tunnelling Centre; Monash Medical Centre – major upgrades, more doctors, more nurses; an Australian-first Victorian Heart Hospital right there in our electorate; sports and pavilion upgrades, lighting and facility improvements across the electorate, from netball clubs to football clubs to cricket clubs; Monash Freeway widening; more pedestrian crossings; and more local parks and playgrounds. These things do not happen by accident, and they certainly do not happen when all you have is press releases, negativity, division and blame. Proper investment in communities and proper investment in health, in education, in transport, in sport and in jobs only happens under a Labor government, and I am very proud of our government's investment in my electorate of Oakleigh.

Ambulance services

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (10:06): Just a few years ago the Minister for Health said every minute counts when it comes to ambulance response times. Well, here is the reality check: in my electorate families are facing the reality that sometimes ambulances do not come at all. Across the Euroa electorate ambulance response times are falling short of the state target of reaching 90 per cent of code 1 emergencies within 15 minutes. In Benalla that target is met just 58 per cent of the time, in Mitchell 51 per cent of the time and in Strathbogie just 32 per cent of the time.

Behind those numbers are people like Strathbogie residents Pam and Murray Ellis. They experienced this firsthand when Murray had severe pain recently, called an ambulance and was told there was none available. A paramedic later called them and said Pam had to drive him to hospital in the middle of the night. When they were told Murray needed further tests at the Euroa Hospital in Shepparton, with no ambulance available Pam had to drive him there too and arrived at 1 am. Murray was diagnosed with severe kidney stones. The paramedics did their absolute best, and I admire each and every one of them, but Victorians should not be told to drive a loved one in agony to a hospital when an ambulance is unavailable. Regional communities deserve the same access to emergency care as Melbourne.

Housing

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (10:08): Also, quickly, I want to mention some of the housing pressures in our state. We are seeing people getting kicked out, and they cannot build their own home.

Newbury Primary School

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (10:08): I recently had the pleasure of attending Newbury Primary School's leadership presentation ceremony at the first whole school assembly of the year. It was a wonderful celebration of the school's culture of encouragement, responsibility and student voice. Congratulations to every student who has taken on a leadership role for this year. The pride they showed was inspiring, and it reflects the strong community that Newbury continues to build.

I would like to acknowledge the student leaders: for prep, Nikki, Thezeeb, Neeva, Shanaya, Tayla, Adam and Rabaab; grade 1, Yeshua, Samreet, Mariam, Kiasha, Savannia, Zoe, Lani and Isaac;

grade 2, Rose, Armaan, Hifza, Sarina, Nadar, Samridhi and Jaime; grade 3, Japji, Jeremiah, Efreen, Aarohi, Amyra, Ira and Shaylee; grade 4, Rahaf, Zeinab, Harjee, Anaya, Sanchi, Muzakir, Ella and Thanvi; grade 5, Asya, Viliami, Isaac, Mirac, Jashan, Muneeb and Prabhmeet; and grade 6 leaders Saif, Miimetua, Kavneer, Maddison, Emir, Stella and Marcelino. I also want to recognise the digital innovators who will help with the newsletter production: from grade 5 Ronak, Matthew and East; and from grade 6 Kayra, Olivia, Sarah, Daisy and Shinelli. And of course there are the house leaders: for Cahill house Ava and Yenul; Hewitt house Denith and Seerat; Jackson house Keturah and Noah; and Gilmore house Te Kawana and Rachel. To all of Newbury's young leaders: congratulations – your schools, families and community are incredibly proud of you.

Warrnambool College

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (10:09): With the May budget approaching, the government should finally honour Warrnambool College's longstanding call for a safe, functional indoor stadium where the school community can gather together and students can play sport without risk. For years, students, parents and staff have engaged in good faith, believing they were working through the proper channels to secure something basic and essential. Yet the situation has only become more unacceptable. The existing facility has a leaking roof. When it rains, and in Warrnambool it rains a lot, the floor becomes wet, slippery and unsafe. Students are slipping, injuries are occurring and sport can only proceed when the weather cooperates. No Victorian school should be forced to operate under those conditions. Country students should not have to wait for sunshine to access physical education, nor should they be expected to learn in an environment that fails the most fundamental safety standards. Providing safe infrastructure is the responsibility of the Minister for Education, and the families are entitled to expect nothing less. I have raised this issue in the Parliament before and was deeply disappointed that the minister appeared unaware of how serious the situation had become, particularly given the school's belief that it had been progressing this project through engagement with the minister's local colleague. This community has already waited 15 years. They deserve certainty, not another setback. I call on the Allan Labor government to respect the good faith shown by Warrnambool College and deliver the safe indoor facility its students need and deserve in the May budget.

Julie Walker

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (10:11): I rise to congratulate Julie Walker on finishing up after 37 years as co-manager of Moongala Women's Community House. Moongala is now located at Moorleigh Community Village, but for most of its existence it was located in a house next door to St Peter's Primary School, owned by the parish. While I have got to know Jules over the last 20 years, she has been a familiar face to me for a lot longer because I was in the same year level at St Peter's with her daughter Laurie. I remember Jules as a very recognisable face due to her work at Moongala and her voluntary work at the parish and the school. While St Peter's and Moongala no longer have an official connection, the friendships forged over a generation last to this day. Indeed, when I walked into Jules's farewell function, the room was full of fellow St Peter's folk. Nobody knows more about neighbourhood houses than Jules. She spent decades at Moongala, and she even spent some years at Godfrey Street Community House in the early days. That is a good 40 years in the community house sector. Jules is known most for her compassion. Her long-time co-manager, the wonderful Jude Rangitaawa, said at the farewell function, 'I struggled to find the right word for it, but perhaps the best way to describe it is that Jules is simply available to people.' Congratulations, Jules. You have left a huge impact on our community, and I cannot wait to see what you do next.

Dunstan Reserve Child Care Centre

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:12): Groundbreaking progress is being made at the Dunstan Reserve Child Care Centre on Everett Street in Brunswick West, which I was delighted to have visited on 11 March to celebrate construction progress on the centre's expansion and modernisation works. The upgrades will provide for a brand new kindergarten room to expand the

centre's capacity by 22 places and support a total of 94 children; upgraded kitchen, office, staff and planning spaces to support educators in daily operations; refurbished amenities and internal spaces, creating a more modern and functional environment for students and teachers; and more kinder places to support the growing number of young families choosing to call Brunswick West home. This is a major $3.6 million redevelopment and has been made possible thanks to our $1 million Victorian Labor government investment and $2.6 million Merri-bek council investment. I was pleased to join Councillor Natalie Abboud, the Merri-bek mayor; Sue Vujcevic, the acting CEO of Merri-bek; the building team from Notion Group; and Dunstan Reserve educators and staff to celebrate these amazing works. Along with free kinder saving families $2600 a year, these upgrades are also part of our $10.7 million package to upgrade 11 local kinders.

Coburg North Primary School

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:13): On 11 March I was flushed with pride to return to Coburg North Primary School to officially unveil the new student toilet facility block, made possible thanks to a $500,000 Victorian Labor government investment I secured. The upgrades provide for fully refurbished, modern, accessible toilets with the signature Coburg North dark and light blue colours woven through the design and the building's mural. Thank you to acting principal Michelle Tedeschi for the visit, as well as the entire school leadership team, teachers, staff and families for the continued good work, advocacy and engagement.

Pascoe Vale electorate soccer clubs

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:14): I also attended the season launch of the Pascoe Vale soccer football club and the Brunswick Juventus soccer football club.

Olympic Park, Heidelberg West

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (10:14): I am pleased to follow my friend the member for Pascoe Vale, particularly in discussing the world game with Heidelberg United at Olympic Park, an $8 million investment from the Labor government and some $10 million from Banyule City Council. We opened our new facilities there, the extension of those facilities down at Olympic Park. They will also benefit the Olympic Colts cricket club. The 'scary pavilion', as it was known in the past, has been redeveloped. It is a fantastic redevelopment at Olympic Park. We have got lights, we have got sporting grounds, we have got great facilities for families and I just want to say, for some 570 players at Heidelberg United football club and Olympic Colts cricket club, this is really accessible not just for the clubs but for the sporting precinct and families generally across West Heidelberg, Preston and our northern suburbs. As a former resident of West Heidelberg, living off the back of Liberty Parade, in Goodenough Court, just at the back of Heidelberg United's ground, to hear the roar of the crowd – some 3000 people who go and watch Heidelberg United on a regular basis. Thank you to the president Steve Tsalikidis for the work that he has done in his leadership to get this project done, effectively an $18.5 million redevelopment of Olympic Park in my Ivanhoe electorate. It was great teamwork from Banyule council and our government that has redeveloped and rejuvenated this facility, which is really at the heart of our community. I thank the clubs and the volunteers that make it happen and wish them every success.

Board of Imams Victoria

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (10:15): It was with great pleasure last Friday evening that I attended the Board of Imams Victoria parliamentary youth summit for combating Islamophobia. There were a whole lot of incredible young people at that summit, and I want to thank in particular Jazeer from the board of imams anti-Islamophobia project for all the work and organisation that he did to arrange the summit. It was a fantastic evening. There were a lot of incredible community leaders from all sorts of backgrounds who contribute so much to our society. It was a fabulous evening. It is terrible to hear some of the things that these young Australians have had to endure.

Easter

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:16): I want to wish the Christian community a joyful and blessed Easter. Easter is fast approaching. It is a time when we have renewed hope and peace and spend time with our loved ones. I want to wish our whole community a very blessed and happy Easter.

Endeavour Hills Cricket Club

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:16): I also want to congratulate the under-12s at Endeavour Hills Cricket Club – huge congratulations on winning the flag last week. They did an amazing job. It was really great to present the awards to the Cricket Blast team as well as the under-10s. They had such a great experience. It was amazing.

Ramadan

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:17): I am very fortunate to have been invited to 32 iftar dinners. I was able to get to 17 of them this year, and they have just been delightful, so I just want to thank my community for all of those lovely iftar dinners.

Bills

Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ros Spence:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (10:17): I rise today to speak on the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026. In opening, given the incredible impacts of fuel shortages across the state, I would like to acknowledge our amazing farmers, our growers across the state, who are tackling some difficult conditions at this point in time. It is not about the cost of fuel, it is about access to fuel. The fact of the matter is: if there is no fuel, there is no food.

I was contacted by Aaron Emmerson, who has a property just south-west of Horsham, late last night. He cannot secure enough diesel for the upcoming seeding season. In fact at this point in time it looks like he can only sow 25 per cent of his usual crop. It is a very deep concern for our farmers, who literally cannot operate their businesses because they cannot access diesel. I again urge the Labor government to take action to make sure that we have those fuel supplies prioritised for the industries that need them and for our food growers across the state and to make sure we are supporting our freight lines so we can get our food from the farm gate to market and we can keep our supermarket shelves filled, because we are at a critical point in time when it comes to food security in Victoria and agricultural security.

It is deeply concerning when in the conversations I am having across the state 'This is going to be worse than COVID; there will be food shortages that will be worse than COVID' is being uttered. Please, government, work with the feds, have an allocation from the stockpile put towards the spot market to make sure that independent distributors can get to every corner of the state. It is putting incredible pressure on our farming communities, on our growers. We do not even know if we can get fuel for school buses or our emergency services vehicles. We need this sorted. The spot price market is about taking a risk on the cost of the fuel, it is not about taking a risk on whether the fuel will be supplied or not. I acknowledge the great work of our farmers and industry, particularly our freight industry. They do so much for our state and our country. We need to support them right now, not in the future but right now.

I come back to the Safe Food Victoria Bill. This is a piece of legislation that has been flagged for some period of time, including through the government's *Economic Growth Statement*, and it was reiterated in the Silver review late last year. It will seek to effectively bring all of the food safety regulators from

across the state into one entity with the intent that this will streamline the regulation of foods across the state, making it easier. It will also capture novel foods such as lab-grown meat. The concern is, though, that PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria are dissolved as part of this legislation. These two organisations have been operating for a long period of time. They have dealt with serious issues in their own industries and have a level of expertise as a result of that, which is quite nuanced and specific to the challenges that they have faced and are likely to face in the future. Certainly it is an emphatic concern from across particularly the dairy industry but also the meat industry and the pork industry, that aspects of these amendments carry a huge risk, with a limited understanding of what the actual benefit will be for growers who rely on the reputation that Victoria grows top-quality food and when there is a contamination issue, for example, that it is dealt with – there is a prompt response; it is a rapid response – and that food is highly respected in this state. Everybody is working hard to ensure that is the outcome. But without any guarantees that there will be a reduction in the cost of regulation of food in Victoria, when there is the converse thought that this actually may create a bureaucratic nightmare and become more complex because there will not be those individual nuances and that expertise that you see in the food regulators when they are grouped by commodity and therefore have their own level of expertise, there is a fear that we will end up worse off rather than better off. The Nationals and Liberals will be seeking a series of amendments, and the intent of them is that we can ensure that there is comfort and confidence by our growers that they know that they will have a voice at the table, that they will have expertise going into the new entity, Safe Food Victoria, and that they will have confidence that their voice will be heard because they will be part of the decision-making into the future.

The other aspect which is causing some concern is particularly related to Dairy Food Safety Victoria, and that is in relation to the regulatory assets that they hold. In lay terms, each of the food safety entities derives their own levies which fund the regulatory requirements of that specific sector. Dairy Food Safety Victoria in particular have accumulated a large sum of money. They are concerned that that money will be potentially gobbled up by the new entity, Safe Food Victoria, and will not be set aside only for regulatory compliance issues and risks around dairy. We have a perverse situation where the funds that have been accumulated over some time by dairy producers could be used to cover novel groups or plant-based groups, including plant-based 'milks', for want of a better term, as they are commercially known. We have a situation where any funds that are accumulated by the meat industry through PrimeSafe or other entities could be used to provide regulatory support and funding support for lab-grown meat, a direct competitor to their market. I have had discussions with the minister's office around this, and I believe that there are opportunities to ensure that those assets are protected for the commodity groups that have contributed to that into the future. It is something that has been flagged, particularly by the dairy industry, and I do commend the dairy industry for their advocacy in this space, because they certainly have worked throughout the Engage Victoria process to convey their views on the risks around the legislation that is before us today and the intent to disband Dairy Food Safety Victoria and create a new entity of Safe Food Victoria and they continue in that advocacy today. They have been clear in their ask and they have been persistent in their ask, and there is vast support for them across the state in other commodity areas as well. But I would reiterate it is not just dairy that have concerns around this legislation. There are certainly those within the broader meat sector and the egg sector that have concerns around aspects of this legislation.

In saying that, it does not mean that it is completely broken. I think there are just aspects that people want confidence to be able to move ahead on. As I flagged, there will be amendments we will pursue in the Legislative Council in relation to that. Those amendments will be around ensuring that there is certain industry representation on the board of Safe Food Victoria. We believe that having a skills-based board is good, but when you are looking at something as complex as food safety, where there is a depth of knowledge of the industry and the risks they currently face and will face in the future, that should be at the decision-making table of the board so there is an understanding of what the risk horizon looks like for this new entity. We will be seeking specific industry representation on the board.

We will also seek to build into legislation the establishment of certain consultative committees which are reflective of commodity groups which are already covered by the entities that will be dissolved but also to ensure that with the wider producers that will be covered by Safe Food Victoria in the future, whether through this first tranche of changes or in future changes, we have commodity groups who have an opportunity to provide specific input, a specific level of expertise, and above all else ensure that growers in those key commodity areas have a level of comfort that they will have their voice heard and they will be included in decisions in relation to their own industry.

We will also seek to have representation on the board from a member from regional Victoria. So often we see boards that are predominantly made up of people from metropolitan areas. They are from Melbourne generally, sometimes from the larger regional cities as well. Given that the bulk of the people who will be impacted by Safe Food Victoria are based in regional Victoria, we are seeking to have in law that one of the board members must be a representative who lives in regional Victoria. It is important for us that regional Victorians get to have their say. It is a different environment when you are having to live and work with the impacts of decisions made by large entities in a regional context. We have a different perspective in the country on many things and for many different reasons, but having a board which is full of people who are based in Melbourne does not really reflect some of the other nuances of the industries that Safe Food Victoria will govern. We will also seek that amendment in the Legislative Council.

We will also seek to protect industry cost-recovery funds, which I have gone through previously in relation to Dairy Food Safety Victoria in particular but also PrimeSafe. We also flag concerns and will have questions in committee in the upper house in relation to how the fees and levies will be appropriately charged to commodity groups. The reason for this is that there is a differing level of levies or fees that are charged by commodity groups with regard to their respective perceived risk and the cost of regulation. However, this will change in the future given that lab-grown meat is included in this legislation as being regulated by Safe Food Victoria, with the specific regulations destined to be outlined in the future. Currently, because this industry is not regulated, they are paying zero levies, so they are not contributing to the regulatory cost of any body. That needs to be resolved as soon as possible, but the pathway towards ensuring a fair system has to be fair. I do not underestimate that this will be a challenge to undertake, because there will be a fear that fees and levies will increase in certain areas. Of course we know that increased fees and levies, otherwise known as taxes, on our producers do have a huge impact in pushing up the cost of food, particularly when we are facing so many challenges in relation to cost-of-living pressures.

It is costing more to fill up your car or your tractor, it is costing much more for people to fill up their trucks and it is costing a lot more to fill up trains. It is costing a lot more to fill up everything. Everyone is feeling the pinch of the cost of living. We cannot also have our growers facing an increased charge in relation to regulation, because it will be passed on to their produce. It will be passed on to the people who purchase food in Victorian supermarkets. I urge the government to proceed with caution when it comes to reviewing the fee strategy. I understand the challenges that will be involved in that, but please ensure that it is fair above all else. If lab-grown meats are going to be included under this legislation and regulated by Safe Food Victoria, a fee or levy needs to be introduced as soon as possible to ensure they effectively do not get a free ride.

We need to make sure that everybody pays their fair share when it comes to regulation. I would like to think that there will be lower fees and charges out of this at the end of the day. That should be something that the government seeks to do. It is certainly something that has not yet been committed to or articulated by the government. I urge the minister to work towards trying to deliver that for every grower across the state.

As I have touched on, there are aspects within this legislation that relate to transparency and reporting. One thing in particular that stood out to me during the bill briefing was that this bill does not require any detailed reporting on regulatory outcomes. Given the context of the type of work that will be undertaken by Safe Food Victoria, it would be appreciated if that was outlined. Whether it belongs in

legislation or not can be articulated during the committee stage in the upper house – we will work through that with the minister, or we will attempt to do so. People are looking for understanding and to have confidence that Safe Food Victoria is doing its job and doing it well. Information like the number of inspections, compliance actions, food safety incidents, industry fees collected and foodborne illness trends is something that the Victorian community expects and the industry appreciates because it does assist them in understanding their risks and where they need to focus their efforts in being good producers and good business operators.

Transparency and accountability are very important, so we will be pursuing that and I will be working with the minister and her office through the passage of this legislation to the upper house. We are open to conversations around any of these suggestions on how the legislation can be improved. We are interested to work with government to ensure we have a better outcome for every food grower across this state and ensure that for the food that is consumed by Victorians people have confidence that it will be highly nutritious, it will be safe, they will not get sick if they have it and there will not be any contamination. I am hopeful that we can work through some of these amendments to support our growers in doing that.

There was an aspect within the legislation that I raised in that this piece of legislation, given it is such a vast change to the regulation of food in this state, does not include a statutory review timeframe. That is quite unusual when there are such significant changes. I accept and acknowledge that this is phase 1 of a broader intent to review and consolidate food safety regulation in Victoria. However, I think that taking a commitment and promise that this is only phase 1 is insufficient when it comes to how important the regulation and confidence in food safety is for our markets. I have touched on the domestic market of course – the people in Victoria having confidence that our food is safe – but we also need to have confidence to continue to be able to access our export markets. We cannot have such an important body as Safe Food Victoria have pitfalls on the way through or have any issues that are not addressed appropriately and that threaten the opportunity for Victorian growers to access export markets. For that reason, while I do not think it was necessarily an oversight – I think it was confidence that there would be a phase 2, but given there is no confidence really in some things and, I hate to say it, no-one really believes anything a politician says, to be honest – we certainly should have some built-in legislative supports around that. We should have legislative supports, and that is why we have it in legislation, because we need to make sure there is a fallback and a backbone. I urge the government – this is a very straightforward request for an amendment – to include a statutory review date of two or three years. I do not really mind when it is, but can we have a set down date that this is reviewed in the event that phase 2 never comes. I know there is intent to bring in phase 2, but let us just make sure we get it right the first time.

Another aspect which I have touched on broadly in relation to this legislation is it does include the incorporation of lab-grown meat. This is specifically in relation to being included in the remit of Safe Food Victoria. This is an area which is not currently covered by regulation; it is effectively unregulated. It becomes very complex. We know of the issue with Cocobella, where it was covered eventually by Dairy Food Safety Victoria because that company undertook dairy production on a larger scale than its plant production. However, it really did show the glaring need to have a specific area around lab-grown meats but also plant-based beverages. In relation to that there are some concerns within the community as to when they will be purchasing lab-grown meat or when they purchase milk whether it is real milk or not milk. We will also be seeking a number of amendments in relation to consumer transparency and consumer choice to make sure that consumers are not misled – that when packaging includes certain terms around meat or terms that are highly related to meat people understand that it is actually a plant-based product, ensuring that consumers know what the predominant protein is in that product and that people can make an informed choice when they purchase food.

Further to that, we will be seeking amendment to clarify the use of the term 'milk' in the sale of certain products. This is something that has been picked up in other parts of the world where there is clarity

and regulation around the use of the term 'milk'. This is very important because we need to ensure that there is protection as well of our vital dairy industry, that we do ensure that dairy products are seen as having a space in the market and that they are not to be replaced by plant-based beverages. But we also need to ensure that our kids understand and that the community understands that almond milk is not really milk, it is juice. It is a beverage. It is a tea, maybe. It is certainly not milk. We will be seeking also to ensure that there is consumer transparency around lab-grown meat. There will be people in the community who want to make an informed choice when they purchase lab-grown meat. That may be because it is a conscientious choice to choose lab-grown meat for whatever reason. It may be a conscientious decision that they do not want to consume lab-grown meat – they may choose to avoid that product. But I think that is something that the consumer can only make an informed choice about if they can see that information in front of them, and so we will be seeking a series of amendments in that regard.

We will be seeking amendments that include mandatory plant-based disclosures and lab-grown meat disclosures, we will include a clause regarding misleading descriptor prohibition and we will further seek an amendment in regard to consumer transparency requirements. We need to ensure that people understand when meat is meat and when it is not. We need to ensure that people understand when milk is milk and when it is not. This is not downplaying these products. I know many people, including even National Party MPs, who enjoy soy milk or an almond latte, but we need to call it as it is. We need to be up-front around it. We need to ensure that milk is milk – it is a lactated secretion from a mammal – and it is protected in that way. That is something that needs to be ensured.

It is very pleasing to hear some banter has been started across the chamber. Maybe there are other members of this chamber who share my views around the use of the terms 'meat' and 'milk' and other products that are marketed in a very deliberate way. I have had this conversation with many producers over the years. I do not know why you would want to market something as being flavoured like a meat when it is clearly a veggie patty. I love veggie patties, they are fabulous, but you do not need to call it meat just to be able to sell it. It is disingenuous to do that. I do not understand why you would seek a product that tastes like chicken if it is not chicken. Eat chicken; it has not got preservatives in it. I do not understand it, but I know some do. I know that some people do seek that, but let us make an informed decision about it and just say it like it is. Why shouldn't we protect our consumers? Why shouldn't we be protecting our industries, which have fought hard to create a reputation for their own market around the reputation of good Victorian meat, around the protection of Victorian-grown milk and what our dairy producers do to look after their cows and make sure they have a high-quality product on our supermarket shelves? This is what we should be seeing. We will be seeking those amendments in the Legislative Council.

I realise this has been a broad-ranging debate, as is often the case when legislation brought through the house is quite significant. It is a significant piece of legislation. Creating a new entity comes with pitfalls and challenges, and I trust that the minister and her representation here today can understand that we are seeking to ensure that there is a positive outcome for our growers and our producers across this state. Agriculture is facing many challenges at this time. I have gone into the cost of fuel as being a big challenge in how we actually proceed with the upcoming sowing season in particular and how our livestock commodities and dairy commodities manage the input costs in relation to access to fuel, how we can mix food and how we can protect and ensure animal welfare outcomes are continued in this fuel shortage crisis, but we need to make sure that we do not lump too much on people at once. I would urge the government to consider our comments today. I am more than happy to meet further with the minister and her office to try and put forward the views of the sector, of the stakeholders and particularly of our growers in relation to the shortfalls of this legislation.

We accept that there may be an opportunity to do things better to ensure there is a one-stop shop, particularly when there are so many councils across the state – 79 councils – that groups have to work with if there is a recall. We need to make sure that it is a streamlined process, but we do not want it to get sunk into the bureaucracy of having a lumping, heaving, heavy bureaucratic entity that cannot do

its job appropriately and cannot deliver positive outcomes to support our food sector in Victoria. We need to ensure that there is some level of confidence that this will actually improve regulation and cut red tape but also cut the cost burden, the cost inputs for our growers in Victoria, to give them a head start, because they are competing against growers not just from interstate but from overseas as well. Let us support our Victorian growers and put them first at every step of the way. There is a real opportunity for the government to work with the Nationals and Liberals to deliver a strong set of amendments to this legislation so that when it passes the other place, or is returned to this chamber, the sector and our growers have confidence that Safe Food Victoria will deliver real outcomes for them.

On our amendments in regard to the labelling and use of 'meat' and meat-related terms and 'milk' and milk-related terms – of course ensuring that there is a place for consumer transparency in regard to lab-grown meat, these novel approaches to foods – we need to ensure we have got the opportunity for the consumer to make an informed choice, whether it be to purchase that product deliberately or to avoid that product. It is the right of every consumer to be able to have that choice, but it is not currently clear. It has a flow-on effect to our kids to understand where their food comes from, which is an ongoing challenge. There are even children growing up in my community who have never been onto a farm, so you can be in regional Victoria and never have set foot on a farm. But in my view it is very important people know where their food comes from. By the government supporting amendments which improve that transparency and improve consumer choice they can support the industries that are targeting those areas that want to get into a market where there is perhaps further consumption of either plant-based products or the choice to have lab-grown meats and those types of products. They should be able to do so, but we can support them by supporting amendments and making sure we have legislation which makes those choices very, very clear.

I thank all of the stakeholders who have provided input to this legislation. I thank the minister's office and the minister, who are open always to comments that I can contribute, whether they are good, bad or otherwise. I particularly appreciate the input from the stakeholders. It is a difficult time for agriculture, and there are many pressures and distractions across the state, particularly at the moment, the highest being access to fuel. But when you are a farmer and you are looking at some of the other changes across the state, whether it is the emergency services tax or the import of large-scale energy infrastructure and renewables, whether it is the changing use of land, whether it is urban sprawl, whether it is mining on land or whether it is the large-scale solar farms which are rolling out or wind farms, you feel like you are getting it from every single angle. There is an opportunity here to make sure that they are supported by the Labor government, to make sure that we can deliver for our growers, because thank God for our farmers. Thank God for our freight industry. We would not have any food on our shelves without them.

Again I reiterate to the government in relation to the fuel crisis that all Victorians are facing at the moment: please step up. Please make sure that we have an allocation of fuel for our growers in particular but also the agricultural industry, all industries that rely on fuels and our freight network, our freight friends. Let us make sure we keep Victoria moving, keep Victoria growing, because we know that with no fuel, we have no food.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (10:47): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026. I am very proud to rise to speak on this bill as the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria but most importantly in my role as Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture. I have been honoured to work alongside the Minister for Agriculture and see her passion and commitment to the agricultural industry, which is an incredibly important part of our economy and lifestyle here in Victoria. As we all know, food production and manufacture make up about 25 per cent of our gross state product, so it is an incredibly important part of our economy but, as I say, it is also an incredibly important part of our life and our lifestyle.

This is an important bill and it certainly offers something for everyone in so much as it offers our farmers and our producers surety, clarity and also a reduction in red tape. But at the heart of it this bill

is about food safety. That is something that matters to every Victorian. Most Victorians probably do not think about it every day, but it is something that they rely on every day – every time a parent is packing a lunchbox, every family sitting down to dinner and every visitor enjoying the incredible produce that we grow right here in Victoria.

I thank the member for Lowan for her contribution and her acknowledgement of her work with the Minister for Agriculture. I know that the process to come to this bill has been a consultative process, and I thank the member for Lowan for her consultation on these matters. I would like to address some of the points that she raised. Her passion around lab-grown meat is pretty obvious and loud and clear. I think the best way to provide certainty around lab-grown meat is the effective regulation of it through this very bill, through Safe Food Victoria. The labelling aspect of it does not sit under food safety. It is a Commonwealth issue, and I know that they have addressed this through Food Standards Australia New Zealand. In relation to the matter of expertise, I understand, having been a farmer myself, that different commodities certainly have different sets of expertise. With the creation of Safe Food Victoria we will be bringing the staff from each of the previous regulatory bodies across so that expertise that has existed there will not be lost. In fact it will come into Safe Food Victoria, so that expertise will continue to be there.

I can also appreciate the concerns the member for Lowan raised in terms of cross-subsidisation. The minister has been very clear and the bill is clear that there will not be any cross-subsidisation. In the way that PrimeSafe currently operates there are different meats within that. Be it seafood, lamb or beef, they have different fee levy structures within that. Safe Food Victoria will operate in the same way. Whilst those fees all sit in a consolidated fund, their usage is hypothecated to that particular industry. I certainly appreciate the need to have levies for lab-grown meats, and the best way that we can do that is to get this body up and operating.

As I say, the bill really impacts everyone in Victoria. We all rely on one simple expectation that the food that we eat is safe, and it is our responsibility in this place to make sure that that expectation is always met. This bill does exactly that. This reform is about ensuring that Victoria's food safety system not only is strong today but is also fit for the future and those developing technologies, cell-based produce and so forth. We really need to make sure that our food system is not just strong today but absolutely fit for the future. We have had these great systems in place, and by no means is the consolidation of these bodies any reflection on the great work that they have done over many, many years. But as we grow over time the challenges that we face tomorrow are changing, and we need to make sure that we are fit for purpose.

One of the interesting case studies, if you like, is the models for businesses. I know in my own electorate we have some really fantastic producers – for example, Meredith cheese. Meredith cheese produce a very delicious cheese, but perhaps less well known is they also look at marketing goat meat. If you are ever passing through Meredith, they have now set up a cafe in the centre of Meredith which can showcase their cheese to people coming along the highway. A business like that is an absolute case in point of why this consolidation is so very important. Meredith cheese, in the instance I have described, would be looking for regulation under the dairy body, the selling of meat would come under a different body and the opening of a cafe sits in a completely separate regulatory framework. They are really a perfect case in point of why this is so important, and the incredible difference that it will make to their operation of their business is something that we seek. We know that for small business, certainly in the agricultural industry, we need to look at ways that we can support them and cut red tape. But it is absolutely imperative that that is balanced with the greater requirement for food safety, and I think this bill does exactly that.

We have been absolute leaders in this country. Electronic eartags began here in Victoria many, many years ago and are now being picked up across all of Australia. This is really about making sure that we can track and trace and know safely where our food is coming from. As I said, we are home to incredible farmers, growers, processors and small businesses, and their success depends on trust. It is trust from customers, trust from markets and trust from export partners. A strong, modern food safety

system underpins that trust. This bill really strengthens that trust. It creates that body. It strengthens our reputation; it strengthens our economy. This government will always choose to act early. As I said, we were out there absolutely in front in terms of electronic identification tags, and we will always act early, but we will always act responsibly and in the best interests of all Victorians. This is a really practical reform and a really sensible reform, a necessary reform which will make our food system stronger. It will make it simpler for businesses and, most importantly, it will keep all Victorians safe.

I too would like to acknowledge the wonderful people that work and operate in our agricultural systems across Victoria. I know from my own time on the farm what great communities they are and how much we owe – all Victorians owe – to their hard work, and I trust that this bill will make their lives a little easier in terms of a single regulatory body. We will certainly support them in the work that they do. Of course, as I said, it is a bill for all Victorians because it guarantees safe food across Victoria.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:57): I rise to make a contribution on the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026. Firstly, I do want to acknowledge the issue of fuel in country Victoria, which is impacting so much of our agricultural sector. Despite being told we are not in a crisis, when we have got towns running out of fuel – and last week somebody came up to me in the street in tears about the issue because their brother, who ran a large business in northern Victoria, was unable to get the diesel he needed to do the silage and harvesting – this does have big impacts on our food and fibre production. Keep in mind that the agriculture sector is a massive economic driver in Victoria and in 2023–24 the food and fibre sector was valued at over $20 billion, and the beef and dairy industries were key amongst that. The bill we have before us is particularly relevant to both the beef and the dairy industries. I urge the Premier to do all that she can to prioritise fuel and diesel supplies to regional Victoria. It is particularly important at the moment, and we need to make sure that we, as a state, do all that we can.

The Safe Food Victoria Bill establishes Safe Food Victoria as the new consolidated food safety regulator and performs functions that were previously undertaken by different bodies. To establish Safe Food Victoria we need to abolish both PrimeSafe and the dairy body. Keep in mind that some of these changes are being made because of the Silver review. Helen Silver was asked to address Victoria's rising debt, waste and inefficiency. Part of that review said:

> **Establish a new Food Safety Regulator** to oversee common issues across food product safety settings …

The former Minister for Agriculture and current Minister for Health can babble on all she likes across the table, but the Silver review mentions very clearly the need to establish a new food safety regulator.

Interestingly, this bill also amends the Dairy Act 2000 to regulate foods that have not traditionally been produced or processed for human consumption in Victoria or that are produced or processed using new technologies – this is the cultured food. This is particularly interesting, and I will talk about it a little bit later. There are other consequential amendments that are being made. Essentially amendments are being made to the Dairy Act, the Food Act 1984, the Meat Industry Act 1993 and the Seafood Safety Act 2003. During the bill briefing we were told that the government had done some consulting on this through the Engage Victoria platform, which I am always very suss about because people do not know to look at it. There were 120 contributions, and there were some concerns from the dairy sector. I will note that 90 per cent of those people were supportive. But when the shadow minister goes around and talks to all of the organisations with skin in the game, you hear a little bit of a different story than what is just on the Engage Victoria website.

I do want to touch briefly on PrimeSafe. PrimeSafe exists to provide confidence in the safety of Victoria's meat, poultry and seafood. They do quality assurance. They want to make sure that the food is produced and transported safely. This extends also to pet food. They issue licences to meat and seafood businesses and support businesses to meet food safety standards. They do have a role in prosecutions. I understand that there were only a couple last year, and they had 99 enforcement actions. When I have a look I see it is a very small organisation. The corporate plan from 2025 to 2030 outlines

that there are 10 staff, a couple of managers, a CEO and 10 members of the board. They have got a relatively small balance sheet, with a net worth of $1.33 million, but I do note that they have $4 million in the bank. I will move to Dairy Food Safety Victoria, which does a similar job within the dairy food sector. They have 29 employees – 23 FTE – and 10 board members, so both of these organisations currently have 10 members on their boards. Their net worth is much larger than PrimeSafe's, with $6 million, and they have got $7 million in the bank. Their total equity is $6 million.

With the creation of this new body and as these organisations are abolished their staff and assets will be transferred to the new organisation, and that can be challenging. When you have a look at how much money they have in the bank, the dairy sector, I am sure, are very keen to make sure that they are properly represented and that $7 million that they have in the bank is perhaps not going to cultured quail but rather to supporting some of the work in the dairy sector. The jobs that they have and the roles that they do are particularly important, skilled and specific. These are science-based jobs very often. Obviously there are some jobs around compliance, but you have to know what is happening and understand the science behind it.

One of the things that does concern the coalition is the representation of stakeholders from these sectors going forward. We would like to see some amendments to this bill, and they have been outlined already by the shadow minister. I do want to raise with the house that this has been done before where bodies have been brought together, and I am going to reference the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997. Within that act, in part 3, section 23 specifically concerns stakeholder consultative committees. I was actively engaged in the bill for that act at the time. Not only does it have how they should be working with consultative committees but it also talks about the appointment of the first stakeholder committee. It goes on to provide in part 4, section 50, that before making a plan they must consult with the stakeholder consultative committee appointed for each of the alpine resorts. I would think that going forward here it is only reasonable that there is that particular consultation. Having this in the act is really important, because it makes sure that those representative bodies and the people with the current expertise have a voice. The new board will have between five and seven, compared to what we have had – 10 on each of the boards. The government introduces lots of legislation with different boards, with sometimes five to seven, and last week we had one with I think about 12. Whilst it is skills based – and I am all for having skills-based and very capable boards – there must be that mechanism for those that understand this sector and who have skin in the game to be represented, and if that is not through board positions it needs to be through consultative committees, which the government needs to endeavour to bring on board through this process. These sorts of processes are not simple, either.

I want to mention cultured food. We had a report about 10 months ago in New South Wales about some quail pâté that was made through the culturing process. It is sort of like stem cells, really, for humans. It multiplies individual cells – this time it was from quail – in a nutrient bath. They had a tank of liquid. It is kind of like being at a brewery when you are making these sorts of things. They have gone on to be able to make pâté out of cultured animal. We are not at the stage where our steaks are going to be from that same process, but as technology is changing – and whilst I might not be one that wants to eat cultured steak; as a cattle grower I am very happy to keep going with my regular beef – it is important that there are checks and balances in this place and that the science keeps up with this work. I want to mention liquids as well. We have got these milks. Oat milk is really water and oats and should not be referred to as 'milk'. These things need to be incorporated into this Safe Food Victoria.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (11:07): I am very pleased to be able to speak on the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026, and I am pleased to be able to do that at a time when the Minister for Agriculture is here in the chamber. The previous speaker referenced the origins of this bill. I can assure her that this was work that I was involved in in my time as Minister for Agriculture, which is now almost four years ago, so this regulatory reform work has been an objective of the government for some time. I am delighted to have been able to work with the Minister for Agriculture, who is the lead

minister, and to support her in bringing this bill to this place with the important regulatory reform that it delivers.

The reasons why it is important that we have an effective regulatory system for food are self-evident, but I will talk to some of those. Significantly, here in Victoria we are the food bowl of the nation. Our agricultural produce is second to none anywhere in the world, and that is a reputation that we hold onto very dearly. Looking around, I see the member for Werribee in the chamber. Of course Werribee is a food bowl in its own right, still home to lots of vegetable growers. I see the member for Monbulk, herself a former greengrocer, in a community that still has a thriving – in fact leading – horticultural sector. Protecting our agriculture and our food production is absolutely critical to our reputation as a state. One of the reasons why of course Melbourne is the best city in the world is because of the reputation that we have for food, so this is very important work. Right now agriculture and food businesses must navigate a complex system: my department, the Minister for Agriculture's department, Dairy Food Safety Victoria, PrimeSafe and then on top of that each and every one of our single local councils. This is clearly inefficient and overly complex. Bringing these regulators together and consolidating the four state food regulators will make it simpler and easier for food businesses to operate in Victoria without compromising public health protections.

Again I reference the genesis of this bill because I want to assure everyone in the house, as the Minister for Agriculture detailed in her second-reading speech, that the consultation that has gone into the development of this bill has been, again, second to none because it is so important that we get it right. Obviously as the Minister for Health, ensuring that we have safe food for consumption is always the highest priority, keeping Victorians safe from contaminated food and foodborne illnesses. Again I go back to that issue that I talked about: our reputation not just as a food bowl but as a dining destination of choice around the world. One of the reasons for that is because of our food safety regime here.

Obviously there are many benefits in removing barriers to business, and this bill implements the first stage of a two-stage reform project, which is all about streamlining and strengthening Victoria's regulatory systems. Safe Food Victoria will mean that farmers and food businesses can access clear guidance and quicker approvals with a reduced compliance burden through streamlined permission processes, all from a single source. For businesses, for example, that manufacture multiple food types, a consolidated regulator will mean that they no longer need to go through multiple regulatory processes with separate regulators for their different products, and obviously that will make it significantly easier for food businesses to do business in Victoria. In the second stage of the reform the government will develop a new framework for food safety in Victoria to streamline those regulatory processes, ensuring greater consistency across the supply chain from paddock to plate. As I said, that will include, in the second stage, refining the role that local councils play in our food regulation system. That work has commenced and will continue through 2027. Together, the bill that is before the house and the further work that is being done with local councils will strengthen food safety here in the state of Victoria.

I want to assure everyone that in order to keep people safe from contaminated food and foodborne illnesses the very first objective of the act is to safeguard public health. My department and the chief health officer will continue to play a critical role, working in partnership with Safe Food Victoria to ensure that the food Victorians are consuming is safe. Safe Food Victoria will play an important role in supporting the food industry to identify and manage risks in food, ensuring that food businesses are producing food that is safe and of suitable quality for all Victorians. My department will retain responsibility for receiving notifications of foodborne illness and microorganisms under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, and when such events occur the chief health officer will provide advice to Safe Food Victoria on how to manage the situation and contain threats to Victorians' safety. The chief health officer will be empowered to provide this information or any public health advice formed from this information to Safe Food Victoria. This could include, for example, advisory information that will help identify illness or pathogens or help pinpoint the source of illness or informing the declaration of food-sampling requirements that enable statewide surveillance. This bill is all about ensuring that various parts of government can work more seamlessly together in order to

provide safe food for all Victorians, as well as a streamlined regulatory approach for food producers and manufacturers and outlets that sell food for consumption. This is a significant step forward in terms of reform for the sector.

One of the other matters that arises from the Safe Food Victoria Bill is that the prime responsibility to represent the state at the food ministers meeting shifts from me as Minister for Health to the Minister for Agriculture. I hope that the Minister for Agriculture will be able to continue the work that has been led by health ministers but is being progressed by food ministers to ensure that we deliver more informative labelling for Australian food consumers. That goes to the health star rating system here in Australia. The health star rating system is by no means a perfect system, but it is one way in which we can work to ensure that Australians have more information to help them make healthier choices about the food that they consume. The biggest problem with the health star rating system is that despite its early intention that it be taken up voluntarily by business, this has not happened, and so health ministers have endorsed work to move towards the mandating of the health star rating system for manufactured foods. This is an important tool. It is my view, as health minister, that this is a very important tool to make it easier and simpler for families to get better information about the foods that they are consuming and help them make healthy choices for themselves and, importantly, for Australian children who are exposed to a lot of unhealthy foods because the information in relation to those foods is not always as simply and readily available as it should be. This is a very important bill. I thank the Minister for Agriculture for all of her work, and I commend the bill to the house.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (11:17): The Liberal–National opposition does not oppose the Safe Food Bill 2026. Let me say that plainly from the outset, because it matters to how this debate is properly understood. We recognise the case for consolidating Victoria's food safety regulatory architecture. Queensland, New South Wales and New Zealand have all undertaken similar reforms and the outcomes have broadly been positive. The Silver review made clear recommendations, and we accept the principles behind them. But not opposing a bill is not the same as supporting it uncritically. The opposition will be seeking amendments in the Legislative Council because this bill, as it stands, contains omissions. They are not minor, they are structural, and if left unaddressed they risk undermining the very efficiency gains the government says it is trying to achieve.

The first and most significant concern is governance. Safe Food Victoria will be governed by a board, but nowhere in this legislation is there a requirement that the board include representatives with genuine expertise in dairy production, meat processing, seafood or regional agricultural industries. PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria are not just names on a letterhead. They represent decades of accumulated regulatory expertise, deeply embedded relationships with industry operators and hard-won credibility with export certification bodies overseas. You cannot replicate that institutional knowledge by recruiting a generalist board, however capable. Skills-based appointments are not a substitute for commodity expertise. The Victorian Farmers Federation, the United Dairy Farmers of Victoria and the Australian Dairy Farmers have all flagged this concern. The omission of mandated commodity representation at either board or committee level is of deep concern to the agricultural sector, and it should concern this government too. We will seek amendments to mandate appropriate expertise on the board and to prescribe commodity-based consultative committees in the legislation itself, not as a courtesy but as a requirement.

The second area of concern is the treatment of regulatory assets. Dairy Food Safety Victoria operates on an industry-funded cost-recovery model. The reserves held by DFSV have been built by dairy producers over many years for the purposes of regulating the dairy industry. This legislation provides no guarantee that those funds will remain dedicated to dairy regulation. In the absence of such a guarantee there is a legitimate and reasonable concern that those assets will simply be absorbed into the broader operations of the new regulator. This is not acceptable, and we will seek amendments to protect those assets. Further, this bill contemplates the future regulation of cell-cultivated meat and other novel foods. We support a regulatory framework that can accommodate innovation, but there is no defined pathway for these new food categories to contribute to the cost of their own regulation. It

is not appropriate that the dairy and meat industries, which already pay their way, are asked to subsidise the regulatory burden of industries that do not yet contribute a cent.

The third concern is transition risk. Victoria's dairy and meat industries are major export industries. Our international trading partners and certification bodies expect regulatory stability and continuity. Any uncertainty in inspection regimes, certification processes or regulatory relationships during the transition period carries real commercial risk. The government has provided no meaningful assurance on this point.

Finally, there is no statutory review date in this bill. The government's explanation that this is phase 1 and phase 2 is coming is, frankly, inadequate. This is one of the most significant restructures in Victorian food regulation in a generation. It deserves a review mechanism, and we will seek an amendment to include one. The opposition will also be seeking amendments relating to mandatory disclosure and accurate labelling for plant-based products. Consumers deserve to know what they are buying. The use of the terms 'meat' and 'milk' for products that are neither should not continue unchallenged in this bill that establishes a new food safety regulator. We will seek amendments to enact mandatory disclosure, prohibit misleading descriptors and strengthen consumer transparency requirements. Many of my constituents in the seat of Prahran are vegan or vegetarian. There is an absolute benefit of describing what a product is made from. I would very much like to see this happen.

I want to speak now not only as the member for Prahran but in my capacities as Shadow Assistant Minister for Tourism, Hospitality and Major Events and Shadow Assistant Minister for Melbourne, because food safety does not exist in a vacuum, it exists in an industry ecosystem, and for Melbourne's hospitality sector that ecosystem is under serious stress. I represent an electorate that is home to some of the most celebrated dining and hospitality precincts in Australia. We have got Chapel Street, we have got High Street, we have got Commercial Road and we have got Domain Road in South Yarra. They are the lifeblood of Melbourne's reputation as having a world-class food and hospitality sector. Right now the reputation is being tested not by any failure of quality or shortage of talent; it is being tested by policy settings that make it harder, more expensive and more complex to run a hospitality business in Victoria than anywhere else in the country. The Business Council of Australia's *Regulation Rumble* report is quite instructive. For the third consecutive year Victoria ranked dead last, eighth out of eight states and territories, for doing business. South Australia topped the rankings and Tasmania came second. Even the Australian Capital Territory ranked ahead of us. For the third year running, dead last, eighth out of eight – Victoria is not just falling behind, we are being lapped.

To open a cafe in Victoria an operator needs roughly 50 per cent more licences and regulatory requirements than in South Australia and around 30 per cent more than in New South Wales, and this is an aberration. That is a structural policy failure. The competition does not stop at the Murray. We are not just losing ground to other Australian states; we are losing ground to New Zealand – to Auckland and Wellington. They are actively courting Australian hospitality investment, Australian food exporters and Australian tourism dollars. New Zealand has streamlined its food regulatory environment, reduced compliance costs for operations and positioned itself as a credible, stable destination for food industry investment. When a Victorian producer or hospitality group looks across the Tasman and sees lower barriers, clearer rules and a more responsive regulator, that is a problem for the state's economy, and our competitors are not waiting for us to get our settings right.

Then there is taxation. Victoria's payroll tax settings are the most punishing in the nation for growing a business. For hospitality operators, who are labour-intensive by nature, payroll tax is not an abstract policy concept. It is a direct, visible cost that makes every new hire more expensive. We have recorded the highest unemployment rate in the country for 17 of the past 18 months. The link between tax on employment and fewer jobs is not complicated. Payroll tax punishes you for hiring people. Victoria has the most punishing settings in the nation, and we wonder why unemployment keeps on skyrocketing. The congestion levy expanded to Stonnington in January this year is adding costs to suppliers and making it more expensive for customers to reach their venues, and my electorate will carry an estimated $4.1 million of annual burden from that decision alone. Our hospo businesses feel

it every week. Property tax settings actively discourage landlords from filling vacancies, energy costs continue to climb, and this government continues to add complexity rather than remove it.

Earlier this year I co-hosted the Melbourne economic revitalisation forum at Parliament House with opposition leader Jess Wilson, and we brought together representatives from the Committee for Melbourne, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Property Council, Colliers and Melbourne City Council, who are the major peak bodies, and the message was absolutely consistent and clear: investors are looking elsewhere. Restaurant groups expanding their national footprint are prioritising Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne, hotel developers who would invest here are being told by their boards that Victoria's sovereign risk profile is too high, and we have heard directly from investors they are being told by their advisers 'Anywhere but Victoria'. That is not the reputation this city has built, and it is not a reputation we can afford to have. Melbourne is still one of the world's great food cities, but you cannot eat a reputation, and at some point the policy settings have to match the ambition. A well-functioning food safety regulator is part of that ecosystem. Businesses and consumers need to trust the system. Export markets need confidence that our certification processes are properly governed and industry informed. Safe Food Victoria can contribute to that confidence but only if it is set up correctly from the start. The opposition supports the principle of this reform. We will not block it.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (11:27): Food safety is one of the foundational responsibilities of any government. Ensuring that the food available to consumers is safe, traceable and consistently regulated is essential not just for public health but also for industry confidence, domestic and international market trust and the reputation of a state's agricultural and food sectors. As the Minister for Health noted before, we have an exceptional reputation, and we are the food bowl of this nation here in Victoria. The Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026 represents a major structural reform to our food safety regulatory system, and it is one that aims to modernise, streamline and futureproof the way food safety risks are managed across the entire supply chain. I am delighted to speak on this. As a former greengrocer and supermarket owner – we had a deli and cafe as well – I experienced firsthand the complexities of the different regulatory systems – not all of them, obviously, but a number of them – and I can say there was a great degree of complexity. I am absolutely delighted for everyone in the food industry here in Victoria that this bill has the intention of making life simpler and easier for them. That is incredibly important, because food is not static, and the world of food as we know it is actually going through some significant change. This act anticipates that and futureproofs for it.

It has been a really fragmented regulatory landscape. As the minister mentioned before, there are four separate acts, two ministers, two statutory authorities in PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria, two departments and 79 local councils. I can give a real-life example here of the complexity with the councils having their own interpretation of things. In my greengrocery, when we cut fruit, it was required at the time by Maroondah City Council that all cut fruit be refrigerated within 2 hours of being cut or it could not be sold. That was quite difficult for us because we did not have fridges for fruit display. Our temperature was controlled in the building, but we made sure that fruit and vegetables were not necessarily popped into a fridge, because it actually does change and degrade them in certain ways, so we had to handle and rotate them very quickly. But that was not required of you if you were just down the road in Yarra Ranges council. They did not require the refrigeration of cut fruit like Maroondah City Council did. I had other greengrocers that I used to speak with, and I would say to them, 'Do you have to do this refrigeration of cut fruit thing?', and they went, 'No, it's not a requirement.' So this actually will eliminate those inconsistencies that occur.

For us, we just followed what we were told, and that was fine. I had no issue with that. But if I had had several businesses across different councils, I would have been exposed to different requirements, and I know that that is an issue that does exist for some people in the industry. So I am really thrilled that this is making things simpler for an industry that does not need it to be complex. It needs it to be rigorous, it needs it to be well considered and of course it needs to have food safety paramount, and that is everything that this bill provides. Food safety is absolutely essential because it is a health issue.

You can become incredibly, incredibly sick if you contract foodborne illnesses. I have known several people over the years who have had salmonella, and one of them was actually a young child, and she suffered from debilitating effects from that salmonella infection for a good two years afterwards. It can cause extreme damage to the body, and sometimes people do not realise that. That is why food safety is incredibly important.

More than 100,000 businesses up until now have needed to interact with multiple regulators, sometimes all at once, and it depends on the nature of the food they produce, handle, package and sell. That, as I have said already, results in regulatory duplication, inconsistent requirements, unclear accountability and a system that is more complex than it needs to be for regulators and the industry. There has been extensive consultation on this as well: 123 submissions, and 93 per cent supported improving the system; and there were over 60 targeted consultations with peak bodies across last year. That is extraordinary consultation, and I think the result is borne out in this bill, which is very thorough and really well considered and puts food safety as the absolute prime objective but then makes it easier for industry to comply with it, and that is incredibly important.

We are establishing Safe Food Victoria, a new statutory authority, which will report to the Minister for Agriculture. It will replace PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria. It will take on the food safety roles currently within the Department of Health, and it is going to be established by around mid this year as part of the stage 1 reforms. Then there are more reforms to come through 2027, which will modernise the legislative framework, streamline regulation across the supply chain, consider optimal roles for local government and strengthen that consistency from paddock to plate. It is going to really assist complex businesses, in particular, by creating that single front door. Actually, as the minister mentioned before, Monbulk happens to be one of the horticultural centres of the nation and definitely of this state. There is a lot in the area and just over the boundary as well. Beautiful food is produced, but also many of the trees that are grown that produce fruit all around the country are actually grown within Monbulk. But if you are a horticulture grower who also packs and retails onsite, if you are one of the berry growers out there or the cherry growers – I do not know if you have ever been to go and pick your own cherries at Christmas time, but it is a real treat – that ends up being a complex business that we are assisting through this bill to make things more streamlined for you and for farms as well, with farm gate, retail, cafe and food manufacturing. I know a bit has been mentioned about producers of novel foods like cell-based products, and it is wonderful that this bill actually anticipates that, because that is the future of food.

I did note the member for Eildon was talking about cattle farming. She prefers the traditional way, and power to her. But I know that there are plenty of people out there too who would like to eat more ethically produced meat products, and cell-based food can produce those too. I did note the member for Eildon also mentioning about oat milk and what we should not call it. I was a bit unparliamentary, I did interject, but very gently, to say that it is mylk with a 'y'. Having been a vegan cafe owner, though not vegan myself, I can tell you that I do not think calling it oat juice would be conducive for anyone who wants to order it with their coffee. Language is everything, but you know the spelling of the mylk takes away the 'i' and puts in a 'y' and makes it quite clear that it is not from a mammal.

But anyway, I digress. I think it is really important that we continuously, as a government, strive to improve the systems that our producers need to work within. That is what this bill is doing, and that is why I am very keen to speak on it, because if you take, for example, Bega Cheese, they are currently licensed under the Dairy Act 2000, despite producing major non-dairy products like Vegemite and peanut butter.

Tim Richardson interjected.

Daniela DE MARTINO: It is a bit cheeky there, member for Mordialloc. But that is the beauty of this bill: it will simplify these arrangements. When you create that single-door entry, you do not have to deal with a whole range of different organisations.

Here is another example, with PrimeSafe – when it came to freezers and refrigeration of meat products, it was not easy to get that information through one channel; you had to then go and look at the PrimeSafe website, you had to look at their recommended times. I would like to also put out there for anyone who may be listening or reading this in the future: if ever you are trying to work out how long your meat can last in deep freeze, there are very clear guidelines on this, it is worth noting, because putting it in the freezer does not mean that five years later you can take it out and eat it. I promise you are going to end up with a terrible tummy. It also depends on the type of meat you freeze because pork will freeze differently to chicken to beef and it is actually quite complex. There is a lot of science in this. I am not a microbiologist, but people far smarter than I have worked all these things out. But what is also really important is knowing what to –

A member interjected.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Well, yes, there are other ways to work it out. It is also important to know how to manage power outages and what happens to your food in that time as well. So I am just going to throw that in there because we have those sometimes up in the hills when the trees come down, and you can save your food by being a bit clever with your knowledge of how to store it and how long it will last as well before it does that sad defrost and you cannot refreeze it. That is not a good thing to do.

In essence – I note there are only a few seconds on the clock – I am really thrilled that our government has consulted very broadly. This work started, as the Minister for Health indicated, four years ago when she was the Minister for Agriculture. There are two great ministers who have worked on this to make sure that we always keep food safety as the prime consideration, but we also make it easier for our producers and our growers within this system to be able to do their work, do it as efficiently as possible and keep continuing to produce the amazing, beautiful food that we have. A big shout-out to all my growers across Monbulk who are terrific horticulturists. I look forward to seeing them at the Melbourne flower and garden show in the next week.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (11:37): I rise to make a contribution on the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026, and I wish to begin by acknowledging my local hardworking farmers and the many industries across my electorate. My electorate of Shepparton is known as the food bowl of Australia, a region that literally feeds the nation as well as producing global exports. Twenty-five per cent of the state's trucks are also registered in the Shepparton region, so we have an enormous amount of transport movement. Dairy is a dominant sector in local manufacturing, making up 53 per cent of food manufacturing output in my region. The broader food and grocery manufacturing sector generates over $3 billion annually. Greater Shepparton also produces 25 per cent of Victoria's total agriculture output and is one of Australia's most concentrated dairy processing hubs. Dairy is the largest single contributor within the export mix.

As we stand in this place today, we know there is incredible uncertainty with the current fuel crisis impacting on our regional and rural communities. As you can imagine this is hitting our farmers and our transport companies hard, and they are crying out for assistance. When farming slows down, the whole economy slows down. Fuel uncertainty has a ripple effect on transport, machinery operators, small businesses and community, and the increased costs of fuel have hit at a time when households are already on their knees. Whilst we are discussing this safe food bill, we also have to be supporting those who are producing the food – the hand that feeds us. This bill is about food safety, but we also need food security to protect our food, our land and our dedicated farmers.

Regional Victoria has been through challenging times, with the impact of recent floods, fires and storm events. It seems to be relentless, and now with the impact of the increased cost of fuel, households are pushed to the limit – and we have just had another interest rate rise. Every day we hear of everyday people, hardworking families just trying to survive. It is overwhelming, the growing level of disadvantage, and many of those that are struggling have not in the past. I know many local farmers, transport industries and small business owners, and every day they get up, they show up and they just

keep going. The government have a responsibility to do all that they can to help them, particularly during these challenging times.

It is important for us to raise these matters in this place so our communities know that on this side of the house their voices are heard. The regions matter, and we will call on the government to do their job. Yet during this latest fuel challenge, in this place we have been called alarmists. Like the member for Mildura and everyone on this side of the house, we find it astounding that we are accused of being alarmist while our communities and our industries are faced with this fuel crisis. We are receiving constant messages of distress. I was informed yesterday that the small township of Wunghnu ran out of fuel. The Premier needs to get out into the regions, meet with communities and see our farmers, see what they are growing, see the food we are talking about today and see our communities and what they are experiencing. Maybe then the Premier will understand why we use our voices in this place – why we may seem at times to be vocal – and not call us alarmists. The regions matter, and the government need to do all they can to help us, as I said, particularly during this challenging time.

Coming back to the bill, this bill will establish Safe Food Victoria and provide for it to perform functions in regulating the Victorian food industry. It will abolish Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe; provide a legislative umbrella, with the SFV act providing overarching governance; and create a regulatory framework to support food innovation such as cell-cultured foods. The Victorian government announced its intention to create Safe Food Victoria in September 2025 as part of a broader economic growth strategy to consolidate and reduce the number of business regulators. Consumers need to have confidence and deserve to know that the food on their table is safe, high quality and regulated by the best possible standards.

Food safety regulation in Victoria is currently delivered through a combination of specialist regulators and government agencies. The structure of the state's food safety regulatory system comprises four acts of Parliament and two responsible ministers. On top of this, the system is regulated by the Department of Health, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Dairy Food Safety Victoria, PrimeSafe and the 79 local councils. The government has argued that the existing system is fragmented and that a single regulator would improve coordination, streamline compliance and provide clearer oversight of food safety across the supply chain. The current system has generally been regarded as highly effective, particularly in maintaining Victoria's strong reputation for food safety in export markets.

The new regulator, Safe Food Victoria, will be governed by a board with between five and seven members. The board will be appointed by the minister responsible – in this case, the Minister for Agriculture – for administering the act, and the board will report to the minister. Safe Food Victoria will come under the ag portfolio. In addition to the board, the regulator will be led by a CEO, who will be appointed by the board and who will also have the power to employ staff. The bill does not guarantee that the new regulator's board will include representatives with expertise in dairy, meat processing, agriculture or regional food production. Without mandated expertise, the board risks becoming dominated by generalist bureaucratic appointees rather than people with direct industry knowledge. Industry stakeholders have raised their concerns that abolishing specialist regulators is not justified in the absence of evidence of systemic regulatory failure.

There is a risk that the new regulator will become a larger bureaucracy that is more distant from the industry and slower to respond to sector-specific issues. While the legislation allows the Safe Food Victoria board to establish consultative committees to inform regulatory performance, these committees have not been defined in the legislation. Such committees should include the dairy, meat and seafood industries, as well as public health, local government and regional representation. Dairy Food Safety Victoria currently operates on an industry-funded cost-recovery model and has built up financial reserves funded by dairy producers. There are concerns these funds – regulatory assets – could be absorbed into the broader operations of the new regulator rather than remaining dedicated to dairy regulation. This issue is particularly sensitive with dairy producers.

In the bill briefing the government also stated there would be a review of fees; however, there were no guarantees offered for when this would occur or that current fees and levies would not be increased. It is likely any increase in cost would be passed on to consumers in the form of an increase in food prices, increasing cost-of-living pressures.

Victoria's dairy and meat industries rely heavily on international markets. Export partners expect stable and credible regulatory systems. Industry stakeholders have warned that restructuring food safety regulation could create uncertainty around certification and inspection regimes during the transition period. Even temporary uncertainty could create risks for export access. We need to ensure any concerns are addressed promptly.

There is a risk that the new regulator will become a large bureaucracy that is more distant from industry and slower to respond to sector-specific issues. There is no statutory review date. While this is a significant change process which could have serious consequences on our agriculture sector and particularly for our export market, there is no statutory review date included in this legislation, as I have mentioned. The government say this is because this is only phase 1 of the implementation and that phase 2 has been promised by government, so it is not necessary. This seems a gross risk for the sake of a single clause in a bill. The government is also seeking to frame this bill around cutting red tape. However, industry stakeholders have suggested the reform may actually increase bureaucracy and compliance costs. There is no indication that this reform will deliver full benefits, but we need to be constantly making sure that our food safety regulations are strict and are compliant.

I also want to acknowledge our hospitality industry. In the Greater Shepparton region we have a huge amount of hospitality, and they provide great service to our local communities. I do have a friend that has a little wholesale food business; she is distributing food to these cafes. We have to make sure when we have small businesses that need to be supported by councils that they have a clear pathway, that they have full understanding of the requirements and also that there is not the red tape that we often hear when it comes to small business. Overall at the moment I think we in this place are all for safe food compliance. We need to make sure that we have certain standards so that people, when they do buy food, are protected, they are not getting sick and everything is there that they need to have in place. I will leave my contribution there.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (11:46): I rise to speak in support of the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026. This is a bill that will establish a new consolidated food regulator, Safe Food Victoria. These reforms will support and enable the continued protection of public health and a collaborative approach to achieving food safety outcomes with industry while streamlining and simplifying our food safety and regulatory systems for business, consumers and the community alike. These reforms are important because ongoing access to safe, fresh and affordable food that is essential to nourishing every household and person across our community and because our agriculture and food processing and hospitality sectors are economic and employment drivers for Victoria and all of our communities. Ensuring the safe growing, processing and consumption of food will always remain an ongoing priority for the Victorian government and the Victorian Parliament.

Victoria's agricultural economic contribution continues to become more interlinked with our socio-economic prosperity. As of June 2024, there was $20.2 billion worth of value in our agricultural production; that is up 15 per cent. $19.6 billion was the value of total food and fibre exports, up 7.4 per cent. 21,300 agriculture and farm businesses were in the state, which has remained stable. 68,870 jobs were associated with agriculture; that is up 3.3 per cent. Victoria, by volume, remained Australia's number one producer of table and dried grapes; we produced 78 per cent of national production. Milk was 64 per cent of national production; sheep meat, 46 per cent of national production; fruit and nuts, 33 per cent of national production; and vegetables, 25 per cent of national production.

By value Victoria is Australia's number one food and fibre exporter of dairy products: 73 per cent of Australia's dairy exports come from Victoria; skin and hides are 47 per cent; animal fibre is 46 per cent; horticulture produce equates to 45 per cent; and total food and fibre exports are 24 per cent of

national exports. Across our food and beverage manufacturing industry, 84,970 jobs are associated. That equates to 74,400 in food manufacturing and 10,510 in beverage manufacturing. When combined, the total jobs across agricultural production and the food and beverage growing, processing and manufacturing sectors is 153,840 jobs.

Melbourne is widely regarded as one of the world's great food cities because it combines extraordinary cultural diversity, creativity and quality in a way that few places can match. Across the city you can experience authentic cuisines from every corner of the globe, from Italian and Greek to Vietnamese, Lebanese, Ethiopian, Turkish and so much more, all shaped by generations of migrants that help define Melbourne's identity. What sets Melbourne apart is not just the variety but the standards. The cafe culture is world class, with a deep focus on speciality coffee, fresh local produce and thoughtful seasonal nuts. Whether it is a simple brunch or a fine-dining experience, there is a strong emphasis on quality, innovation and consistency. Melbourne's laneways and neighbourhood strips also play a massive role, offering hidden gems, family-run eateries and cutting-edge restaurants side by side. Chefs are known for pushing boundaries while still respecting tradition, creating a food scene that is both authentic and constantly evolving. Put simply, Melbourne's food culture is about more than just eating. It is about community, creativity and connection. It goes to the very essence of what Melbourne is about, and that is what makes our restaurants and cafes some of the best in the world.

This bill is all about ensuring we continue to strengthen food safety standards to protect industry standards and public health. The way the food safety regulatory system is structured currently is very complex, with four Victorian acts and two responsible ministers. The system is currently regulated by the Department of Health, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Dairy Food Safety Victoria, PrimeSafe and 79 local councils, including mine in Merri-bek. The first stage of reform implemented by this legislation is focused on entity reform, bringing together PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria, two regulators with similar remits, as well as some departmental food safety regulatory functions, into a new central food safety agency. Safe Food Victoria will enable more efficient regulation, better incident management, a paddock-to-plate approach to food safety that is better aligned with risk and clearer food safety leadership, including within Victoria, as part of Australia and New Zealand's binational food regulatory system for our most important export markets. The purpose of the bill, as I said, is to establish Safe Food Victoria and to provide for it to perform the functions in regulating the Victorian food industry; to abolish Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe; and to make consequential and related amendments to the Dairy Act 2000, the Food Act 1984, the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Seafood Safety Act 2003 and certain other acts.

A consolidated regulator can deliver benefits for businesses and consumers while protecting public health. It will reduce the need for businesses to engage with multiple regulators and reduce compliance costs. Once Safe Food Victoria is established a further series of reforms in a second stage will be brought before the Parliament in the next term. This will further consolidate existing food safety legislation, modernising the licensing, compliance and enforcement laws. The second stage of reforms will also consider new cost recovery arrangements and the role of local councils in regulating food safety. While we expect some regulatory benefits in this first stage of reform, this legislation will largely set the foundations for more explicit benefits as part of stage 2. Reforms have been supported by an extensive engagement and consultation process over the last year involving more than 60 individual engagements with stakeholders and interest groups, and this has culminated in an Engage Victoria process across September and October 2025. More than 120 unique submissions were received, with an overwhelming 91 per cent support, and I commend the Minister for Agriculture as well, who is at the table, for her work and leadership in bringing this bill to the chamber.

Across my community the value of agriculture, food processing and consumption remains critically important: 5200 jobs associated with retail – many cafes, restaurants and hospitality – 10 per cent of local jobs; 4200 jobs associated with accommodation and food services – that is 8 per cent of local jobs; 3800 local jobs associated with the manufacturing sector – that is 7.3 per cent of local jobs; and almost a hundred jobs associated with agriculture in my community – that is 0.2 per cent of jobs. We

are not the agricultural heartland that we used to be in Coburg and Pascoe Vale. We were once upon a time during early settlement days, but that baton has very much passed to Shepparton and other areas these days. In terms of businesses there are 63 businesses associated with agriculture, 0.4 per cent; 471 businesses associated with manufacturing, 2.8 per cent; 1100 businesses associated with retail, 6.9 per cent; and 870 businesses associated with accommodation and food services, 5.2 per cent.

Across my community we have many fantastic local food offerings and cafes. Elio's panini bar and cafe – un grande piacere to have visitato e mangiato with the Victorian Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister Suleyman, previously. Catching up with the owner, one of our newest, local and best panini maestros, Peter De Marco, it was bellissimo to have been served up some of the freshest, most authentic paninis and focaccias in town. I cannot go past the mortadella special. Named after Peter's son Elio, this proud Calabrese-inspired cafe is a labour of love blending family tradition, homemade sugo and the most authentic, freshest ingredients into every panino e focaccia. Opened in November 2024, Elio's has quickly become a local favourite built on passion and deep connection in our community, and you can check it out at 68 Newlands Road in Coburg North. With an extensive family history and background, having grown up in hospitality, you can see his family wall when you go up and have a panino there. They have come from Adelaide to Coburg North. He has got a great Calabrese heritage, and he has got you covered for colazione/breakfast, pranzo/lunch e tutt'altro/everything else in between.

Growing up in West Coburg, on Jamieson Street, we had the Progress Theatre, which was on Reynard Street, which we spent a lot of time at. But on the corner of Jamieson and Reynard streets for many years was a pizza institution. It was originally Charlie Falleti's Pizza, then Joe's Pizza for nearly 30 years, and more recently it is now Ralphy's Pizza. John Spataro runs his family pizza business, now Ralphy's Pizza, at this location. John, his brothers Carmelo and Vincenzo, nephews Rob, Joe and Anthony, two nephews both named Nicolas and son Antonio took it up. After their working hours they would go to the shop and work hard to renovate it to make it what it is today: a fantastic, welcoming Italian pizza place where customers are warmly welcomed to enjoy their food. They got the keys on 17 April 2024, and it took them six months to complete the renovations. It was officially opened in November 2024, and the family pizza business has not looked back since. John, his son Antonio and his wife Lina run the pizza business. Lina's particular emphasis on food safety regulations is impeccable, and I can attest to that firsthand. They work hard to provide pizza and food for customer satisfaction. John has been overwhelmed by the local community support and how the business has grown with the support of local families. Children, including those of Coburg West and St Fidelis, are making it their regular eatery. The best thing about it all, says John, is that he feels it is in memory and honour of his father Nicola, a pioneer Italian immigrant who came here and worked very hard, who had love for his family and love for good food as well. His family origins are from Varapodio in Calabria, not far from where my families are as well.

Just further east down Reynard Street we have another wonderful family food outlet with a proud family community history. Two Franks is a gorgeous new local cafe nestled in the backstreets of West Coburg and operated by sisters Angie and Chryssie, who, like yours truly, also grew up in that neighbourhood. Angie and Chryssie actually grew up right across the road from where their shopfront is today. Drawing on the suburb's multicultural history, Two Franks is the beginning of a new chapter where locals are gathering to meet, share in their love of soul-filled food and hospitality and excellent coffee. But the question is: why the name Two Franks? It is because the shop at 202 Reynard Street was previously a butcher's for many years, whose name was Frank; 16 years ago Frank hung up his blades and handed the keys over to another butcher, whose name was Frank as well, so it was two Franks. That is why the cafe is called Two Franks. We have so many other great cafes across my community. There is Jack & Daisy, where Eugene does a great job. There is Carson cafe as well, where Dario does a magnificent job.

I commend this bill as someone who worked in hospitality growing up, working in Carlton, in Lygon Street over many of my formative high school and university years. There is still great food and great coffee in the northern suburbs.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (11:56): I rise to speak on the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026, legislation that proposes significant restructuring of Victoria's food safety regulatory system. The purposes of this bill are clear: to establish Safe Food Victoria as a new consolidated regulator, to abolish Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe, to transfer staff and functions into a single authority and to create a legislative framework capable of supporting emerging food technologies. On paper, these are substantial reforms.

The government argues that consolidation will streamline compliance, reduce duplication and deliver a more coordinated paddock-to-plate regulatory model. But while the intent may be sound, the execution of this bill raises serious concerns, and it is those concerns that I want to focus on today. The first and most pressing is the issue of governance. This bill abolishes two specialist regulators, PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria, each with decades of deep technical expertise. I have a long and personal relationship and experience with Dairy Food Safety Victoria, having been a licensed dairy farmer, and I saw the good work of the CEO Anne Astin for many years, and following her, Corrie Goodwin. So I have a very deep understanding, and I have witnessed their trusted relationships with industry, with producers and, critically, with international export partners. Yet the bill does not guarantee that the Safe Food Victoria board will include members with expertise in dairy, meat processing, agriculture or regional food production. There is no mandated commodity representation; there is no requirement for specialist knowledge. While the bill allows for consultative committees, it does not define them or prescribe them or guarantee that they will be established in a meaningful way.

This omission is not a minor oversight. It is actually a fundamental flaw. Agricultural groups have been very clear. Without mandated representation, the risk of losing institutional knowledge is high and the consequences could be significant. The dairy industry pays substantial licence fees to Dairy Food Safety Victoria, and we did that very willingly in the knowledge that we were getting an excellent service, and that was to maintain that high standard, that specialist authority.

Dairy Food Safety Victoria currently operates with around $6 million in reserves, roughly one year of operating costs. There is a real concern that these funds paid by dairy farmers in the past will be absorbed into this new entity and used to cross-subsidise the development of fake dairy and fake meat industries. Dairy Food Safety Victoria's reserves exist to manage regulatory risk, and under this bill, those funds could be redirected to support emerging sectors such as cell-cultured – which is meat grown in laboratories – or plant-based products masquerading as milk, effectively forcing dairy and meat producers to subsidise industries that directly compete with them. Dairy farmers already find it a sore point when we hear about plant-based milk. These are products labelled as milk that do not come from the mammary glands of an animal, or meat that has not come from an animal at all. Whatever your view on these products, one thing should be non-negotiable, and that is clear, honest labelling. Milk does not come from cashews or pistachios, and it does not come from soybeans or oats. Almonds do not lactate. If you want to order an almond latte in your local cafe, that is absolutely fine; I do not have a problem with that. You are making your choice, and it is absolutely your right. But what I do have a problem with is plant-based alternatives being labelled as milk. It misleads the consumer into believing that plant-based products have a nutritional equivalency with dairy, when they often have high levels of added sugar and do not have the nutritional benefits of whole milk.

This is not about stopping innovation, it is about fairness when farmers operate already under strict standards. They have invested heavily in animal welfare, sustainability and food safety. Farmers deserve a level playing field, not a marketplace where imitation products can borrow the reputation of established agriculture without the same level of accountability. This raises serious transparency issues. Why should established industries be footing the bill for new developing ones? Producers are already under immense pressure. Meat and dairy operators fear that they will be forced to cross-

subsidise non-meat and non-dairy industries, driving up their own costs at a time when cost-of-living pressures are already biting hard.

At the same time, we are facing crises like the growing fuel crisis at present. When fuel costs rise, everything in food production becomes more expensive – planting, harvesting, transporting food to market, milk getting to the processors. That flows directly through to the price at the check-out of food. So it is a timely reminder: food security does not happen by accident. Farmers cannot plant, harvest or deliver milk without fuel, and right now confidence is slipping as the regional fuel outlets dry up. If tractors stop, crops are not sown. If tankers stop, milk never reaches the processors. By the time government realises the shelves are empty, it will already be too late. The Labor government cannot sit on its hands while the foundations of our food supply are put at risk. Farmers need certainty now, not apologies later. The Allan Labor government cannot sit on its hands while fuel continues to dry up. Fishing trawler operators in Portland tell me they now need 3 tonnes of fish just to cover the fuel required to catch 1 tonne. These vessels use around 1500 litres of diesel a day. With the price jumping from $1.70 last week to $2.99 today, that is more than $1500 extra they must find every single day. These are the margins our producers are having to work with, and they totally erode the profit a producer needs to be able to operate. Farmers are being disrespected yet again. Fishing operators are being ignored. It is just another example of how this city-centric Allan Labor government treats the regions – taken for granted and left to carry the burden.

The consequences will not stop at the farm gate. The food we all rely on – milk, meat, vegetables, cheese, fish for Easter – will all rise in price. Do not be surprised if seafood costs double on Good Friday. This is why the Allan Labor government should do something about these issues today, because in the end it is the consumer who pays the price. Adding regulatory uncertainty and cost shifting at the top is simply irresponsible.

The second major concern in this bill relates to the powers of entry onto food production premises. It is typical of this government, which shows little respect for private property. We are seeing that all the time with the way they are overreaching in trying to get claims on private property. Many farms are also family homes – places where people eat, live, sleep and work under the same roof that they run their business from. Well, food production may not occur inside the home. Offices are often located in the spare bedroom or converted living spaces. So under this bill, can regulators simply invite themselves into these areas? Can they just walk in? This lack of clarity in the bill is unacceptable.

Victoria's dairy and meat industries are our export powerhouses. Victorian dairy alone is worth $2.5 billion to our economy every year. Success depends on the confidence of international markets. Export partners expect stability, predictability and credibility in regulatory systems. Industry stakeholders have warned that restructuring food safety regulation and losing industry experts could create uncertainty around certification and inspection regimes. One single misstep – a delay in approvals, a gap in oversight – could jeopardise our export access. We cannot afford to gamble with our export reputation. The transition must be watertight, and at present the bill does not provide that reassurance. Merging three regulatory systems into one is not a simple administrative exercise, it is a complex, high-risk undertaking. The risks include loss of experienced staff, IT and licensing systems failures, delays in inspections and approvals and regulatory uncertainty for business. These are not hypothetical risks; they are actually foreseeable. Yet the bill does not include a statutory review date for reform of this scale, and that is extraordinary. The government claims a review is unnecessary because this is phase 1 of a broader process. That is not a justification; it is an excuse. A statutory review clause is a basic safeguard. Its absence is a glaring omission. Agriculture stakeholders, including the Victorian Farmers Federation, United Dairyfarmers of Victoria and Australian Dairy Farmers, have been clear and consistent. We are taking their concerns seriously, and we will put forward amendments in the upper house to mandate industry representation on the Safe Food Victoria board, to prescribe consultative committees for key commodity groups, to protect the regulatory assets and fee reserves of each sector and to establish a statutory review period. These amendments reflect the concerns of the agricultural stakeholders and the expectations of Victorian consumers.

The bill represents a major shift in how Victoria regulates food safety. With the right amendments, this reform could be strengthened; without them, the risks to industry, to consumers and to export reputations are simply too great. Backing our farmers is good policy. We should protect the integrity of what they produce and ensure Australians can trust the food on their plate, because once that trust is lost, it is hard to rebuild. In a country like ours, we should never take for granted the people who make sure we are fed.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (12:06): Food, glorious food. I rise today in support of the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026. I want to take a few moments to talk about why this reform matters and why it is the right thing to do. I would like to thank the member for Pascoe Vale for taking me on a food tour through his electorate, and I am going to get his speech so I can follow that. It was also great to hear the member for Shepparton talk about her food bowl. When I did my food show *Mercurio's Menu* I certainly went to Shepparton and toured around the area in various places. I went to the SPC factory, which is historic. As a child SPC was always in the cupboard, whether it was canned spaghetti or baked beans or Two Fruits or whatever. The member for Pascoe Vale outlined Victoria and its place in Australia as a very, very important food bowl, and I think that is terrific.

The Mornington Peninsula is a fantastic food bowl. We have many, many different products, from fruit, vegetables – when I say vegetables, we have got Hawkes Farm potatoes – cows, goats, chickens of course, eggs, wines and artisanal products such as cheese and honey. We have got Gazolla, who produce some amazing fresh vegetables, and they go all over the place, and we have got Torello Farm, which produce their own beef as well as their own vegetables, and they are really terrific. The Mornington Peninsula's food and agriculture is worth $1.3 billion and employs over 7000 people, so it is an important industry for the community, and food safety is an incredibly important aspect of that. If we are not on top of our food safety, then we lose an industry and people lose their livelihoods, so it is very important.

Food is fun, it is creative, it is exciting and it is delicious. It tells stories, gives us identity and gives us a history and a place of belonging. Food safety is not any of those things, and it does not do any of those things. It is not really very exciting. I have had my own restaurant and food businesses, and I know food safety is an arduous but important task, and it is incredibly necessary that we follow it. What food safety does is make sure that we can continue to enjoy our food and enjoy all the other benefits that it provides.

Food safety is something that most people do not think of. I might be a bit strange, because I do think about it. The fact is that if people do not have to think about it, then that is a good sign. It means that the system is working. But just because something is working today, that does not mean that it is going to work tomorrow or the next day or the next week. Things change – food changes, production changes, the world changes and food production changes – so the risks also change, and our regulatory system needs to keep up with that and keep pace and change with it. Right now Victoria's food safety system is generally complicated, and I have experienced that. We have four separate acts and two responsible ministers, the Department of Health, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Dairy Food Safety Victoria, PrimeSafe and 79 local councils all playing a role. That is a lot of moving parts for what should be a straightforward question: is our food safe? I recall a moment when I was on Mornington council and we had a person who had a fish and chip van who also had a seafood facility and wanted to sell fresh seafood out of the fish and chip van. They were cooking fresh fish for fish and chips, but they were not allowed to sell fresh fish. I am still not quite sure why. But the question is: is our food safe? Obviously if this van was cooking fresh fish to sell to people, the fish was safe and they should have been able to sell it. But that is, I guess, the complexity of having so many councils and so many organisations looking after food safety.

I have been lucky enough to travel around Australia, going to food bowls in each state when I had my television food show. One of the big things that farmers and producers would often talk to me about was the regulatory red tape. It is there to keep people safe, but their experience, and probably my experience too, was that it goes back to that question: is the food safe? I would go to cheese

manufacturers. Traditionally cheese is aged on wooden boards. It has been like that for centuries, it is perfectly safe, it has never been dangerous, but for some strange reason in Australia they changed that around so that cheese had to be aged on stainless steel. It is not the same thing – it changes the flavour and changes timing and all of those sorts of things. I do believe that has been changed, which I think is a good thing. But again, it is just this very simple understanding that with so many different bodies looking after food safety there is confusion, there are contradictory elements to it and it makes it very, very difficult.

Food safety is hard work. When I had my restaurant we would put the food out. Obviously if we did not put safe food out, we would go out of business very quickly. The great thing about having a restaurant is putting food on the table and feeding people and nourishing them. The worst thing about a restaurant is when you close you then spend an hour to an hour and a half cleaning down – cleaning the fridges every day, cleaning everything to within an inch of its life. Obviously there are regulations about that. If you are doing meat, if you are a butcher, PrimeSafe come down on you pretty hard.

This bill is really about bringing everything together and making things simpler. It will consolidate all of those things like PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria together, along with the food safety functions currently sitting inside the Department of Health – one agency, one front door, a clear paddock-to-plate approach to keeping Victoria safe. I might take a moment to be clear about something else, because it is worth saying this directly. This is not about cutting corners. This is not about watering down our food safety standards. This is not about the idea of maybe cutting red tape so things are a little bit easier and people have an easier opportunity of getting away with things. The whole point of this reform is to make our food safety system stronger and more responsive, not weaker. Safe food is the starting point, the non-negotiable, and everything else flows from there. I think that is a really important thing to remember.

I think about businesses in my electorate, and I think about the complexity that they deal with and that I dealt with. Take a diversified farm operation, for example, a business that processes meat, grows vegetables, runs a farm gate and does some food manufacturing on the site. One of those, as I said, is Torello, which is in Dromana. They do an amazing job, but they do all of it. Over the years as a councillor I had involvement with them, trying to assist them with various food safety elements from council, from PrimeSafe and other things. Under the current system that business could be dealing with, as I said, a PrimeSafe licence, a registration with Agriculture Victoria and a separate registration with their local council all at the same time. That is not a system designed to help businesses succeed.

I had a bloke called Paul Stafford come to my office a little while ago. He has a business called Bigger Than Texas. It does smoked meats and things. He just wanted to talk to me about the fact that he can control above the line – numbers of staff and food costs – but he cannot control the stuff below that, which often comes from all the regulatory processes that he has to go through, adhere to and fill out. He was saying that as a hospitality person he was thinking about getting out of the business. Maybe this bill will make a change and maybe he will consider, now that it is a one-stop shop, not getting out of the business but staying put.

I do not have too much time left. This reform has been a long time coming, and it has been done properly, with more than 60 individual consultations with industry groups and stakeholders and an Engage Victoria process that drew over 120 submissions. Of those submissions, 93 per cent were supportive of the direction. The dairy industry alone has had around 20 individual meetings since December 2024, including with the minister. I think a lot of thought has been put into this. Also, we are not the first to make this change, which is good. New South Wales has done it, Queensland has done it and New Zealand has done it, and it has worked. A consolidated food safety regulator is a proven model that works, and it is long past time Victoria joined that list. This is a sensible reform. This will keep Victorians safe and make it simpler to do business in this state. I commend the bill to the house.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (12:16): I rise today to talk about the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026, and you cannot talk about this bill without talking about the plight and the needs of farmers, particularly those in my own electorate of Polwarth. It was interesting that the member for Hastings finished with the fact that Engage Victoria was again used – and trumpeted by this government as its cutting-edge consultation process. Can I just remind the member that, with 93 per cent approval through Engage Victoria as justification for this bill, I will also point out that this week Kim Jong Un talked about his 99 per cent approval from the people of North Korea in running his state. Governments of all persuasions can use their own market research to determine their usefulness and worthwhileness, but those at the cutting edge, those on the workplace floor and those on the farms may have a different view.

In my consultation this morning, unlike the government's Engage consultation, I managed to speak to the Victorian Farmers Federation, I managed to speak to United Dairyfarmers of Victoria and I managed to speak to Australian Dairy Farmers. I managed to speak to those people that will be directly affected by this bill, and do you know what I found? I found 100 per cent dissatisfaction with this legislation. And why were they dissatisfied with this legislation? Because they felt that they were not listened to – surprise, surprise, at a time when this government, every time a member of the community disagrees with them, bring in more legislation to just fast-track their own agenda. It had me thinking. We know, for example – it is a topic today, about planning – this government cannot get houses built in Victoria, so it has decided to just bulldoze every community and not listen to anyone. Those of us out in regional Victoria have had that for a while now. You can build solar farms and wind farms, and you can do all sorts of things, but the local community is never listened to. In fact the tension that we have out in the community with not only renewable energy but agroforestry projects also is highly problematic in our region.

These are the types of issues I am hearing farmers, particularly in Polwarth, wanting to have solutions to. I have not actually had anyone come and knock on my door like I do about new foreign-owned solar farms or wind farms or foreign-owned agricultural bluegum tree plantations and other things. I hear plenty of concern and angst about that. I am certainly hearing plenty of angst and concern about rising diesel prices, the cost of urea, all these immediate concerns clobbering farmers and food producers in my region, but actually no-one has come to me and said, 'Look, could the Parliament please go to Dairy Food Safety Victoria? They've been running at a profit. They're highly respected. All the people in the industry, from producers to suppliers all down the manufacturing chain in dairy in particular, are all really happy with the service they get. They find them highly collaborative. They're world leading. The rest of the world looks to them. And unusually for this government, they run at a profit. They've got surplus funds in the bank account. They're set up for a rainy day. They're doing the work the industry wants them to do. Can you please pull it apart, government? Can you spend time in Parliament and come up with a way to pull it apart, because it's not working and we want change.' No, they are not the words that I have heard from the stakeholders in this particular debate. I have not heard those at all. But what I am hearing is, 'We have not been listened to. We do not have the necessary safeguards and guarantees in this new entity that the government are bringing in that will ensure that the suppliers and producers of dairy products, in particular, are listened to and their concerns are taken account of.' So that is of great concern to me.

The government will talk much today about, 'Oh, we need to do this because we need safe food.' Well, of course we need safe food; that is a given. The people that work every day, seven days a week, out in our paddocks and our food producing things or out on boats bringing in fresh seafood – that is what they wake up for. They love to produce a food product that not only they can be proud of but they know gives them a good reputation and keeps their business going into the future. It is not an issue of whether we want our food safe, but is our farming future safe? That is the question I have. There are storm clouds galore on the horizon for farming, particularly at the moment. The battles I am hearing farmers talk about are 'The costs of running our equipment and our trucks on our roads are going through the roof because this government cannot maintain basic infrastructure.' Our roads are crumbling; that is a cost that directly goes to transport, the cost of getting food and food supply in.

There is cost of urea because of the war in the Middle East at the moment. While we cannot blame the government for the war – I am not even suggesting that – it will be a huge problem down the road because so much of that important fertiliser that goes into producing the crops right across Victoria and southern New South Wales, a significant percentage, comes back into the food production chain here in Victoria, whether it is top-up feed for our dairy industry, our pig industry, our feedlot industry or other things.

These are huge and important issues today. These are issues that we could and should be talking about in the Parliament, not looking to consolidate a department that no-one is actually worried about. I would also reference the fact that when I was preparing for today and I was wondering, 'Why has the government gone to such effort to bring up some pretty significant changes that no-one's really asking for? Why might they do that?' the other little hidden bit in the government's discussion is the Silver review. Not everyone may be familiar with the Silver review, but that is this government's ham-fisted attempt to sort of try and cut costs. And there, amongst the justifications for this bill, is reference to the Silver review, and what that says to me is, sadly, the government have found a profitable department, one that is run and controlled and financed by the farming sector, and they are going, 'Mmm, that's a little bit too much of a black balance sheet there. What could we do to' –

Peter Walsh interjected.

Richard RIORDAN: 'How could we stuff this up, and how can we get our gritty little hands, our grimy little treasury hands, on these hard-earned funds?' Can I just put this into context. If we assume that this government will do potentially to this new agency as it has done to so many others, farmers will quite rightly be very upset. They are going to be upset because over the coming years they will see massive increases in the fire service levy to pay for services that they are providing to our communities already. So, 'Here's a fire service which, farmers, you all do out of the goodness of your heart to keep your community safe, and you do it all for free.' On the weekend I was lucky enough to have the Leader of the Opposition Jess Wilson in my own patch, and Jess came down, and there, after spending all day Saturday, my local CFA –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Proper titles.

Richard RIORDAN: The Leader of the Opposition and I went there on Saturday. The CFA and the SES were all fundraising; they raised about $30,000. Then on Sunday morning there they all were doing extra training, all for free. It did not cost the taxpayer a cent, but we are going to charge them extra. Not only do we have the poor old farmers going to be slugged for a service they already provide and they are already funding profitably and in a way that is world class, but with Dairy Food Safety Victoria regulation, which they are doing a great job with, what I can see happening and what I am sure so many farmers, dairy farmers in particular, are saying is, 'Oh, my God, we're already paying a levy. It's doing a good job, and these guys are going to come along, gobble up that surplus that we have got there, that good management, and they're going to fold it into existing revenue.' They will stack a board full of their mates, who will all probably get paid twice as much as what the existing board gets, and that is where the money is going to go. That is the great worry. They are going to pay a heck of a lot more for a heck of a lot less, and that seems to be the mantra of this government on that. At the moment the uncertainty in agriculture continues, and this bill, sadly, does not do much to relieve the concerns that so many in primary production have as to how this is going.

Just in the time I have left, this bill, while it says it is for the betterment of food safety in Victoria, I do not believe is really keeping a strong and vibrant farming future going forward. It is not addressing the issues of today that really are keeping so many of our primary producers and food producers awake at night. This government has been silent on that, this whole past few weeks, with what is going on internationally. There is a crisis on the horizon for us. We expect the government to deal with the issues of the day that are keeping people awake and to keep our food on the table.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (12:26): I know that Footscray is perhaps not renowned as a farming community, but we do our best locally with the amazing young people at the Footscray High farm, learning all about where food comes from and sustainability, and they do an outstanding job. I think it is a really innovative program to teach kids in the city how to grow their own food and how to appreciate and value all things permaculture. They have got some amazing learning resources down there, including a stargazing centre where the kids built their own space with a telescope, and they learn all about the environment there. I do not think the chooks are still at the farm, but we have a yabby farm there, and it is a pretty impressive set-up which was highlighted on *Gardening Australia*, which has been a source of pride for all of us.

I am pleased to make a contribution to the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026. This bill seeks to both strengthen our food safety regulatory program while streamlining the process for businesses and those involved in the food safety pipeline. The current food safety regulatory system is pretty complex, as we have been hearing this morning. There are four acts of Parliament and two responsible ministers. The system is currently regulated by the Department of Health; the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action; Dairy Food Safety Victoria; PrimeSafe; and 79 local councils. So even before the impact of this regulatory shandy happens on business and is unpacked, the efficiency gains that can be made by reducing administrative duplication are obvious.

The current regulatory system requires two CEOs and executive Victorian public service staff, four separate and unconnected IT systems, 17 board positions and four different worksites, to name a few of the duplications. As many in the food safety industry will know, too many cooks can spoil the broth, so under this reform, rather than having four entities regulating over 100,000 food businesses, Safe Food Victoria will hold a whole-of-supply-chain role in ensuring food safety with support from departments and local councils, reducing the number of cooks in the proverbial kitchen – I am trying to get as many cliches as I can into this contribution; I am sure you will appreciate that – without cutting frontline staff. Safe Food Victoria will reduce the number of permissions needed by businesses, making it easier for these businesses to comply with regulations. As someone who spent a good portion of my 20s working in hospitality, I know that that will be well received in the hospitality sector. Businesses can often conduct multiple activities that do not sit neatly in a specific framework and require multiple permissions from different regulators. A diversified farm business operating a retail outlet, a cafe and food manufacturing – and I heard the member for Eureka talk about my favourite cheese before, Meredith Dairy, as an example of this – may require a PrimeSafe licence to process and retail meat products; registration with Agriculture Victoria to produce and process leafy vegetables, berries or eggs; and registration with the local council to operate a cafe or a food manufacturing business. SFV will incorporate all of these systems into a single access point, making it easier for businesses to get the permissions required.

This bill is more than administrative efficiency, however. Fundamentally, this bill is making sure that we keep Victorians safe from the various food safety risks that are out there. The nature of these risks changes all the time, and that is why the government is acting proactively to manage those risks. Just because our food safety system has worked in the past does not mean it is fit for purpose to manage the risks of the future. It is only responsible to acknowledge the need for change and to safeguard the health of Victorians and the reputation of our fine agricultural industries here in Victoria. Food safety is something that can be taken for granted in developed countries like ours, and like a lot of work undertaken by governments, people do not notice things when they are done right. The implications of getting it wrong, on the other hand, are very noticeable. Whether at the beginning of the supply chain at our farms and ag facilities or at the consumer-facing end in commercial kitchens and supermarkets, food safety quite literally is a matter of life or death. Outbreaks of foodborne illnesses caused by salmonella, E. coli, listeria, norovirus and more can have devastating consequences for the community, particularly for children, the elderly and the immunocompromised. Ensuring that businesses have the knowledge, support and resources to facilitate proper food safety practices is vital to the health of Victorians and to our incredible foodie culture here in Victoria.

Our livestock industry is absolutely rolled gold, as we have heard many times this morning, and produces some of the best-quality beef and dairy products in the world. A shout-out to my mum up in Dederang – it is good dairy country. Food safety does not just protect consumers, it protects the livelihood of those farming communities. Many here will remember the mad cow disease outbreak that affected the UK and the EU in the 1990s. This epidemic resulted in millions of cattle being destroyed and hundreds of people losing their lives and cost entire industries their ability to export beef and beef products. This bill helps to ensure that everyone in the Victorian supply chain from primary producers to dinner guests are protected from harm. In order to do so, this bill will implement the first stage of a two-stage reform program to consolidate food safety regulators in Victoria, with stage 1 seeing the establishment of a new statutory body, Safe Food Victoria, to replace PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria as well as conduct the food safety regulatory functions currently undertaken by the Department of Health. This effectively creates a single front door for food safety queries to be established by mid-2026, reporting to the Minister for Agriculture. PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria will then be abolished, and stage 2 will see the development of a new framework for food safety in Victoria. These reforms will streamline regulatory processes, ensuring greater consistency across the supply chain from paddock to plate. This process is in the early stages and will continue through 2027. This will strengthen our food safety system by making it more robust and responsive to effectively manage risk, foster innovation and facilitate continual improvement. In short, our food safety system will be even safer and smarter.

I would like to conclude my contribution by thanking Footscray Market, who have just donated boxes of fruit to the kids participating in Ride2School Day across my electorate tomorrow. I am very proud to support Footscray Market. I commend the bill to the house.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (12:36): I also rise to speak on the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026. I have been listening to contributions. Some are very in touch with our agricultural community, and some are a little bit more out of touch, but I certainly love our cafes in Melbourne, for which we provide the produce – the meat, the milk, the fibre for our great state. One comment that really stood out to me, before I go into my notes, was what the member for Polwarth said, and it is largely guiding my contribution today. This bill is looking at whether our food is safe, but it is a worthy argument to ask whether our future of farming is safe in Victoria. This bill looks at restructuring how food safety is regulated in Victoria, abolishing those longstanding specialist regulators like PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria and replacing them with a single centralised body. As someone who has spent more than a decade of their life in the agricultural industry as a farmer and as a journalist, a lot of these changes are welcome, but there are also some significant changes that we do have some concerns with.

Food production in my amazing electorate of Euroa is central to everything. It is central to our economy. Seventy per cent of our rates are largely dependent on the success of agriculture and the benefit that that has for our communities and employment: Stanhope, dairy; across the north-east, livestock. In Merino unfortunately we lost our beehives. We were honey producers, but we lost our bees in the fires. Across our region, for every farm or agricultural entity, they employ the majority of our jobs in our communities, but they are under immense pressure. We have heard it throughout today, whether it is dealing with bushfire recovery, workforce shortages, regulatory burden or, right now, this fuel crisis that we are all dealing with. Their ability to produce food easily and financially effectively is under immense pressure. I think that the question we want to ask on our side of the house is whether this reform will help producers and farmers. We want to know if this will make their lives better, or is it going to add more bureaucracy and challenges at a time when they just cannot cope with any more? We stress not just the economic impact of changes that this government has forced on our farmers but that the emotional toll of some of these changes is significant.

I want to start with the fuel crisis. Every contribution this week has been commenting on the impact that this is having on the livelihoods of the individuals and businesses in my electorate. We are dependent on those independent retailers to supply our farms, our businesses and machinery operators. There are not many businesses in my electorate that do not depend on some reliable fuel, which they

cannot access right now. Intel from the petroleum association is telling me that the spot market is above $3.55 a litre – astronomical, crippling to our economy. There are some retailers at the moment, independents, that are up to $3 a litre, and that is really ensuring that our emergency services have fuel and our farmers have fuel. We are coming into the grape harvest, and we are also coming into sowing. It is critical for these businesses to operate without government intervention, which is why I wrote to the Premier to ensure that she pressures the federal government to relinquish some of the MSO, the minimum stockholding obligations, onto the spot market, directing that to some of our independents, relieving some pressure and allowing our farmers to keep farming so that you can all have your lattes in Melbourne.

The allegations around panic buying from the Labor state and federal governments floor me. I have spoken to some of my business operators, aka farmers, and it is not panic buying; it is forward purchasing. They know they need fuel and they have read the play and they understand there is risk in that security. So they have prepurchased, anticipating. They need grape harvest; they need fuel. We are also dealing with the clean-up from a bushfire. Many complaints are coming through that they cannot even get a jerry can full to put fuel in their chainsaws and they are living in unsafe conditions because of that.

This is a window where we need to strike quickly. I think immediate allocation of minimum stocking obligation volumes to independent regional fuel operators is needed. We do not have public transport. We do not have alternatives. We saw some funny reels around of excavator drivers getting on their bikes and taking their shovels to go do their work. It is not a joke. It will grind regional Victoria to a halt. I understand that in the coming weeks, in mid-April, when we have challenges sourcing fuel from South Korea, Japan or China, this is going to get incredibly high pressure for our community. I have got to note, considering the CFA put out some communications two weeks ago, that it is about time we are seeing Labor coming to the table and having these conversations around fuel security – some would say a bit late. But they are there, and we are going to guide them in making sure they are practical solutions, and the Nationals will tell them how to make sure our farmers can keep farming.

Also, just in my time remaining, I want to talk about the centralisation that is referenced in this bill. We have concerns on this side about that loss of trust that we are seeing when it comes to the power of individual government agencies, and entities as well, when on paper it might sound efficient, but in practice we do have some serious, serious concerns. I want to draw on an example of an operator, Colin Sinclair, in my electorate of Benalla. In the community he is one of our major employers. He has a pig abattoir, and for the last 30 years he has operated this business successfully. Without it, let me tell you, you will not be getting much bacon, because they are a huge provider of meat onto the Victorian market. He has been dragged through the courts for years. He operates to the standard and beyond. Yet he has been a target of so-called animal activists – we actually think that they are terrorists, because the way that they grind our communities and our businesses to a halt is abysmal. Through legal challenges, he has been targeted repeatedly and forced to defend lawful operations, despite regulatory compliance. He came through the courts. At the time he was seen as being absolutely compliant, yet still there is another appeal and another appeal.

It is death by a thousand cuts to our agricultural industry. If we allow these individuals to attack how we operate, without protection or without a government coming back in and saying, 'No, we actually need this business to operate,' it is shameful. We saw this erosion of rights and protection with the VicGrid bill, and we have seen it repeatedly under the Labor government; they just continually erode and attack agriculture. To be frank, I think regional Victoria has had enough. In centralising this authority without guaranteeing strong regional representation, we risk creating a regulator that is further removed from the realities on the ground. We have heard that a fair bit recently.

My final point that I want to talk about – this is a really incredibly disappointing one, and it comes to everything we are debating here today – is around the bushfire recovery. In previous disasters right across Victoria, including the Grampians and East Gippsland, we saw direct business support to the farmers and individuals impacted, grants of around $5000 and concessional loans to help those who

had been impacted and whose businesses and therefore our communities had been impacted because people were not spending money in our towns. Those concessional loans and grants supported those impacted by road closures, power outages and lost tourism. In my community we lost Australia Day, and it is looking like we might be losing Easter as well. They lost peak trading periods, and contractors could not operate as communities were cut off. Yet this year, through the penny pinching of this government, we have seen no business grants – none whatsoever. The excuse: they are quite difficult to administer. You know what is difficult to administer? All of the businesses that are leaving or closing in Victoria. That is what is hard. They are not getting replaced by others that are popping up and forming employment in regional Victoria; they are closing because it is too hard to operate. My advice to the government today is to give us a break and support with business grants those fire-affected communities. The precedent is there, and I will not stop raising this issue until we see $5000 grants to businesses impacted by the bushfires across Victoria, not just in my community. We know that the precedent is there. To close, these changes will be felt right across all the paddocks, all the businesses and all the farms in regional Victoria, but without fuel, we have no food.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (12:46): I rise in support of the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026. This is a reform that goes to something fundamental: the safety of the food we eat, the confidence consumers place in our system and the strength of Victoria's food and agricultural sector. Every Victorian every day relies on the integrity of our food system. From the milk poured over breakfast cereals to the meals shared with family to the food served in our local cafes and restaurants, we trust that what we consume is safe. That trust is not accidental. It is built on strong regulation, clear standards and a system that is capable of responding to risk, not just as it arises but before it emerges. That is what this bill is about. It is about ensuring that Victoria's food safety system is not only strong today but fit for the future.

At present our food safety regulatory system is fragmented and overly complex. Responsibility is spread across multiple agencies, including the Department of Health, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Dairy Food Safety Victoria, PrimeSafe and 79 local councils. It is also underpinned by multiple acts overseen by different ministers and often requires businesses to engage with more than one regulator at the same time. This is not a criticism of the people working within that system – they are dedicated, highly skilled and committed to protecting public health – but the structure itself is no longer fit for purpose. As outlined in the minister's second-reading speech, the current system creates duplication, inefficiencies and unnecessary complexity, particularly for businesses that operate across multiple parts of the supply chain. In a world where food production is evolving and where businesses innovate, diversify and operate across transnational boundaries, that complexity will only grow.

This bill recognises that reality. It acknowledges that while the system has served us well, we cannot stand still, because when it comes to food safety, standing still is not neutral, it is a risk. This legislation delivers the first stage of a two-stage reform to modernise Victoria's food safety framework. At its heart is the establishment of a new statutory authority, Safe Food Victoria. The new regulator will bring together the functions of PrimeSafe, Dairy Food Safety Victoria and key food safety responsibilities currently undertaken by the Department of Health. It will create a single consolidated body responsible for regulating food safety across the supply chain from paddock to plate. That matters because food safety risks do not exist in silo; they move across the supply chain, they evolve with new technologies and they require coordinated, timely and expert responses. A consolidated regulator will be better equipped to deliver that. It will provide clearer leadership, it will improve incident response and it will enable a more consistent risk-based approach to regulation.

But this reform is not just about the structure, it is about the outcomes. It is about making Victorians safer, and it is about making it easier for businesses to do the right thing. Right now too many businesses, particularly those that operate across multiple areas, are required to navigate a system that is fragmented and at times duplicative. They may need to deal with multiple regulators. They may require multiple licences. They may be subject to different processes for what is, in essence, a business

operation. As the minister's notes highlight, this has been consistently raised through consultation as a barrier to productivity and compliance. This bill responds to that by creating a single point of contact. As a front door for food safety regulation, Safe Food Victoria will simplify interactions, reduce administrative burden and improve clarity for businesses. When regulation is clearer and more consistent, compliance improves, and when compliance improves, public health outcomes improve as well. That is the core logic of this reform.

Importantly, this bill does not lower standards, it strengthens them. It ensures that the primary objective of the new regulator is to safeguard public health. It embeds the role of the chief health officer in providing advice on public health risks, ensuring that the connection between regulation and public health expertise remains strong. It maintains existing legislative frameworks, including the Food Act 1984, the Dairy Act 2000, the Meat Industry Act 1993 and the Seafood Safety Act 2003, while creating a more coherent structure around them. This is not about tearing down what works, it is about building a system that works better. This reform is also forward looking, because the food industry is changing. We are seeing new technologies emerge, including cell-cultured foods, and innovative production methods that do not neatly fit within existing regulatory categories. We are seeing businesses diversify, producing, processing and selling across multiple parts of the supply chain, and we are seeing increasing expectations from consumers, not just about safety but about transparency, traceability and trust. Our regulatory system must keep pace with that change. This bill begins that process. It creates a regulator capable of responding to emerging risks, supporting innovation and ensuring that Victoria remains at the forefront of food safety. It is also worth noting that this reform is not being done in isolation. Other jurisdictions, including New South Wales, Queensland and New Zealand, have already moved to consolidated food safety regulators, and the evidence is clear. These models improve coordination, reduce duplication and provide clearer accountability, and Victoria should not fall behind. We should lead.

This bill has been shaped by extensive consultation: more than 60 targeted engagements with stakeholders and an Engage Victoria process that received over 120 submissions and strong support, with over 90 per cent of submissions backing the direction of reform. That matters, because good reform is not imposed, it is built. It is informed by those who will operate within the system: industry regulators, local government and public health experts. While not every stakeholder agrees on every element, there is a clear recognition that the current system can be improved.

I want to address a point that has been raised in some of the debate. There are those who say, 'If the system is working, why change it?' But that question misunderstands the nature of good governance. Good governance is not about waiting for failure, it is about anticipating risk. It is about recognising where systems can be strengthened before problems arise, because in food safety the consequences of failure are significant. They affect public health, they affect consumer confidence and they affect the reputation of our producers, not just locally but in export markets around the world. We cannot afford to be reactive; we must be proactive.

This reform also reflects a broader commitment by the Allan Labor government to make government systems more efficient, more accessible and more responsive, not by cutting corners and not by reducing standards but by designing systems that work better for both consumers and businesses. This is about better government and better outcomes. For my community in Glen Waverley, this matters. We are a community that values quality, we are a community that values safety and we are a community that celebrates our food culture through our restaurants, our cafes, our multicultural food culture and the small businesses that bring people together. Those businesses deserve a regulatory system that is clear, consistent and supportive, and the families who dine in those businesses deserve the confidence that the food that they are served is safe. This bill supports both.

Of course this is only the first stage of reform. The second stage to be progressed in the next term will further modernise the legislative framework, including licensing, compliance and enforcement. It will also consider the role of local government and new cost recovery arrangements. That work will be

important, but it can only occur once the foundation is in place, and that is what this bill delivers: a foundation, a structure and a clear direction for the future of food safety here in Victoria.

Before I conclude I want to acknowledge the collaboration that has gone into this reform across agriculture, health and Treasury and across regulators, departments and stakeholders, because reforms of this scale require cooperation, they require shared purpose and they require a clear focus on outcomes. This bill is about protecting public health, and it is about strengthening confidence. It is about supporting industry, and it is about ensuring that Victoria's food safety system is ready for the future. It is a careful reform, it is a considered reform and it is a necessary reform. I commend the bill to the house.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (12:55): I rise to speak this afternoon on the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026, and I just wish to take up some comments from the previous speaker, who talked about the importance of rationalising offices in the interests of efficiency. On a day like today, where there seems to be so much chatter on the government benches, there may be some opportunities for some rationalisation there and the removal perhaps of one office to be replaced by one or two others. I think the good member for Glen Waverley over there might want to take that point up.

Juliana Addison: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I would like you to bring the member for Hawthorn, who has a lot of understanding of leadership spills, back to the bill before us.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): What is your point of order?

Juliana Addison: Relevance, and irrelevance.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Hawthorn, you did stray. I will get you to come back to the bill.

John PESUTTO: I thought we were friends, the member for Wendouree and I. But I take your point, Acting Speaker. This is an important bill, and I just want to make a few overarching comments about this bill. The first point I want to impart into the debate is what drives reform. I just want to make the point that the two key dynamics driving this process at the moment, which would see Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe both abolished and absorbed into Safe Food Victoria, are said to be, as we understand from the materials, the Silver review and the *Economic Growth Statement*. I am a big fan of a constant dynamic in government, which is always searching for better ways to do things and to remove duplication where it exists. But let us not be mistaken about what drove the *Economic Growth Statement* and the Silver review. It was the increasingly parlous state of our finances. You might say reform is reform – if it leads to efficiencies, that is a good thing – but as previous speakers on this side of the house have pointed out, there are risks involved in a process of reform such as this, where you are abolishing existing bodies and replacing them with one overarching body and where you could end up throwing the baby out with the bathwater and miss the whole point. If you are a government, as this one is, that is under so much financial pressure – you have got S&P Global, Moody's, Fitch and everybody else, and the Commonwealth and independent agencies that conduct oversight of government operations, such as the Auditor-General, the Ombudsman and the Parliamentary Budget Office, both here in Victoria and nationally, putting pressure on you, for good reason, to get your finances under control – there is a risk that in the pursuit of efficiencies you will lose the very objectives that you are trying to achieve.

A good example of that is, if you look at Dairy Food Safety Victoria's annual report for 2024–25, you will see in it that it had in 2025 proudly released its corporate plan for 2025 to 2030. How is that going? My point is no-one seems to be talking to each other. If you want evidence of a reform process that seems to be chaotic and driven by the circumstantial urgency of our financial position as a state under the Allan Labor government, there is a good example. This is an agency which by most accounts has operated well. No agency is performing to everybody's liking, but I think Dairy Food Safety Victoria has been performing well. It has won plaudits from many people, and it is overseeing one of our most important sectors. As you know, our dairy farmers are our second-largest exporters in Victoria. For

those watching and those who will read the debate, our dairy farmers produce 63 per cent of our milk products nationally and underpin our export markets. There is a whole lot riding on – I am just talking about Dairy Food Safety Victoria but PrimeSafe as well – whether we get that right. I say that with particular fondness because Dairy Food Safety Victoria is located in my electorate. We do not want to lose the benefits of all of that in this process. As the lead speaker in the debate pointed out, there are some risks with this, and the first one is in the creation of an overarching centralised bureaucracy.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Members

Minister for Emergency Services

Absence

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Energy and Resources will answer questions for the portfolios of emergency services and natural disaster recovery and the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events will answer questions for the equality portfolio.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Construction industry

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC. The Premier has said workers on Big Build worksites with Gatto-linked companies deserve to have safe and secure workplaces. Does the minister support a royal commission into corruption on the Big Build to keep workers safe and secure?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:03): I would have thought the opposition leader would have heard me on Jacqui Felgate the other day, because I said, very clearly, a royal commission will take twice as long – you are meant to be the party of financial responsibility – and cost twice as much. What I will say on the WorkCover portfolio, though, is that nothing makes us prouder on this side of the chamber than getting up every day and fighting for and securing workers rights. The party of family values loves nothing more than breaking workers rights and sacking workers.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members – member for Bulleen – that interjecting across the chamber is disorderly.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): As the minister for WorkSafe, why won't you support a royal commission to ensure the future safety of workers on Big Build sites?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members again that interjecting across the chamber is disorderly, and it will be treated as such.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:05): Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, WorkSafe not only are an independent regulator but also are out there every day making sure that every mum and dad comes home safely from their workplace. I will repeat what I said in my substantive answer. A royal commission will take twice as long and cost twice as much. On this side of the chamber we are making sure Victoria Police have the powers. We are making sure that the Labour Hire Authority has the powers. It is why we have seen the cancellation of construction licences. It is why we have seen prosecutions. A Labor government will always put workers first.

Ministers statements: community safety

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:06): Every Victorian has the right to be safe and to feel safe. The crime statistics released today show the Allan Labor government's plan to deliver consequences for those who break the law is having a strong effect. We have seen already police holding more offenders to account than ever before – a record number of arrests of some 78,000 in this quarter. That is backed by $4.5 billion in investment from our government for Victoria Police members. I want to thank them for the work they do, 24/7 right across our state, providing an emergency response to all Victorians.

We have seen our tough new bail laws lead to bail being revoked or stopped and cancelled; 84 per cent it is up. That is in the cancellations and revocation of bail across Victoria. We have also seen remand decisions up 70 per cent. That means people are not getting bail and being remanded in custody when they continue to flout the law. What we are seeing is that Victoria Police are saying that crime is stabilising. We have seen aggravated burglary down. We have seen robbery down, family violence down, sexual offences down. This is happening because of new solutions from our government: PSOs in shopping centres – a $9 million contribution from our government that has seen PSOs at Fountain Gate, at Highpoint, at Werribee and Northland make some 500 arrests and lay a thousand charges. It is about new solutions and backing the chief commissioner to ensure we are not driving desks, we are driving vans.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, I was just wondering if the minister could table his crime stats –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Northcote, you can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Northcote withdrew from the chamber.

The SPEAKER: When I am on my feet, members will be silent. The member for Berwick has a point of order. Please allow him to make that point of order in silence.

Brad Battin: I was just wondering if the minister could table the crime stats he is referring to, because they are not the same ones that Victorians saw today that show an increase in crime.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Anthony CARBINES: Some may be disappointed to see aggravated burglary down, sexual offences down, family violence crime down and robbery down, but not the Allan Labor government. We will continue to invest in new solutions for Victoria Police. We will continue to invest in our shopping centres to keep people safe, and we thank our PSOs and police for the work they do. It will not be about cuts, like those on the other side.

Construction industry

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition has a question. She will be heard in silence, or members will be removed from the chamber.

Jess WILSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. $15 billion of Victorians' money has been wasted through corruption and misconduct on the –

Members interjecting.

Jess WILSON: I cannot hear, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will ask her question while I am on my feet.

Jess WILSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. $15 billion of Victorians' money has been wasted through corruption and misconduct on the Big Build. Does the minister support a royal commission into corruption on the Big Build, which has run rampant on her watch?

Lily D'Ambrosio interjected.

The SPEAKER: The minister for energy is warned.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:10): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question. It has been made very clear by me, the Premier and others in this chamber that this government has zero tolerance for any sort of illegal behaviour on government sites. Corruption and criminality offend every Victorian and need to be dealt with with the full force of the law, which is exactly why this government wasted no time in taking action when these allegations were first aired in mid-2024, through a number of different and very comprehensive streams of work. First and foremost there is the support the government has given to the federal government's administration of the CFMEU and the support that we continue to give to that important work. There is the Wilson review, which separately to that was initiated by the Allan Labor government.

Jacinta Allan interjected.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: That is right – the Greg Wilson review. And it is important work in setting out a dedicated complaints mechanism, which is important because you can only enforce what you can evidence, so that work is incredibly important. Of course, as a part of that, there was the strengthening also of the Labour Hire Authority, and we are seeing the fruits of that labour start to be realised with the cancelling of licences. Then of course there is Taskforce Hawk. As we have learned, some 70-odd charges have been laid against some 15 individuals, and that work is ongoing, stamping out the terrible conduct that offends us all so greatly and doing so with a sense of urgency, not kicking the can down the road but acting –

Members interjecting.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, almost 2 minutes into the response the minister has not yet dealt with the royal commission element of the question.

The SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant to the question. I cannot tell the minister how to answer the question.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: So there is our support for the administration, there is the Wilson review and the many recommendations that came out of that that we are busily implementing, there is Taskforce Hawk and there is the work of the merit review, complementing recommendation 7 of the Wilson review, bringing together industry, unions and delivery agencies to see what more can be done. We have not stopped.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, the minister is being evasive on the issue of the royal commission.

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the minister how to answer the question. She was being relevant.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: The point is that we have not stopped. We acted quickly and we made the necessary changes to stamp out this terrible conduct. We are seeing that bear fruit through criminal charges being laid, through the cancellation of licences and through a reform agenda that we continue to implement.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is required to be direct to the question. The minister, after being called up twice, has still not said the words 'royal commission'.

The SPEAKER: The member for Brighton has raised this point of order three times. The minister is still being relevant to the question.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Our priority has been to act quickly and comprehensively across a number of different work streams. Some may wish to kick the can down the road. Some may wish to waste time, to waste money and to look at ways to fill their $11 billion black hole, but that has not been our priority. Our priority has been to get on with the work and stamp out this behaviour.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:15): When it was revealed that Gatto-linked M1 labour was operating on the North East Link, the minister claimed she had only just become aware of it. Can the minister now guarantee that no business linked to Mick Gatto is still working on any Big Build site?

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, the point of order goes to whether or not the supplementary question is in fact related to the substantive question. I would suggest that it is not and that you rule it out of order.

The SPEAKER: I will allow the question as it refers to the Big Build.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:16): I appreciate that it has been quite some time – in fact I was probably a child at the time – since the opposition last delivered a project, so they may not be aware that the government –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is clearly being evasive and debating the question.

The SPEAKER: The minister has only been on her feet for a few seconds.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: The fact remains that the government does not directly employ workers on government projects. We fund them, and then our contractors manage the subcontracting of –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I cannot hear the minister. Leader of the Opposition, you demand silence when you are on your feet. I expect the same respect for other members.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: It is an important process to understand. The government funds the projects and the contractors manage the subcontracting of the work across those projects. Irrespective of that, and as has been outlined in this chamber before – in fact it was outlined yesterday, I believe – any labour hire business mentioned in the Watson report is under review by the Labour Hire Authority.

Ministers statements: residential tenancies

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:17): Under Premier Allan's leadership, Victoria is the best state to rent in Australia. Rental bidding has been banned, minimum standards have been met, no-fault evictions have been abolished and renters now receive 90 days notice for rent increases, which must be justified. These are not abstract reforms. They matter a lot to renters in Hawthorn, in Prahran and in Kew. These renters deserve security, dignity and a decent standard of living. We have gone further, with Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria and a portable rental bond scheme.

I was severely disappointed, though I was not surprised, that some people could not bring themselves to back these reforms. They have railed against stronger renter rights before, and in this Parliament they voted against these landmark reforms. It is no surprise that their housing policy is all sales pitch and no floor plan – big promises at the open for inspection, nothing behind the front door. But all is not lost. My spirits were lifted when I was handed a media release by my newfound brethren the New South Wales Liberal Party. You may be thinking, 'What have they called for?' Well, get a load of this: a ban on no-fault evictions, longer notice periods at the end of fixed-term leases, a standard rental

application form and the introduction of a portable rental bond scheme – all delivered under the Allan Labor government. If even the New South Wales Liberals can work out that renters deserve security and fairness, why are those opposite still siding with insecurity, weak standards and the worst operators in the market? The contrast could not be more stark: Labor supporting renters and those opposite following One Nation down their rabbit hole.

Crime

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:20): My question is to the Minister for Police. New crime data confirms offending in Victoria has reached a record 630,592 offences in the past year. Why has the minister comprehensively failed to keep Victorians safe, with more than 1500 vacancies on police rosters?

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:20): I welcome the member back from the witness protection program, because it has been a long time since I have had a question on any matter from the member.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Members will be removed from the chamber. I am looking at you, member for Tarneit.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, with an extra 750 victims each and every day here in Victoria, I find it inappropriate for the minister to get up and make a joke about crime here in our state.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Anthony CARBINES: I want to thank Victoria Police for the record number of 78,000 arrests that they have been able to achieve over this past year compared to the same time last year. You cannot do that unless you are investing over $4.5 billion into Victoria Police, not $100 million in cuts like some have done, not investing in no additional police like some have done when they have had the opportunity to be on this side of the house. What we need to make sure is that Victoria Police are providing 24/7 emergency support, 24 hours a day, for Victorians right across this state. We have seen, as I said, Operation Pulse in shopping centres across Victoria – 500 arrests, a thousand charges. That is about investing in new solutions, responding to what the community has asked for, responding to what small businesses have asked for, to make sure –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the minister has not dealt with the record number of vacancies that exist in Victoria Police.

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

Anthony CARBINES: I know that there is a particular vacancy in Nepean that those opposite do not seem to want to talk very much about.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Gippsland East withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, a young boy died last weekend. The minister needs to grow up.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, you know that is not a point of order.

Anthony CARBINES: Most fortnights I am at the police academy, where we see almost 48 double squads graduating every fortnight. That will be happening again from April, in the very next month. We also know that Victoria has more sworn police officers than any other jurisdiction in the country. That is a fact. Absolutely that is a fact. We continue to invest in Victoria Police, a record $4.5 billion

a year to give them the tools they need to keep Victorians safe. It is why our chief commissioner is making sure we have got more police driving divvy vans instead of desks. These are the changes that we need to make to ensure Victoria Police members are on the front line.

It is also through an EBA that delivered them a 20 per cent pay rise under our government. If you want to come and join Victoria Police, our Made for More campaign that we invest in to recruit and attract more police than ever before is the investment that is being made by our government. It is new police stations at Narre Warren that we are about to reopen, a significant redevelopment at South Melbourne and also at Benalla, where we have opened new police stations, and also the investments that we are making at Clyde North. This is all about making sure that police have 21st-century services to work from and to provide support to Victorians.

We know that a 24-hour police response is available to all Victorians any time of the day or night, any day and night of the year. That is provided because our chief commissioner has the full support of this Parliament and our government to make sure that Victoria Police is a fit-for-purpose organisation. The frontline police have the opportunity to protect Victorians; they are out there on the front line each and every day. We thank them for the work that they do. Our government will continue to invest in them. The opposition is about Liberal cuts.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:25): This morning the minister said that manufacturers need to take some responsibility here. Does the minister seriously believe that car manufacturers are responsible for one car being stolen every 16 minutes in Victoria?

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:25): I get the sense that the supplementary question went to crime statistics. Let us go to crime statistics: aggravated burglaries down, sexual offences down, robbery down, family violence offences down –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Berwick, you are warned.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, the question was directly about car thefts, which have increased to one every 16 minutes here in this state, which seems to outdo every other state, and the minister wants to blame the manufacturers.

The SPEAKER: I remind members that a point of order is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house. I cannot tell the minister how to answer the question. He was being relevant.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, I seek clarification. The actual question was directly around car thefts in Victoria, and the minister decided to turn it around to just crime statistics in themselves. Can I seek clarification that your ruling is now that by mentioning something about crime the minister can go in any direction they want rather than answering the question? If that is the case, we may as well not ask questions of the Labor Party, who refuse to answer and you continue to protect them.

The SPEAKER: As the member for Berwick knows, if he wishes to discuss my rulings he is welcome to do so after question time. I do believe that the minister was being relevant to the question and in fact to the substantive question as well, which he is entitled to be. The minister has concluded his answer.

Ministers statements: planning

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:27): This morning, alongside the Premer, we proudly announced another major reform in delivering more homes for Victorians, the new Mid-rise Code for residential buildings of four to six storeys. These are the homes you see in some of the world's most livable cities, places like Paris and Madrid. They are exactly the kind of well-designed, gentle-density housing that Melbourne needs more of. The code will apply in

areas where these heights are already allowed, including in our housing choice and transport zones. Importantly, it sets clear, strong standards, 26 in total, to ensure that homes are livable and comfortable and fit into their neighbourhoods, with new standards for setbacks, more space for trees and landscaping and stronger protections from overshadowing. This is all about unlocking those suburbs, delivering more townhouses and apartments and more homes in well-connected suburbs close to jobs, transport and services. It is going to make a huge difference, cutting planning delays, removing uncertainty and ending the drawn-out VCAT limbo that holds too many projects back.

Those opposite have made their position crystal clear. They guarantee to rip up these reforms, tearing homes away from young Victorians. They want to drag Victoria back to the same broken system that has locked up well-connected suburbs for 30 years. They want to keep locking out young people, creating childless suburbs where families just cannot afford to live, where populations of children and people under 65 are going backwards. At schools in Kew, enrolments are plunging. This includes the opposition leader's own electorate. And leading the charge is her biggest backer, the blocker from Brighton.

Fuel supply and prices

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:29): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Aaron from the Wimmera contacted me this morning to say, just weeks away from seeding, he only has enough diesel to put in a quarter of his crop. No fuel means no food. What action has the minister taken to ensure farmers can access the diesel they need to feed our state?

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (14:30): I thank the member for Lowan for her question.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

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

Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.

Ros SPENCE: There is no doubt that the diesel shortages are causing a lot of distress across not just the state but the country. Indeed New South Wales and Queensland are faring very badly at the moment. That does not take anything away from the concerns in Victoria. We know that 84 per cent of on-farm energy is from diesel, and with those costs increasing around 30 per cent that is a massive burden that farmers are needing to bear. That is why the Premier convened me, the minister for energy, the Minister for Consumer Affairs and the Minister for Ports and Freight to meet on Monday, and on Tuesday the SEMC met. Since then, the Premier has taken that issue to national cabinet as well. We will keep working on this. It is a very important issue.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:31): Minister, meetings do not deliver diesel for our farmers, like Aaron, who contacted me late last night. What is the risk to food supply and increased prices on our supermarket shelves if low or no access to diesel stops farming from today?

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (14:31): I thank the member. I can assure her that farming has not stopped as of today, and we will continue to work with the agriculture sector because this is critically important.

Ministers statements: women's health

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (14:32): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's commitment to making contraception easier and more accessible for Victorian women at their local chemist. For many women, securing a GP appointment can mean delays, out-of-pocket costs and time away from work, study or caring responsibilities. That is why from July women over

18 will be able to access the oral contraceptive pill directly from trained pharmacists without needing a script from the GP. Of course safety must always come first. That is why pharmacists must complete postgraduate training, undertake a thorough consultation with their patient and provide advice about alternatives, including long-acting reversible contraceptives. And of course, if there are concerns, pharmacists will do what they have always done and refer their patient to their GP. Victorians have already accessed treatment more than 77,000 times through Chemist Care Now, and women are the big winners, seeking access to resupply of the oral contraceptive pill and treatment for uncomplicated UTIs. But from July they will be able to initiate contraceptive supply. With access through more than 850 community pharmacies right around the state, our new reform will continue to save Victorian women time, no matter where they live.

We believe that access to contraception is not a luxury, it is fundamental health care. Removing barriers improves health outcomes, gives women greater control over their reproductive choices and prevents unplanned pregnancies. While this is a reform that is supported by the Queensland Liberals, here in Victoria the member for Kew and the Liberals have indicated they would wind back this reform and limit access to contraception for Victorian women. We have to ask – it begs the question: what other reforms to reproductive care would they roll back under a Wilson-led Liberal government?

Premier

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:34): My question is to the current Premier.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Hands up who said 'six-seven'. Out you go for an hour. This is not a classroom, member for Wendouree.

Member for Wendouree withdrew from chamber.

Jess WILSON: My question is to the current Premier. On the Premier's watch, Victorians have seen $15 billion of taxpayers money siphoned off through corruption and misconduct on the Big Build; record crime, with 750 new victims of crime every single day; the lowest number of new homes built in a decade; and the surgery waitlist blowing out to more than 64,000 people. Does the Premier accept responsibility for these failings?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:35): I am proud to be the Premier of a great state and that more and more people are choosing this state as a place to live, a place to work and a place to raise their family. And they are doing so because they know they can get access to great, strong public health care in one of the many hospitals that we have built. It is a workforce that has doubled during our time in government. We do not go to war with our healthcare workforce; we back them. I am proud to be the Premier of a state where, with the work of the police minister and the new Chief Commissioner of Police, we have the largest police force in the nation and those police are out on the streets preventing and responding to crime. And new initiatives like PSOs in shopping centres are not just driving down retail theft, they are increasing community safety.

And I am proud to be the Premier that is getting more homes built than any other state. We have a housing policy that we are proud to talk about. We have a housing policy where we build more homes for everyone right across this state. We do not have a housing policy that is dressed up as a sandbagging eastern suburb Liberal Party seat. We have a housing policy that, whether you are a young person in Brighton – and here is a tip for the member for Brighton: 250 kilometres from Melbourne is New South Wales. Here is a hot tip, member for Brighton: I am going to send you a little *Melway* map or a VicRoads map – 150. I am proud that we are getting more homes built. Do you know what, not only are we getting more homes built, we have done the work, and I want to credit our great planning minister for this work. We have had to do the hard work, the detailed work, to change the rules, to have a planning system be a system that says yes, not no – a planning system that breaks the status

quo. But we know that those opposite are lovers of the status quo, are lovers of locking young people out of getting more homes built.

This is a great and strong state, but we also know that there are challenges that families and working people are facing, challenges that need new solutions to those challenges, whether it is the work, as I have mentioned, of PSOs in shopping centres, whether it is working from home to save Victorians time and money. It is only our Labor government that has got these new solutions, not Liberal cuts.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:38): Why should Victorians have any faith the Premier can fix the problems she has created when her own colleagues do not?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Lowan is warned.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:39): Victorians know this: while we are focused on them and new solutions to the very real challenges that are faced right now, there are households around the state where this week they have seen an interest rate rise, they have seen an increase in fuel prices, coming at a time when cost-of-living pressures are making it harder for them to pay the bills. And they look and they see a Labor government that is working hard to give those families a helping hand to put fuel in their car, to send their kids to our great schools, to get them the health care they need. They look at the Liberal Party and see cuts and division. The only offerings from the Liberal Party are cuts, an $11 billion black hole that the Leader of the Opposition does not want to talk about and division with their alliance and partnership with One Nation.

Ministers statements: Melbourne

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:40): It is official, much to the upset of those opposite: Melbourne is the best city in the world. I know those opposite love to talk the state down; it will come as a bit of a shock. But Melburnians know this, and they know this because they could be one of those passengers travelling on one of the 1200 new services thanks to the Metro Tunnel, they could be a parent getting health care at one of our great public hospitals or free health care closer to where they live or they could be a young person enjoying one of the many, many major events, creative industries or cultural opportunities. Melbourne is a city people are choosing not just for a great night out but for a life – a life for them, their family and their kids.

We can hear Liberal mentor Jeff Kennett is busy there at the typewriter, ready to tell everyone how wrong they are. Well, the statistics confirm it. According to the ABS, Victoria is leading the nation for first home buyers. Almost a third of the nation's first home buyers are right here in Victoria. When it comes to rental affordability, we lead the country as well. And people are spending as well. During the December period we smashed record spending in the CBD – over $300 million through our shops, restaurants and businesses. People are moving here. People are building here. People are spending here as well. And that is because they know what this great city is about. It is about opportunity. It is about culture. It is about a life for them and their family.

As we know, even the New South Wales Liberals back what we do here in Victoria. We are going to keep going. We are going to keep building the homes that young people need, we are going to keep investing in education, health and skills and we are going to support people's right to work from home, because we are backing Victoria.

Constituency questions

Kew electorate

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:43): (1578) My question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Can the minister provide an overview of the options available to residents and their children whose daily lives are being significantly impacted by the occupation of a dwelling without the owner's consent on their residential street in Kew? The owner of the relevant property has

been tied up with VCAT for months, with no clear pathway to rectify this untenable situation. The behaviour of the occupants, who remain living in the premises despite having accrued tens of thousands of dollars in unpaid rent, is having a significant impact on the other people living in this street, who fear for their safety. Residents have repeatedly sought the assistance of police, who informed them that there are no options available to our police officers. Can the minister please provide an overview of the options available to remedy this situation so residents can live without fear in their own homes?

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, can you rephrase your constituency question to be a question. 'What are the options' is probably the best way to go.

Jess WILSON: What are the options available to the residents in this particular part of Kew?

Bayswater electorate

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (14:44): (1579) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health Infrastructure. When will the major upgrade to the Angliss Hospital in Upper Ferntree Gully be complete for residents and locals alike to use? I am very proud of the record when it comes to the local healthcare outcomes that the Allan Labor government has delivered in my time as the member for Bayswater, whether it is the upgraded Angliss Hospital that is soon to open; whether it is the new public aged care facility in Wantirna – 120 beds, helping people age in place; or whether it is more nurses and midwives or the suite of policies I am very proud this government has rolled out over the past few years. I am proud that we are backing in our healthcare heroes and making sure we have got the best facilities locally, and I look forward to hearing from the minister.

Murray Plains electorate

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:45): (1580) My question is to the Minister for Education. Principals and school communities across the electorate of Murray Plains are warning me that vital funding used to employ teacher aides and other critical student support staff is being pulled away, leaving schools scrambling to support their most vulnerable students. Teacher aides are not a luxury. They are essential in classrooms, supporting students with additional learning needs and helping teachers manage increasingly complex workloads. Yet principals are now being forced to contemplate cutting these roles, further overloading already stretched teaching staff and putting dedicated education workers out of a job. Instead of supporting students, this financially incompetent and scandal-plagued government appears to be balancing its books by ripping support out from under principals, teachers and students. Can the minister advise when this vital funding will be restored so schools across Murray Plains can keep teacher aides in classrooms and provide the critical support that students deserve?

Thomastown electorate

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (14:46): (1581) My question is to the Minister for Education, and the question I ask is: what are the Department of Education's plans for consultation with regard to the future of the Pavilion School in Epping? Pavilion School is providing a flexible learning program for young people who have experienced significant disengagement from mainstream schooling. The Pavilion School currently operates as a campus of Charles La Trobe College. However, the Pavilion School has many distinct histories, cultures and educational approaches, having begun in 2007 and now with campuses in Preston and Epping. I have met many parents who are very supportive of the structure and work of Pavilion School. One parent has said:

> I honestly believe that if it wasn't for the Staff and operations of the Pavillion School in Epping that my child would no longer be alive today, that my child would not have ever been looking at a Zoology course at Latrobe university.

A student I met recently also told me that they had not gone to school except for – *(Time expired)*

Caulfield electorate

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:47): (1582) My question is to the Minister for Police, and the question is: what options are there for my constituents and small businesses in Glen Huntly and Elsternwick when it comes to community safety? Local shoppers have raised with me concerns about the increase in rough sleeping along the shopping strips in both Glen Eira and Port Phillip and want to know what the government is doing to support people who are doing it tough. This is an issue that is beyond just policing. It is a housing matter, it is a health matter and it is a mental health matter. But at the same time, many of these small businesses are really struggling to keep their doors open. Councils are looking at it, both in Port Phillip and in Glen Eira, with their safety officers. But we are seeing situations, as an example, in Glen Huntly, where a woman was camping outside Whyte Cafe near the Asian grocer for several months. Traders report open drug use and ongoing intimidation, including a knife pulled. We need options in terms of community safety for the shoppers and also the traders.

Cranbourne electorate

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (14:48): (1583) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. How long will it take nurses and midwives and other clinicians and healthcare workers to travel from my electorate, quite specifically from the Cranbourne train station, to the Parkville health neighbourhood? Parkville is home to our extraordinary healthcare facilities, built and redeveloped by Labor governments: the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre, Peter Mac, the Women's hospital, the Children's hospital, Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research, the Doherty, the Florey and of course the CSIRO and Murdoch Children's Research Institute. Our nurses and midwives and healthcare professionals are valuable and sit at the heart of Cranbourne. Their capacity to get to work quickly with a turn-up-and-go service is vital to their ability to live somewhere wonderful like Cranbourne and get back home at the end of their workday. I would like to thank our nurses and midwives for everything that they do. Their expertise is so precious and important. I look forward to the minister's response.

Cindy McLeish interjected.

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

Cindy McLeish interjected.

The SPEAKER: Make that an hour and a half.

Member for Eildon withdrew from chamber.

Mornington electorate

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (14:49): (1584) My constituency question is for the Attorney-General. My constituents and so many others have lost their life savings due to the alleged mortgage fraud of the now deceased John Adams. Will the Attorney-General update my constituents and me on this situation, along with any related review of safeguards to prevent fraudulent mortgages being registered? I started writing to ministers on this matter in August 2024. On 23 July 2025 the member for Malvern wrote to the Attorney-General for my constituents, who were defrauded of more than $900,000. He asked what safeguards are in place to prevent fraudulent mortgages being placed on Victorian property titles and whether those safeguards will be strengthened. On 16 December 2025 I followed that correspondence up, and on 4 March 2026 the member for Malvern raised it in Parliament. Yet despite the seriousness of this matter and the broader concerns about the integrity of our land title system, we have received still no response from the Attorney-General under this state Labor government.

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (14:50): (1585) My question is for the Minister for Education, and my question is: what is the Department of Education's current thinking regarding the future of the

Pavilion School? As the member for Thomastown noted in her constituency question, the Pavilion School operates campuses in both Preston and in Epping, in her electorate, and provides a unique, flexible learning environment for young people who may feel disengaged from mainstream schooling. I would like to refer members to an article in the *Guardian* last year from Adeshola Ore that set out some of the very vivid examples of the way in which the school has made a tremendous difference to the lives of its students. But I ask this question because while the school is currently part of Charles La Trobe College and operates under their whole-of-school governance model, it has a very distinct culture and approach and there have at times been discussions about whether it should have a more differentiated or independent governance model, particularly with respect to decisions about curriculum and resourcing. Any information the minister could provide about the department's thinking about the future of the Pavilion School would be greatly appreciated.

Prahran electorate

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (14:51): (1586) My question is to the Minister for Housing and Building: why has the government failed to restore safety at the public housing complex at 49 Union Street in Windsor, despite repeated reports of fires, flooding and criminal activity? I have been contacted by deeply distressed residents living in this complex. The building was historically designated for elderly residents with medical conditions, yet it now appears to house frail elderly tenants alongside individuals struggling with drug addiction and engaging in persistent antisocial behaviour. The consequences of this change have been severe. One constituent recently made the heartbreaking decision to leave his apartment and return to homelessness because he felt safer sleeping on the streets than inside the building. An 88-year-old Holocaust survivor living in the complex has endured nine flooding incidents since moving into his unit, including several this year alone. These floods were reportedly triggered by fires in a unit above his apartment. He has described dirty, foul-smelling water pouring into his home, and has had to place containers throughout his unit to manage the damage. Despite being – *(Time expired)*

Werribee electorate

John LISTER (Werribee) (14:52): (1587) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning: according to contributions plans, who is responsible for delivering the gap in Ison Road at Greens Road? In the dying hours of the previous Liberal government, a handful of precinct structure plans were approved in Wyndham with very little in the way of infrastructure planning. I am shocked by recent announcements that, if elected, they wish to fast-track these same types of plans. Since 2014 the Labor government has been busy trying to fill the gaps, building services and new transport links. Developers and local government also need to play their role in meeting these needs. For some time there has been no resolution of who will build the missing gap in Ison Road at the intersection with Greens Road. At the moment it is currently paddocks with no way through. This is putting more traffic onto Rondo Drive and has meant our new route 194 service has had to take a detour past a school and a busy area. I will continue to fight for the infrastructure we need to be delivered and make sure that our developers are held responsible.

Bills

Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (14:53): Before the break I was making the point that as part of a very significant reform like this, and as the lead speaker, the member for Lowan, pointed out in her remarks, it is very important that Safe Food Victoria incorporate into its board and senior executive levels people with actual industry and farming expertise and familiarity. We do not want just general bureaucratic experience occupying the upper echelons of Safe Food Victoria, because it is a sector which as we know is crucial.

I also want to echo the point made by the member for Lowan and lead speaker on this side of the house that Dairy Food Safety Victoria has had a record of accruing substantial funds from farmers in our dairy sector, and that money has been used wisely and importantly, we would say, over many years to service the dairy industry. Dairy Food Safety Victoria has already been operating under significant pressure in recent years. It produced, last financial year, an operating deficit of nearly $760,000, and that was a turnaround from the year preceding that of just under $50,000 by way of an operating surplus. It is already under some existing pressure, and these reforms, it is feared on this side of the house, may provide a temptation to use the available funds, which have been raised off the backs of our dairy farming community, to support other purposes not connected with that sector. That would not only be unfortunate, if it were to occur, but it is something we would steadfastly oppose.

There are just two other points that I want to make on this bill, and they relate, again, to the sensitivities surrounding the efficacy of the reforms being pursued here. We know that the government is doing it not for the reasons of necessarily improving the outcomes – although that will hopefully be a consequence – but because of the dynamics I spoke about at the top of my remarks, which are the financial pressures this government is under, which concern us, because if they lead to poor decision-making, and the sector has pointed this out in its consultations with the government, that is something wholly to be avoided. Let us remember that Victoria constitutes about 3 per cent of the nation's arable land and yet provides around 25 per cent of the nation's food. Victoria is punching well above its weight, and the nation depends on us. Whole export-facing industries, which are successful or unsuccessful off the back of our food sector, which is affected by this bill, depend on these reforms actually hitting their target. We will be keeping a close eye on the reforms that are being undertaken to ensure they actually achieve the objectives of removing inefficiencies.

The final point I wish to support is that of the lead speaker in relation to transparency and disclosure around cell-cultivated meat products and plant-derived milk. I note the member for Narracan is a huge fan of plant-based meat and plant-derived milk. I have heard him speak about these products often, and I know he is a huge champion of them. In all seriousness, can I just say that I wholly support what the member for Lowan has said about the importance of the disclosure of these matters. People have a right to know what is in the products they purchase. I want these sectors that are seeing producers providing options for consumers to be successful and to have growing markets, but with that, there are two important points that I conclude on. The first is that they should be subject to the normal disclosure and transparency requirements that should attend the production of these materials from paddock – or lab – to market, as it were. Finally, to ensure that the funding for the work that Safe Food Victoria will undertake is not just conducted off the back of the existing sectors which support this, such as dairy farmers, meat and poultry, it is important that all of the functions of Safe Food Victoria – and those functions will expand over time – are funded by all who are working to produce the food and related products that will support our families and communities right across the country. With those remarks, I conclude by saying I support the bill.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (14:58): I rise today to speak to the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026, legislation that marks a defining moment in how this state regulates our food safety. This bill is not merely an administrative reform; it is a commitment to the health and safety of every Victorian who sits down to a meal. I love to sit down to a meal regularly, and in particular when I am staying down here for the parliamentary sitting week there are not many nights when I am not sat down to a meal in Melbourne. This is for every business that works hard to put safe food on Australian tables. Just on that, I want to rattle off a few businesses in Melton that are fantastic cafes and fooderies: the Grey Matter Cafe, Bik's bakery, Urban Punjab, Mac's Hotel, Golden Fleece Hotel, Melton Country Club, Melton bakery, Buddy Bakery, Morgan's IGA, Train Station One, Pappa's Ocean Catch and Melton Entertainment Park. They are just some of the fine locations in Melton that are good fooderies and provide safe food for their customers, and I do frequent many of those businesses. There are many, many more in Melton, and we are very lucky with the diversity that we have in regard to cafes and restaurants.

The way we have regulated food safety in Victoria has for too long been fragmented, duplicative and unnecessarily complex. The introduction of this bill changes all of that. To understand why this legislation is necessary, we must be honest about the system that we are replacing. Victoria currently operates under four separate acts administered by two responsible ministers and regulated by an array of bodies like the Department of Health, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Dairy Food Safety Victoria, PrimeSafe and no fewer than 79 local councils. That is not a regulatory system designed for the modern era. It is a patchwork built up over decades, and parts of the patchwork have been very protective of their patches. Each layer is added with the best of intentions, but as I say, some of them have become quite protective of their own patches. But that accumulation has resulted in an architecture that is confusing for businesses, inconsistent for our customers and inefficient for government.

This bill begins to change that. It is the first stage of a two-stage reform program and a key commitment under the government's *Economic Growth Statement* to halve the number of Victorian regulators by 2030. The bill establishes Safe Food Victoria as a new consolidated statutory authority. It will bring together PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria, along with relevant departmental functions from the Department of Health, into a single, capable and coherent food safety regulator. The community and stakeholder engagement showed clearly that over 90 per cent of stakeholders support the move to a single regulator. That means that PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria will be abolished and in their place will stand one organisation with one mission, and that is to protect the health of Victorians – that is the most important thing – by ensuring that the food they eat is safe to eat. That is obviously a positive move forward, notwithstanding that the standards here in this state are very good right now, but we will be improving those standards.

No longer will we have two organisations essentially doing the same thing across both sectors. With one authority there is less duplication in regulating safe production and transportation, manufacturing and delivery, monitoring of safety compliance, licensee support, technical support enforcement and working with the minister on matters relating to the industry sector and again keeping Victorians safe. The new authority will be governed by a board of between five and seven members, led by a chair and a deputy chair, and appointed by the responsible minister. It is the intention that the Minister for Agriculture will administer this act, placing Safe Food Victoria firmly within the agricultural portfolio, where its paddock-to-plate mandate is best understood and best served.

Safe Food Victoria will be led by a chief executive officer, appointed by the board, with the authority to build a strong and expert team. Staff, assets and property from existing regulators will transfer to the new entity. Something that I want to be clear about – I know it is a phrase the opposition do not really like to hear, but we do need to be clear about it – is that staff will transfer on conditions no less favourable than those they currently hold. Again, that is about the protection of those workers. The expertise that has been built up over many years within both Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe is an asset to this state, and we intend to preserve all that expertise. There will be no loss of corporate knowledge, and we will build on the incredible foundation that has been established over many, many years. This is a step in the direction of better transparency, retention of critical expertise and clear and consistent information with an overarching focus on health outcomes, and the health outcomes are safer food for Victorians and better health outcomes for Victorians.

A consolidated regulator delivers benefits that reach far beyond the machinery of government. For businesses, it means a single point of contact and a one-stop shop rather than a maze of regulators with overlapping remits. It means reduced compliance costs, less duplication and a clearer regulatory environment in which to operate and to grow. For consumers it means stronger, more consistent food safety outcomes and a regulator that can take a true paddock-to-plate view of the risk and manage incidents with greater speed and coordination. And it brings specialist capability together under one roof – I referred earlier to the expertise from the two agencies that currently exist – rather than just siloing that expertise across multiple agencies.

New South Wales and Queensland and most comparable international jurisdictions have made very similar reforms, and obviously the outcomes in those other states and those other jurisdictions have been quite successful. The model that we are implementing is very similar to that. It lowers the cost regulation over time, it improves incident response, as I referred to earlier, and it delivers better outcomes for both the industry and the public, and that is exactly what we want. It is legislation that is quite genuine. There was extensive consultation over the past year. The government conducted more than 60 individual engagements with stakeholders and interest groups, and it is pleasing to see that so many stakeholders and interest groups and people that have an interest in the production and delivery of food and the provision of food and meals and things like that were so engaged with the consultation process. Those people that were involved were small producers, large processors, from local councils, public health bodies, so it was a cross-section of everyone that is involved in this particular area of food production and delivery of food to the consumer through restaurants, through supermarkets and through outlets where people buy and eat and purchase their food. It was fantastic to see that engagement. This all culminated through Engage Victoria in September and October of last year.

Overwhelmingly – 91 per cent – respondents expressed support for the reform. It is great to see that people are on board with it and think that it is a good thing, moving in this direction. That is an incredible result, over 91 per cent. Stakeholders told us clearly what they wanted in a new regulator: clear and consistent food safety information and a genuine one-stop shop for business. That was clearly portrayed through those consultations. They want that ongoing specialist expertise that has been built up over the years to support their local councils and a regulator that will understand the balance between non-negotiable public health outcomes and practical industry engagement, and embedded consultative committees to ensure industry voices are heard and keep an oversight of the changes for the future.

This is an important bill that has been brought to the house. I am pleased that the opposition are not opposing this bill, although I know that the lead speaker referred to the fact that they might put up some amendments in the upper house. But it is an important bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (15:08): I rise to speak on the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026. First of all, those on the other side are saying how this is a great reform. I think the fact that both Dairy Food Safety, which started in 2000, and PrimeSafe, which started in 2003, have been there for effectively 25 years and have done a very good job of regulating the food safety in this state shows that those two organisations have worked really well to keep our food safe. To start off, I would like to put on the record our thanks to all those people who have been on those boards and in the administration of those two authorities to make sure our food is kept safe.

Over my life in agriculture I have known quite a few of those people. Gis Marven spent a long time on the meat industry authority and PrimeSafe as the chicken meat representative. Gis was there for a long time. Gary Hardwick and his wife Vicki both had stints on PrimeSafe and the Victorian Meat Industry Authority – they were abattoir owners at Kyneton at that time – as did Frank Herd, who is an abattoir operator from Geelong. John Watson, a former dairy farmer and head of the United Dairy Farmers at the Victorian Farmers Federation, was chair of that for quite a bit of time. Leonard Vallance, another great stand-out name from the VFF, was chair of PrimeSafe for a period of time. They did their work to make sure that our meat industry was safe all through that piece of time.

If you look at Dairy Food Safety, Anne Astin was the inaugural CEO; I have known her for a long time, and she did a great job of setting that organisation up to be the success it has been for the last 25 years. So, yes, there are changes coming, but I think we need to commend and celebrate the people that did a great job for the last 25 years in keeping our food safe. Michael Taylor, former departmental secretary here in Victoria and departmental secretary for agriculture and then for transport in Canberra, was chair of Dairy Food Safety at one particular stage, as was Des Hore, another Department of Agriculture icon here in Victoria. Grant Davies, a dairy farmer out of my electorate, was chair at one particular stage. All those people worked really hard to make sure that food safety was not an issue here in Victoria. How often do you in your office or I in my office have someone coming and raising

a complaint about food safety? We actually do not, because those organisations work well. So yes, there is change, but it is not change because there has been failure. I will come back to why the government might be wanting to make those particular changes.

If you think about food safety from a milk point of view, you might look at the changes to the milk industry from pre the industrial revolution to post the industrial revolution. Pre the industrial revolution small farms and smaller communities were close to where the cows were actually milked, so there was not an issue with food safety with milk. After the industrial revolution, with large cities being built and the milk being transported further – at that time without refrigeration and without pasteurisation – milk was the medium that spread a lot of diseases. There was a lot of work done back in the late 1800s and early 1900s to reduce the rate of infant mortality because of the consumption of cow's milk, because it was not pasteurised. When pasteurisation was brought in you saw a 30 to 60 per cent reduction in fatalities of infants from diseases that were spread by milk. Pasteurisation had been around for a while, but it was in the early 1920s that pasteurisation was brought in for dairy milk. That led to milk being a lot safer into the future because once it was heated and sterilised, milk could be transported and kept longer through that time. What we are seeing all the time is the evolution in how our food is made safer into the future.

The other thing to note, as I found when I went and researched this, is about that same time the milking machine system that we still have here in Victoria and still have around the world was invented. It isolated the milk straight from the cow into the milking machine system and out into a vat or into a container that kept the milk clean, compared to how cows were milked by hand in the past and there was cross-contamination of that particular milk. There has been a lot of change, but it has been for the better. We talk about issues with food safety very, very rarely. There is an issue sometimes with dairy and with some soft cheeses in particular with listeria, but apart from that I do not think we have had any issues here in Victoria that I can recall to do with a food safety outbreak either with dairy or with meat.

To come to the bill, this legislation puts PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety together to form a new organisation. The Victorian Meat Industry Act 1993 set PrimeSafe up, and when PrimeSafe went from being a regulator of the food safety of red meat and chicken to include fish I was in my first year in this place. I can remember some of that debate, and the debate at that time was about making sure that the red meat industry and the chicken meat industry did not cross-subsidise the cost of bringing the regulation of the safety of fish as a food into the legislation. Like other speakers have spoken about, these two, PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety, fund themselves by industry stakeholders paying levies. The government does not cover the costs of running these organisations; they are paid for by the industry and regulated generally by the industry and participants from the industry on the boards that oversee management. There was quite a substantial debate in this place at that particular time to make sure that the fishing industry paid their fair share, and the reserves that have been built up by the red meat industry and the chicken meat industry did not actually cross-subsidise the fishing industry. Bob Cameron, former member for Bendigo West, was actually the agriculture minister at the time and was under a lot of pressure to make sure that money was quarantined, so the fishing industry paid their fair share.

Big is not always better, and I suppose on my reading of the legislation and my reading of the consultation – those on the other side keep saying there were 60 stakeholder engagements, but as the member for Polwarth pointed out, the dairy industry in his electorate did not have any consultations with them – what is missing in this legislation and the explanations, in my view, is if you are going to put these organisations together, if you are going to create efficiencies and it is going to work better as all those on the other side of the house are saying, is there going to be a reduction in fees? What we do not want to have, and this government is noted for it, is the setting up of big bureaucracies, particularly where there is industry levy funding, that industry pays for. If this is going to be an organisation that works better because of bringing them together – and I will take it at face value that both the new board and the new management will make sure it is as effective as possible – we want to

make sure there is actually some cost reductions that come out of this too. It should not just be about charging the same or charging more. There should be cost reductions for industry from the efficiencies that are generated out of this. No-one has said that. No-one on the other side has touched on the fact that actually this organisation, because of the efficiencies from coming together, will actually drive some savings for the industry. I would hate to think that the government is going to trade away those savings by making the bureaucracy bigger, because big is not better. We know there are cost pressures on all small businesses and large businesses in Victoria. Because this new authority will be regulating the food safety of the average-sized dairy farm to the big dairy processor, the smaller beef producer all the way to the largest abattoir that exports overseas, it is important that it is efficient and as cost effective as possible for those industries.

I spoke to one of my abattoir owners today about a very separate issue. But he said yesterday they actually closed their abattoir because they cannot get planes to take meat to the Middle East. So there are some real challenges coming for agriculture right at the moment, with the cost pressures of the war in the Middle East, but also the fact that they actually cannot get product out of Australia. To think that his major abattoir has shut for a day because he cannot get planes to take the meat to the Middle East. That is just the start. No matter what happens in the Middle East in the next few days, it is going to take months and months to get back to normal. So take at face value what the government says about the new organisation being better because they are all together. I would have liked to have seen a review process to actually prove that in the legislation. That is not there. And the last thing in my few seconds remaining, we should not be regulating non-mammal milk. That should not be included in this legislation. It is juice. It is almond juice. It is soy juice. It is oat juice. It is not milk.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (15:19): Acting Speaker Farnham, it is always wonderful to see you in the chair. I speak in support of the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026.

Members interjecting.

Eden FOSTER: He is a friendly face in the chair, one of the only ones from that side, maybe. Anyway, I speak in support of the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026, an important reform that will strengthen Victoria's food safety system while also making it simpler and clearer for businesses to operate in Victoria. At its core, this bill is about two very important objectives: keeping Victorians safe and ensuring our food safety system continues to meet the needs of a modern and evolving food industry. Food safety is not something we can ever afford to take lightly. Every Victorian family expects that the food they purchase, prepare and eat is safe. They trust that the systems put in place by government will protect them from contamination, illness and other food-related risks. At the same time, our farmers, producers, manufacturers and food businesses rely on a regulatory system that is clear, effective and responsive so that they can continue producing the high-quality food for which Victoria is well known.

The creation of Safe Food Victoria represents a significant and long-planned step forward in how we manage food safety in this state. It recognises that while Victoria has a strong food safety record, the world around us continues to change, the risks associated with food production evolve over time, the technologies used by industry continue to advance and businesses increasingly operate across multiple parts of the supply chain. The current food safety regulatory system in Victoria is complex. It operates across four separate Victorian acts of Parliament and involves two responsible ministers. Responsibility for regulating food safety is currently shared across the Department of Health, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Dairy Food Safety Victoria, PrimeSafe and 79 local councils. Together these organisations oversee more than 100,000 food businesses across the state. While these regulators perform their roles with professionalism and dedication, the structure itself can sometimes create challenges. For businesses operating in the food sector the current system can be difficult to navigate. Depending on the type of food produced and the activities undertaken, a single business may need to interact with several different regulators. In some cases, businesses may require multiple licences or registrations simply because their operations fall across different regulatory frameworks. This complexity has been highlighted through extensive consultation with

stakeholders since 2021. Industry groups, businesses and regulators themselves have all pointed to the difficulties created by having multiple regulators performing similar functions under separate legislative frameworks. This fragmented approach can place unnecessary administrative burdens on businesses and can make coordination more difficult when responding to emerging risks.

The Safe Food Victoria Bill seeks to address those issues by bringing greater clarity, consistency and coordination to the system. The bill implements the first stage of a two-stage reform program to consolidate food safety regulators in Victoria. Stage 1 involves the establishment of Safe Food Victoria, a new statutory authority that will serve as the central food safety regulator for the state. Safe Food Victoria will replace both Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe, and it will also take on the food safety regulatory functions currently performed by the Department of Health. As a result, those existing regulators will be abolished and their staff, assets and responsibilities transferred into the new organisation. Importantly, Safe Food Victoria will operate as an independent statutory authority governed by a board and led by a CEO. This structure mirrors the arrangements that currently exist for the regulators it replaces, ensuring that the regulator maintains independence while remaining accountable to Parliament through the responsible minister. The board will consist of between five and seven members, including a chair and deputy chair, appointed by the minister responsible for the act, and the board will also have the ability to establish consultative committees that bring together sector-specific expertise from industry, public health and local government. This structure ensures that Safe Food Victoria will benefit from strong governance while continuing to draw on the expertise and insights of those working within the food sector.

One of the most significant benefits of this reform is that it will allow Victoria's food safety system to take a truly whole-of-supply-chain approach. Currently responsibility for regulating different parts of the food system sits with different regulators. This can sometimes create difficulties when responding to risks that cut across multiple parts of the supply chain. Safe Food Victoria will take a broader paddock-to-plate view of food safety. By bringing together expertise and oversight within a single organisation the regulator will be better placed to identify risks, coordinate responses and support businesses in meeting food safety requirements. This approach aligns regulation more closely with the way the food industry operates and ensures that oversight remains focused on protecting public health.

Another important benefit of this reform is the creation of a single point of contact for food businesses. Safe Food Victoria will act as a single front door for food safety inquiries, licensing and regulatory engagement. This will make it easier for businesses to understand their obligations and to access advice or guidance when they need it. This is particularly valuable for businesses that operate across multiple parts of the food supply chain. For example, a cafe that produces its own cheese or smallgoods for sale may currently fall under the oversight of several different regulators, depending on the activity involved. Similarly, a horticulture grower who packages produce onsite for retail sale may interact with different regulators at different stages of the process. These businesses are often innovative and diversified, but the current regulatory structure can make compliance more complicated than it needs to be. By consolidating regulatory oversight within Safe Food Victoria, businesses will have clearer guidance and a more straightforward pathway when engaging with government.

The current system can also require businesses to obtain multiple permissions when their activities span different regulatory frameworks. A diversified farm business operating a farm gate shop, a cafe and a small food manufacturing operation may need several different licences or registrations, depending on the products they sell. For example, they might require a PrimeSafe licence to process meat products, registration with Agriculture Victoria to produce eggs or berries and registration with their local council to operate a cafe or food manufacturing business. While each of these permissions serves an important purpose, the combined process can become complicated and time consuming for businesses to navigate. Safe Food Victoria will help simplify these arrangements by bringing oversight into a single authority, reducing duplication and providing clearer pathways for businesses to meet their regulatory obligations. Importantly, these reforms do not change the standards businesses must meet to keep food safe; instead they improve the way that those standards are administered.

A consolidated regulator will also strengthen Victoria's ability to respond to food safety incidents. At present, incident response arrangements differ across regulators, with centralised leadership from the Department of Health but with operational capacity often sitting elsewhere. This can complicate decision-making when a rapid response is required. A single regulator with consolidated expertise and authority will make it easier to coordinate responses and ensure that decisions can be taken quickly when risks arise. In a world where food supply chains are increasingly complex, having clear leadership and coordinated capability during an incident is critical to protecting public health. These changes are really important for food safety, for our communities and for the state of Victoria, and I therefore commend this bill to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:28): Acting Speaker Farnham, what a delight it is to see you in the chair. I was getting carried away discussing the food industry with the member for Murray Plains, who I have known for some time, but I am still continually surprised to learn that he knows quite a bit about the dairy industry. I am also surprised to learn that he knew when the automatic milking machine was invented in the 1920s – he was obviously one of the first ones to use it! – and also of his knowledge around PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria, noting that Leonard Vallance, who is a constituent that I will often seek advice from in my electorate, was the chair of PrimeSafe for a while. They do deserve a great amount of thanks, these two bodies that have been around for quite some time, given the extraordinary amount of work that they have done.

It is interesting to listen to those for whom the only interaction they have with the food-producing industry is when it lands on the plate and they go to eat it. That is great. That is why we are in business. That is wonderful. I hope that learning about this bill has opened some eyes on both sides of the house as to how much regulatory burden there is in food production. Amalgamating PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety, it has been explained, could streamline the regulatory burden. Let us hope, as the member for Murray Plains said. I made some notes myself: will this reduce costs as far as regulation and levies go? If it increases them, then it defeats the purpose.

I have been having a lot of discussions, as I always do, because I am deeply entrenched in food production. But one thing I hear a lot about is the regulatory burden for anyone that exports and even from the governing bodies, all of them, the amount of paperwork, administration and auditing. I mentioned in here yesterday during one of my contributions – I cannot remember which one, because there are so many – the amount of audits particularly for fresh food – table grapes, stone fruit – anyone that exports around the world has to complete; for example, GLOBALG.A.P. audits, Freshcare audits. Even domestically, Coles, Woolies and all the supermarkets have their own.

Hopefully this kind of streamlining might flow to some others. It is probably a federal jurisdiction, but what actually needs to happen with those types of audits and regulation is to streamline all of them. These cost 10 to 12 grand each audit, and everyone has to do every single one depending on where you are sending your food. That could be north of 50, 60 grand per season to get into a market, and you need a market. Wouldn't the magical solution be to amalgamate all those into one and have it covered by Freshcare or GLOBALG.A.P. both domestically and for export to other countries? That is one thing that I am working on, Acting Speaker Farnham, and by the look on your face you are terribly interested in that kind of work. I know it is not sexy work, but it is practical and will save farmers and food producers a huge amount of money and a huge amount of regulatory burden that they do not want. They do not want to be sitting at a desk doing audit paperwork. They want to be out there producing food and, at the moment, spraying.

We are talking about table grapes. Botrytis is a huge problem now after all the rain that they have had and they need to get spray and go out there and spray. Botrytis, for your information, is a grey mould that affects strawberries, grapes and cherries, I think. It is a huge problem put on top of all the other pressures that farmers are going through at the moment: fuel shortages, because there are shortages; the weather; the cost of water – $550 a megalitre is a huge cost.

We heard the member for Lowan in her lead contribution talk about how we are not opposing this bill at all. We are congratulating the work of PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety. But the member for Lowan has proposed to include in the bill mandatory plant-based disclosure. I know this is a large sticking point for the dairy industry and dairy producers. Again, the member for Murray Plains pointed out it is not milk. Almond milk is nut juice. Oat milk is grain juice. Soy might be bean juice, I do not know. But it is not milk, so it should be mandatory that it is disclosed. Even for lab-created meat or plant-based meat there needs to be –

Peter Walsh interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Fake meat. It is fake. It is not meat. It is some other sort of protein. That should also be disclosed on these sorts of products so as not to lead to a misleading product description. I would have thought it was consumer law but certainly a consumer expectation at the very least and a consumer transparency requirement. Transparency is not a huge priority for this government, we know that, but it should be as far as food safety goes, 100 per cent, because we are all consumers of the food industry at some point, aren't we?

While we are not opposing this bill, it does give me a chance to talk about – because of course local governments look after retail foods, restaurants, cafes and such. I know you have been saying for years now, Acting Speaker Farnham, that a visit to Mildura is due, and yet here we are, still waiting. We are spoilt for choice in Mildura when it comes to restaurants and cafes. Not only are we producing food, but the restaurant scene in Mildura in particular is exceptional, with Stefano's Restaurant, owned by a very famous TV chef – one of the OG TV chefs and a card-carrying Labor member, I think. The Spanish bar and grill is also exceptional. They do an amazing steak. The Province is no longer there, by Matt De Angelo, but it was an amazing Italian restaurant, which I am sure you would have loved, Acting Speaker. Sharp's Bakery is of course the home of Australia's best vanilla slice and best bee sting – unpopular opinion, but it is. There is Brass Monkey, Brother Chris and even our pubs in Mildura. The Gateway actually constructed, expanded and redeveloped their pub during COVID, mind you – what a time to be alive and do some pub renovations, during COVID – but the end product was Verde, which uses a lot of local produce. The food that is produced – it is a pub; it is an icon in Mildura – is amazing.

Peter Walsh interjected.

Jade BENHAM: I am getting to Sea Lake. I am doing it geographically, member for Murray Plains. I will take up that interjection. I have not forgotten Sea Lake. In Sea Lake, which is a popular stop for me every time I drive down, because I drive all the time, there is a cafe, restaurant and catering business called The Juke. Ezra and Dylan own The Juke. They used to have the kitchen at the pub. They are no longer in the community owned and operated pub across the road, the Royal, anymore. Ezra and Dylan make the most amazing food. I will put it on the record and say that the bacon and egg rolls at The Juke in Sea Lake are without a doubt the best in Australia. I do not know what he is doing to those eggs, but they are amazing. It has probably got a bit to do with the brioche buns and the amount of butter contained in them, but that is beside the point.

We are so spoilt for choice when it comes to food – not only food production and the fact that we can spend our entire lives dedicated to feeding the world. I said in this place last week, 'Who'd be a farmer?' We would, because we love it. It has never been tougher and it is only getting tougher, but we love it. This is why we do it: we love it. Not only do we get to produce food in all aspects: Mallee lamb, dairy – it gets a bit hot right up my way for dairy – fresh food in particular, grains, beer and wine, dried fruits. We produce it all. And then we have amazing restaurants that can actually put it on the plate. That is why we do it, because we love the food industry in the electorate of Mildura.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (15:38): I too rise to speak on the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026. The bill is about making things easier for our food businesses and safer for all Victorians. The bill marks the creation of a new body, Safe Food Victoria, which is the long-planned merger of our state's

food safety regulators. The goal of the reform is to make sure our food safety regulators are fit for purpose in their important role in keeping our community safe from the various food safety risks that can present. This is particularly important as these risks change often and require a proactive government to manage them. Our current food safety system needs a refresh to make sure it is up to speed for years to come. The current system is complex and is currently governed by four separate pieces of legislation and overseen by multiple regulators. Under this bill we are streamlining the system and consolidating these authorities.

Food safety is such an important part of our everyday lives that we put a lot of trust in, from where we buy our groceries through to who manufactures them and processes the products we buy to the local busy restaurants that are in our communities. It is right across the supply chain. We must make sure our responsible regulator is strong and adaptive so we can all have confidence in the safety of our food and our food businesses. The bill means simpler processes and greater consistency for Victorian food businesses and the important regulatory functions to get fresh food to market and ultimately to our plates. The bill will implement stage 1 of a two-stage reform program to consolidate food safety regulators in Victoria.

Stage 1 will see the establishment of Safe Food Victoria, effectively creating a single front door for food safety queries. Safe Food Victoria will be established by mid-2026 and will report to the Minister for Agriculture. The bill will therefore create the new aforementioned statutory authority, Safe Food Victoria. This will replace PrimeSafe as the current regulator of meat, seafood and poultry and Dairy Food Safety Victoria, as well as conduct the food safety regulatory functions currently undertaken by the Department of Health. PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria will both be abolished through this process. Importantly, the health portfolio remains in charge of public health issues and will continue to advocate and progress programs to support issues such as nutrition. The agriculture portfolio and Safe Food Victoria will primarily focus on acute issues, like ensuring businesses produce safe and suitable food, while supporting government initiatives related to chronic public health issues.

Stage 2 will see the development of a new framework for food safety in Victoria. The reforms will streamline regulatory processes and ensure greater consistency across the supply chain – from the paddock right through to the plate. This process is in the early stages but will continue through to 2027. These changes will work to strengthen our food safety system by making it more robust, making it more agile and making it more responsive to effectively manage risk, innovate and work on improvements for the future.

In terms of context, currently the responsibility of food regulation is shared across several government departments, ministers, Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe as well as local councils, and that has created a complex regulatory environment. Rather than four entities regulating over 100,000 food businesses across the state and across the supply chain, Safe Food Victoria will have oversight over the supply chain to ensure food is safe, with support from the departments and local councils, who do the important work of carrying regulations out on the ground right through our communities.

The consolidation of the food safety regulators allows for further confidence for Victorians in the safety of their food. A benefit for a single regulator is that there is improved access to shared data and knowledge systems, meaning that risk can be better identified and managed to protect public health, and a single digital front door for those utilising the regulator, meaning leadership is clearer, permissions are simpler and it is easier to do business. I am sure for food businesses across my electorate of Narre Warren South this will be a welcome improvement. It will reduce regulatory burden for them. Less forms, less duplication and less permissions will be required, with all of this found in the one place. Especially for those small businesses who might not have the manpower to do this type of administration, the reform will mean reduced barriers, all while keeping them up to regulatory food safety standards.

We are talking about better management of more complex businesses which have been covered by multiple regulators – for instance, a cafe in Hampton Park in my electorate that might be producing its

own cheese to sell to customers – and improvements to the way incidents are responded to to manage the diverse food safety risks we might encounter and the way responses are set up as well in the case of a complex event, such as the blue-green algae in South Australia.

A consolidated regulator is successfully used in other jurisdictions. By comparison, in Australia, you see that is already in existence in New South Wales and in Queensland, and just across the ditch as well, over in New Zealand. The reforms outlined in this bill to consolidate the food safety regulator meet the feedback provided by consultation through Engage Victoria with key stakeholders as well. In this consultation, over 90 per cent of stakeholders support the move to a single regulator. The consolidation of regulators is part of Victoria's *Economic Growth Statement* that focuses on unlocking new economic growth by removing barriers and making it simpler to do business in Victoria. We are making it simpler, and we are making it more accessible for businesses to do business in Victoria, while maintaining high-quality regulation so businesses can focus on what they do best: creating jobs, fostering innovation and driving economic growth as well. While those opposite do like to talk about the ways they would make things easier for businesses in our state, they do tend to oppose sensible options when they are presented. This is a sensible option. We are not being hypocritical. Our government is busy ensuring a stronger regulator for food safety, while supporting businesses and a strong Victorian economy too.

In conclusion, I would just say that this is a good bill. We know how much the food safety regulator is relied upon right across the state, whether that be for the agricultural and production industry, whether it is for our distributors and manufacturers, whether it is for our retailers, including restaurants, local cafes and of course, our public health sector and all those stakeholders that may lie in between. As I said, it is a good bill. In short, the bill will make this system fairer and smarter through the establishment of the key body Safe Food Victoria, and on that basis, I commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (15:47): Acting Speaker Farnham, first I must say there has been a lot of genuine appreciation of you in the chair. I was watching a couple of other members standing up here and giving you a big pat on the back, so well done to you. I get to stand up and talk on the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026, and we get to talk about the region both you and I come from too, down through the Latrobe Valley and Gippsland and West Gippsland. As we heard from the member for Lowan when she actually led the debate off on the Safe Food Victoria Bill, I think everybody in the chamber realises that we do have to have mechanisms in place to make sure that we protect our food sources and make sure there are regulations that our farmers and our providers of our food and grain right around regional Victoria need to go through to make sure that the products that we are receiving are of quality, which they always have been and always will be, because what our farmers produce is outstanding. We are very lucky here in Australia. We also need to try and reduce the amount of regulation and extra work that our primary producers have to go through to actually get their produce, as we heard from the member for Mildura, not just around the great state of Victoria and interstate, but also overseas. Everything that we can do to streamline what needs to be done, we need to make sure we are doing in this area. As the member for Mildura said, we also need to make sure that we are not putting the extra burden of extra cost on our farmers as we are trying to streamline what needs to happen here.

Obviously, the purpose of the bill, as you would be well aware, Acting Speaker, having listened to others stand here and talk, is to abolish Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe, the two entities that have been in charge of ensuring that what we move from our paddock and onto our plate is of a very, very high quality. Down in our region in Gippsland, Acting Speaker, we are heavily reliant on a lot of dairy and beef farmers in and around there, and up your way in Thorpdale as well we have the world-famous potato farmers. So we do have a lot of primary production down around there. One of my good mates, Peter Ayres, lives out at Flynn. Amongst other things he is a maker of spectacles in his work life, and in his spare time he runs his beef farm out at Flynn. In having a relationship and seeing how hard Peter has to work and the regulation to get his quality beef around Victoria, this is going to make, I hope, his life a lot easier and more streamlined, being able to make sure that what he

is producing is still of a high quality. He brings beef here into Melbourne and right around the state. Also they run a wedding venue out at Bonnie Brae, out at Flynn, so there are a lot of weddings in the summertime. To see the set-up of the wedding venue with a working farm – there are a lot of people that just do not realise how much work goes into running that farm, and especially a lot of our city brothers and sisters that travel down really enjoy the experience of being out on the farm in that environment.

Not only do we need to make sure that our food and fibre are secure and safe, but we also need to make sure that the pressures on our farmers are as low as they can be by making structured, sensible decisions here in the chamber. One of the issues, talking about Peter, that he has had of late is transmission lines coming through Flynn and the impacts they may have, thinking about that visual impact for him on his farm with his wedding venue but also the security of making sure that we are not getting rid of that prime farming land. As we spread out around the state, we have only got to look around the Pakenham area, Acting Speaker, and how massively that has grown over time. That has moved into some prime production area, and I know you and I sat on a committee where we had a look at how we do keep our prime farming land safe and working, because what we do know is the further we move out, the more pressures it does put on costs for the farmers to get their produce into the city. If you are a beef farmer with abattoirs around the place, the abattoirs have actually diminished over time, and these primary producers now are paying a heck of a price for being able to cart their produce to the abattoir so it can come out into the regions and into the city so we can enjoy what they do have to offer. And it is not only if you are a beef farmer or you have got chickens on your farm or eggs or whatever it is, or you are producing milk – our dairy farmers – or the food and fibre that they produce up in and around the Mallee and up into Mildura; there are these associated costs of fuel, as we have been speaking about this week, and chemicals and fertilisers and spraying our crops.

The member for Mildura and the member for Murray Plains have also spoken about the ongoing cost of being able to access water.

Jade Benham interjected.

Martin CAMERON: Was it $550 a megalitre? It is mind blowing if you go back over the journey of what they have been paying.

I think everyone stands in agreement here that it is good what we are doing, making sure that we are streamlining the process of being able to get our produce from the paddock to the plate. It is fantastic that we are able to do that in here. But on the flip side, going back to the pressures that are on the farm, we have only got to look at some of our regions right around Victoria, as I said before, with transmission lines coming through, with solar farms going on and batteries, we need to make sure that this infrastructure is going in the right places and not on our good fertile land where we are growing our crops and feeding our cattle, whether you are a dairy farmer or a beef farmer. We need to make sure that we absolutely, 100 per cent have a focus on protecting that prime agricultural land. There are a lot of veggie growers that were close to Melbourne, as I said before, that have just been continually pushed further and further out by our thirst for trying to build houses in Victoria as we try and get that number up. It is a double-edged sword, especially down our way. We know the process of trying to get our produce down here into the city, driving on roads that really are not up to scratch, causing grief not only with fuel costs as we talk about that but also the maintenance costs of our trucks. You have only got to talk to any logistics teams around the place with trucks that are running up and down the roads about their costs of maintenance, whether it be tyres or springs and shocks or even the wear and tear on the engines themselves as they have to slow down and speed up.

We do not oppose this Safe Food Victoria Bill, and we wish it a speedy passage, and I know that we do have a couple of amendments that we are going to bring up in the other place. We are working hard together here to make sure that what we are putting forward here in Parliament in the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026 is ticking all the boxes, making sure it as good as it can be, because we need to protect our farmers and make their lives a lot easier, and this is the place where we can start to do it.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (15:57): This bill is about making things easier for business and safer for all Victorians, noting the importance of food safety and the vicissitude of risks that can unfold. I do feel a sense of gratitude, noting the high standards that have been maintained in Victoria. It is a credit to the food growers – they must have to use the most meticulous care to be able to deliver high-quality produce that is safe for consumption, all the way to bringing it down to local places such as the great South Melbourne Market in my seat of Albert Park. In my electorate there are just so many cafes and restaurants that if I start to list them, we will be here all night; that is a good problem to have. But I do respect the incredible care that is taken by all those all the way through the system to make sure that we can safely consume the products that are in front of us.

Not that it is relevant to this conversation really, but I have never really had food poisoning in Victoria. Again, I do not think that is luck – that is a credit to all the hard work of all those involved, from the growers right down to food servers and the cafes and restaurants. I have had the odd bad bain-marie; I had a couple in Queensland years ago. I remember I had a turkey sandwich with mayonnaise; I was chewing it and I was thinking, 'Gee, this tastes awful', but I kept eating it, which was probably not the most sensible decision to make. That had consequences that flowed on from there, because we know that our senses can sometimes alert us to these things but not always. This is why we are reliant on good regulation, because we may not always make the best decisions. Another food poisoning scenario – and this will be the last one, I promise, because it is not really the most pleasant thing to share – I was overseas and I had another bad bain-marie, and then I was on a train and I remember feeling absolutely shocking. I had some good advice from someone on the train who said – this is not medical advice, by the way – 'Nina, scull that Coke. You need to get that out of your system as quickly as possible because, if you don't, you will be down for days.' So I did scull it and, let me tell you, it did work. I am not being disparaging to Coke, but it did bring the matter up. I am sorry; it is not very nice to talk about that. I was down for one day – one day on my back – but after that I recovered and could enjoy the rest of the trip.

What is the moral of the story? The moral of the story is I see good value in high-quality regulation, in strong regulation, when it comes to many things but indeed food safety. And a bain-marie must be kept at just the right temperature. Not only should the food be put in there in the first place in a fresh and appropriate condition, it must be maintained at a good temperature. So having experienced some negative things – and I am sure I am not alone, and I recovered very well – I have absolute respect for the fundamentals that we are seeking to deliver here, because we know that the nature of the risks when it comes to food safety is changing all the time. Status quo is not necessarily the best approach, and in fact taking a proactive approach is really important, and this is what is underpinning the vital reforms that are coming through here.

We know that the current food safety regulatory system is overly complex. I think there are four Victorian acts and two responsible ministers. The system is currently regulated by the Department of Health, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Dairy Food Safety Victoria, PrimeSafe and 79 local councils. We have already heard from the member for Monbulk of the problems that arose when she used to have a small business from different councils having different rules, which created undue complexity and which did not necessarily deliver the best outcomes for consumers ultimately. Fundamentally it is important that we are improving the system with the hope that actually we are not only being proactive and being ready for the evolving risks that there are when it comes to the management of food safety but also making it easier for businesses to do what they do so well.

This is why we are consolidating our food regulators in Victoria and creating Safe Food Victoria, which is a long-planned merger of food safety regulators in Victoria, just to be very specific on that point. It will certainly – and this is what is pleasing for businesses, one of a number of benefits – reduce the number of permissions required by businesses, making it easier to do business, and that is what we want to see. Businesses can often conduct multiple activities that do not neatly sit in a commodity-

specific framework, which makes sense. Henceforth if we are able to – which we are seeking to do through this bill – simplify those processes, then that has got to be a good thing.

We also note that with this system, in terms of food safety management, there has been extensive consultation. I respect that people can have different views on who should be on X or other board, but I know that there has been extensive consultation on this matter, noting just how important it is and how many stakeholders have a significant and appropriate interest in how food safety is going to be regulated into the future, making sure that there are those practical inputs as required to ensure that truly the goal of maintaining excellent food safety is able to be fully executed.

Certainly as a government we are about making positive future-looking improvements rather than responding to a specific current problem or failure. I would proffer that that makes good sense, because you have to anticipate the various risks that may be in the foreseeable future. Several reviews have identified that while the system is working, there are weaknesses that could lead to problems if not addressed. This includes having many small regulators completing similar regulatory tasks, leading to regulatory inefficiency. I would have thought those opposite would be on board with reducing inefficiency in this space, and I believe they broadly are. They have said that they will support the bill, although there may be some amendments in the upper house, so we will see what that means.

There are also gaps in our current food regulatory system, particularly in regard to novel and emerging technologies and responding to business models which include producing products that span multiple parts of our regulatory system. Acting proactively to ensure the ongoing strength and credibility of our food safety regulatory system is critical to maintaining public health and consumer and market trust in our great Victorian produce. It is certainly something I feel a lot of pride in; I am sure everyone in this chamber does. We are so fortunate to be able to access so much beautiful fresh produce. I am going to go back to the South Melbourne Market because, honestly, the meat is incredible and people flock there for the fresh seafood week on week. It would take a lot of due care to be able to manage all that seafood and make sure that it is safe for human consumption.

I do want to do a shout-out to Rita's Coffee & Nuts. Rita Karambetsos has been there as a business owner, and I also pay respect to her husband, who passed not so long ago. In true fighting spirit, Rita is continuing her business and produces the most amazing nuts and coffee and chocolates and sweets and beautiful things. Those nuts are super fresh – oh, my goodness. I am just saying, the walnuts are second to none. Anyway, I just want to salute her because that business has been there 37 years, and that takes incredible dedication and skill and care for the local community as well, really providing fantastic service. This is not to mention all the other beautiful cafes and restaurants in my area, but I just did want to do a shout-out to her because I know she has been through some difficult times, but in true fighting spirit she is incredibly resilient, and she is continuing – and it is a family business as well – to deliver really lovely products, which I certainly love to consume and I am sure many locally and from afar are enjoying as well. On that note, I commend these important changes in the bill to the house. I know it is really important to continue the very high standards we have in food safety regulation and also to be proactive in anticipating foreseeable risks into the future.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (16:07): I am pleased to rise today on the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026. I will reference the member for Albert Park's latest contribution. The South Melbourne Market is a great place. I have been there many a time. It might not shock anyone in this chamber that I think South Melbourne dim sims are probably the best thing in the joint. Look, my body is a temple; it is just built like a pyramid, unfortunately.

Paul Edbrooke: The temple of doom.

Wayne FARNHAM: On occasion it can be. But I really want to go back to the member for Murray Plains and his contribution. I actually really do enjoy listening to the member for Murray Plains. He is very experienced in this chamber, and he has great life experience as well. He talked about our milk sector and when the automation of milking machines came in in the 1920s. As the member for Mildura

referred to, he was there for that leap forward in technology in the milking industry. There was another time in this chamber when the member for Murray Plains was speaking, again on experience, and that was when the Prahran Mechanics Institute bill came in in 2024. The Prahran Mechanics Institute existed from 1896, and the member for Murray Plains had good experience there too. I always enjoy listening to the member for Murray Plains.

Jade Benham interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: He will live. He will be fine. Essentially this bill is about streamlining PrimeSafe and dairy food safety in the state. Again, the member for Murray Plains said some really good things in his contribution, and that would be that if we are going to streamline this process to make it easier for farmers and to make the processes easier – and this side of the chamber actually hope that works, we really do – in doing so, costs need to come down. It is very, very important for our farmers that we ease the pressure on them because at the moment they are under the pump. The farmers in this state feel like a punching bag for the state government at the moment with everything that has been pushed on them with the emergency services levy – I think that is coming in on 1 July this year for farmers – and with compulsory acquisition of land for renewable projects and transmission lines, not to mention all the natural disasters they have had to go through with fire, flood, drought and buying in water at $550, what was that –

A member interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: $550 a megalitre, which puts a huge, huge burden on farmers. I do feel for our farming community at the moment, and every member that is part of a farming community will tell the same story in this chamber. It does not matter whether you come from Narracan, Morwell, Gippsland South, Gippsland East, Mildura, Murray Plains or Euroa – and Lowan as well – in any of these areas in this state the farmers are telling the same story, but we on this side of the chamber feel as though the government is not listening to the farmers. So if this bill actually streamlines processes and makes things cheaper, then that is a good thing. But I do agree with the member for Murray Plains when he picked up that this should be reviewed. We have had two bodies in this state, PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety, that have done an incredible job in the time that they have been in place. They have done a good job. And yes, they may be outdated now but they may not. This is why the review is important. This is where, if we had the review in place, we could gauge the effectiveness of this bill for our farming communities across the state. I think it is very important. It is something the government should really consider.

If I look at my area of Narracan, which takes in West Gippsland and Gippsland as a whole, we produce about 20 per cent of Australia's dairy. My area is high in dairy, high in beef and high in produce, so my area is actually what this bill is about. I look at my area and what they are going through at the moment, particularly with the BESS projects, the battery energy storage system projects, that are taking up prime agricultural land with no consultation with the community. The people developing these projects have to go through a community consultation process, which is literally a tick and flick. They turn up at a hall for 3 hours on a Sunday and go, 'Come and see us.' But they turn up from 4 to 7. What are dairy farmers doing from 4 till 7? They are milking cows, so it does not give them the opportunity.

My community is actually very concerned about these BESS projects, especially if they catch on fire. You talk to the people doing the developments, and they say, 'We have an internal mechanism for the battery. If there's a fire, it puts it out.' But they are not talking about the external effects when you build a BESS project in a bushfire overlay area. My electorate has been subject to pretty severe bushfires, especially in 2009 and 2020. The community is rightly concerned that those batteries are not protected adequately. The reason they are concerned, especially about the ones in Shady Creek, is because about a kilometre and a half down the road as the crow flies is the Fonterra milk-processing plant. When we are talking about food safety, if these batteries catch alight and there are fires from the north – and predominantly in my area when the wind is from the north in those very hot conditions,

that is when we are most at risk – that toxic smoke will go straight into the Fonterra milk-processing plant. We are talking about food safety in this bill. I have asked the minister on numerous occasions not to allow these BESS projects to go ahead in these areas, for that reason. The fact that they can remove an overlay and put a BESS project in there is not great, in my opinion – and that is any overlay. It could be a bushfire overlay, it could be a cultural heritage overlay, it could be a flood overlay; it is the fact that they can remove them. But particularly these two in Shady Creek are really in the wrong location.

I was talking to a couple of my producers today, and I was talking to a producer out at Thorpdale about the war in Iran and the effect that is having on fuel prices at the moment. At no point in time am I blaming the state government for the war in Iran – do not get me wrong – but we have to think of implications, and I think every government probably in this country has been negligent in never preparing for the worst when it comes to fuel. And who does it affect first off? Our primary producers. It is always our primary producers. This producer in Thorpdale – and I know the member for Murray Plains will know these people – is Durkin transport. Durkin transport supply all the brushed potatoes for Woolworths throughout the state. They do an enormous amount of kilometres, as you can imagine, across the state, and at the moment their fuel bill has gone up $50,000 in a week. Currently today they only have seven days supply.

Obviously with everything that goes on in the agricultural sector, even for a big producer like Durkins, $50,000 in a week in lost revenue is an enormous hit. Now they have got to try and renegotiate to get that money back, and this is the problem. This is where I think governments have failed: we really do not prepare for the worst when things happen. As I said, I am not blaming the state government at all for the war in Iran, but I think any government in this country should have a contingency plan so that when we get to stages like this in the state there is a plan to go forward so our food can still hit the plate, because if our farmers cannot harvest, if they cannot seed, if they cannot milk and if they cannot transport the milk, everyone in the state suffers. I think it is incumbent on government going forward that they actually do have a plan.

As previous speakers have said, we do not oppose this bill. There will be amendments in the other place; those amendments will come forward there. But in the meantime the government should start looking after the farmers.

John LISTER (Werribee) (16:17): When it comes to food safety, we cannot just let it brie. I am really fondue of regulatory reform being more efficient. You cheddar believe it. In talking about the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026 and our work to bring Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe together into a single regulatory authority, I think it is particularly important in the context of this week, as we have been talking about regulatory reform, to reflect on how this will make things more efficient when it comes to keeping the community safe, also guaranteeing industry viability and also encouraging innovation as well.

This is particularly important for my community. A lot of people think that Werribee is just all housing, but it is not. Werribee is still one of the key agricultural centres when it comes to innovation in both dairy and grains. Quite literally in the middle of Werribee is what used to be called the State Research Farm, which from 1912 led innovation in research around pulses and wheat. At one point 90 per cent of the wheat grown in Victoria had its genetic origins from breeding programs at the State Research Farm. They pioneered practices around artificial insemination and IVF, particularly for the meat industry. They also had innovations in dairy technology down there, including around spreadable butter, which I do not think any of us could live without now; flavoured yoghurts; different types of flavoured milk; and different types of ice cream. The State Research Farm is now in a different phase. We are moving towards having some of those existing tenants, like the Gilbert Chandler dairy innovation centre, Melbourne University and their faculties of agriculture and veterinary science, and the CSIRO down there on Sneydes Road, as anchor tenants for what will be the future East Werribee precinct. We want to have this high-quality manufacturing and innovation happening there, particularly – and it is something I am particularly passionate about – in the food industry.

Making sure that we have a regulatory body that is what you could call a one-stop shop when it comes to food safety is particularly important. It is important because not only have we had the innovation in Werribee around those different types of food products but also we grow the products themselves. Just across in my learned friend the member for Point Cook's electorate, in Werribee South, which I have to say is spiritually still attached to the electorate of Werribee, 10 per cent of Victoria's vegetables are grown – 85 per cent of it is cauliflower, 53 per cent of it is broccoli and 34 per cent of it is lettuce. Also we still have egg production in the Werribee electorate just on Bulban Road at Casaccio Egg Farms, which is a huge local operation supplying IGAs and FoodWorks across Victoria. A lot of food production is happening in Werribee.

We have always been at the forefront of technology. Down at the CSIRO, I recently went on a tour late last year and got to see some of those different innovations that they are doing, particularly around manufacturing. $50 million has been put into this facility down there. Again, it is one of those anchors in that future innovation down at East Werribee. Not only are they doing things around how to manufacture certain products and how to package certain products but they are also doing a lot of work around safety and screening of products, something that will feed into the work of Safe Food Victoria, which we are looking to establish with this bill. The other thing about the East Werribee precinct, especially at the Melbourne University campus, is they do a lot of emergency screening for potential biohazards like bird flu, foot and mouth and all those other sorts of nasty diseases that organisations like PrimeSafe and soon-to-be Safe Food Victoria look out for. That work is being done down at Hoppers Lane and Princes Highway. I see the member for Point Cook has arrived for my contribution. He loves this part of the world.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

John LISTER: Werribee South's spiritual home is the electorate of Werribee; I knew that would get a rise out of him. I have to say it is particularly important, as we are looking at having this consolidated food safety regulator, that it is not just about the retailers or the food manufacturers that we have across the western suburbs. It is also about giving those industries that one-stop shop to go to for all that advice, that professional industry knowledge that has been developed through Dairy Food Safety and PrimeSafe over the years, to bring it closer together with those functions of the Department of Health, particularly around some of those nasty diseases that are being detected down at East Werribee. Strengthening our food safety system, making it more robust to manage that risk, is something that we are doing down at Werribee and we will be able to work in with Safe Food Victoria.

Fostering innovation and continual improvement – like I said, in Werribee we have developed a lot of stuff down at the research farm. Flavoured milk – there is quite a journey around flavoured milk, particularly a lot of the work around maintaining the safety of UHT flavoured milk. If anyone's a fan of Nippy's, they did a lot of development down at the CSIRO around the safety of their UHT products. Although they are a South Australian company, I would always welcome them to be manufacturing in Melbourne's western suburbs, and I am sure they are watching this right now.

But it is too important to our society, food safety, to take a reactive stance. Having a one-stop shop where we can have this sort of work with research bodies like CSIRO and the University of Melbourne and the dairy innovation centre means that we are able to keep ahead of any emerging problems in the market. This is something that is already happening in terms of having this single regulator in places like New South Wales, Queensland and New Zealand, which obviously relies extremely heavily on agriculture for its GDP.

When I was doing a little bit of research into this on the train the other day I was looking at a graphic representation of the current regulatory authorities that we have got when it comes to food. I was trying to think of a situation. I want to start a food truck in Werribee. Where do I have to go? At the moment I am going through council. If I want to sell fresh salami that I make, I need to make sure that I go through PrimeSafe to get the authority to be able to store it with the refrigeration requirements and things like that. If I am selling cheese that has been developed – in partnership with the dairy

innovation centre in East Werribee – then I need to make sure that I go to Dairy Food Safety Victoria to get advice and the authority to be able to sell that. It is quite an effort.

I spoke earlier this week about meeting with local businesses, particularly through the Committee for Wyndham and talking about that regulatory environment and how difficult it can be to navigate. If I was looking at this mind map of different regulatory authorities just to be able to open a food truck, I would be totally putting it off. That is why it is important to have these single bodies, these one-stop shops. Of course this does not preclude the role of local council. The work of organisations like Wyndham City Council in enforcing food standards is particularly important, and I appreciate the work that they do, and so is the work that is done through the Department of Health when it comes to the human health interface and ensuring that that is still there. This does not preclude some of those arrangements, but what it does do is make it more efficient, as it is in one place.

Having an efficient regulator at the moment means we have four primary regulators, which equals around two CEOs and executive staff in different departments, four separate IT systems, 17 board positions and four separate sites around Melbourne that they operate out of. One of the regulators currently works out of Camberwell, which is interesting. It is not renowned for its food production, but I am sure it is a very convenient location to be having public servants. Having this new body cuts those duplicative elements of the regulatory system, improving efficiency without cutting frontline staff, because we know that what comes with those frontline staff is decades of experience in the food industry. Having that as part of a new body, with new branding and a new organisation behind it, will be particularly important. I commend this bill to the house.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (16:27): From listening very intently to the very fine member for Werribee, there is certainly no chance at all that I can top that contribution. It was a very good contribution on what is an important bill, and it gave a sense of the member for Werribee's understanding of the complexity that comes with food safety in this state. The range of entities that are involved with the management of food safety is something that the member touched on. When you look at the detail and the provisions within this bill, the fact is that there are four existing acts, two responsible ministers and regulations that are enforced by the Department of Health; the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Change; Dairy Food Safety Victoria; PrimeSafe; and 79 local councils. That is something that is really important and has been reflected on through the debate that has run this afternoon.

I understand we have got some other business to deal with. My intention will be to keep the contribution relatively short, but I do want to take the opportunity to thank the ministerial offices for the way that this has been brought to the house. My understanding is that there has been extensive consultation that has formed part of the delivery of this bill. Engage Victoria had 123 responses and 2579 visitors, and of the 123 responses 93 per cent of the submissions were supportive of the planned efforts to improve the food regulatory system. What I think has been well canvassed through the debate this afternoon is the continual improvement function of the bill and the government's position, not just when it comes to food safety but when it comes to all of the bills that come before the house, and the sense of ensuring that we are continually updating and continually improving and providing legislation that is fit for purpose. Having legislation that is fit for purpose and that deals with the practicality of being on the ground and making sure that food safety is well supported is, first and foremost, important for consumers, but also important for small businesses and large businesses and all of those people that do terrific work in this space.

Acting Speaker, I am sure you have countless examples, as other members do, of opportunities and engagement that you have had within your community when it comes to food safety. I think what is important, in the context of mentioning the engagement that has been done on this bill, is making sure that we are providing for that fit-for-purpose legislation. It is really, really important. We are continuing to deliver that as we go forward, and making sure that we are doing that is really important. I want to acknowledge the work that has been done by the minister and the ministerial offices in bringing this to the chamber. As I said, there is no possible way I can compare to the member for

Werribee and his fine contribution, and some other great contributions on this side of the house. With those short comments, I happily commend the bill to the house.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (16:31): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Council's amendments

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert) (16:31): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

Appropriation

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert) (16:32): I inform the house that I have received a message from the Governor recommending a further appropriation for the purposes of the Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025.

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 1, page 3, lines 23 to 28, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

   "(ii) to provide for the appointment of a Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner; and".

2. Clause 1, page 3, line 29, omit "(iv)" and insert "(iii)".

3. Clause 101, lines 15 and 16, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

   '(2) For section 647(6) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 substitute** –

   "(6) In making a recommendation to the Governor in Council, the Minister must ensure that –

   (a) at least one member of the Board is a person who identifies as experiencing, or having experienced, mental illness or psychological distress; and

   (b) at least one member of the Board, other than the member referred to in paragraph (a), is a person who identifies as –

   (i) experiencing, or having experienced, mental illness or psychological distress; or

   (ii) caring for or supporting, or having cared for or supported, a person experiencing mental illness or psychological distress; and

   (c) if the Board is to consist of 7 or more members, at least one member of the Board, other than the members referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b), is a person who identifies as –

   (i) experiencing, or having experienced, mental illness or psychological distress; or

   (ii) caring for or supporting, or having cared for or supported, a person experiencing mental illness or psychological distress.".

   (3) Section 647(7) and (8) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** are **repealed**.'.

4. Clause 103, lines 26 to 28, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

    "'(4) The quorum for a meeting of the Centre Board is a majority of the members of the Board for the time being and –

    (a) if the Board consists of 6 members or fewer, must include at least one member who identifies as –

    (i) experiencing, or having experienced, mental illness or psychological distress; or

    (ii) caring for or supporting, or having cared for or supported, a person experiencing mental illness or psychological distress; or

    (b) if the Board consists of 7 or more members, must include at least 2 members who identify as –

    (i) experiencing, or having experienced, mental illness or psychological distress; or

    (ii) caring for or supporting, or having cared for or supported, a person experiencing mental illness or psychological distress.".'.

5. Clause 114, lines 30 and 31, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

    "'***Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner*** means the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner appointed under section 420(1A);".'.

6. Clause 114, page 103, lines 5 to 8, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

    '(3) In section 3(1) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022**, in the definition of ***Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner*** –

    (a) for "a Mental" **substitute** "the Mental";

    (b) for "section 420" **substitute** "section 420(1)".'.

7. Clause 116, omit this clause.

8. Clause 117, lines 2 and 3, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

    'For section 417(a) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 substitute** –

    "(a) the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner;".'.

9. Clause 118, lines 6 to 8, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

    'In section 419(4) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

    (a) for "a Mental" **substitute** "the Mental";

    (b) after "Commissioner" **insert** "or Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner".'.

10. Clause 119, line 9, omit "**Sections 419A and 419B**" and insert "**Section 419A**".

11. Clause 119, line 10, omit "Sections 419A and 419B" and insert "Section 419A".

12. Clause 119, line 11, omit "are" and insert "is".

13. Clause 120, lines 15 to 17, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

    '(2) In section 419C(b) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

    (a) for "a Mental" **substitute** "the Mental";

    (b) after "Commissioner" **insert** "or Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner".'.

14. Clause 121, line 21, after "**Commissioner**" insert "**and Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner**".

15. Clause 122, line 25, after "**Commissioner**" insert "**and Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner**".

16. Clause 122, lines 28 to 31, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

    "'(1) On the recommendation of the Minister, the Governor in Council, by instrument, may appoint a person to be the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner.

    (1A) On the recommendation of the Minister, the Governor in Council, by instrument, may appoint a person to be the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner.".'.

17. Clause 122, page 105, lines 1 to 11, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

'(3) For section 420(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 substitute** –

"(2) In making a recommendation to the Governor in Council under subsection (1) or (1A), the Minister must ensure that either the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner or Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner is –

(a) a person who identifies as experiencing, or having experienced, mental illness or psychological distress; or

(b) a person who identifies as caring for or supporting, or having cared for or supported, a person experiencing mental illness or psychological distress.".

(4) In section 420(3) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

(a) after "Council" **insert** "under subsection (1) or (1A)";

(b) for "Commissioners" **substitute** "Commissioner and Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner".

(5) For section 420(4) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 substitute** –

"(4) To avoid doubt –

(a) the appointment of a person referred to in subsection (2)(a) or (b) as the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner does not prevent another person referred to in subsection (2)(a) or (b) from being appointed as the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner; and

(b) the appointment of a person referred to in subsection (2)(a) or (b) as the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner does not prevent another person referred to in subsection (2)(a) or (b) from being appointed as the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner.".'.

18. Clause 123, after line 15 insert –

'(1A) After section 421(1) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 insert** –

"(1A) The Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner –

(a) is to be appointed for the period, not exceeding 5 years, specified in the instrument of appointment; and

(b) is eligible for reappointment; and

(c) holds office on any other terms and conditions, including remuneration and any travelling or other allowances, that are determined by the Governor in Council.".'.

19. Clause 123, lines 16 to 19, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

'(2) For section 421(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act substitute** –

"(2) The **Public Administration Act 2004** (other than Part 3 of that Act) applies –

(a) to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner in respect of the office of Commissioner; and

(b) to the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner in respect of the office of Deputy Commissioner.".'.

20. Clause 124, lines 21 to 23, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

'In section 422 of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

(a) for "A Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner" **substitute** "The Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner or Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner";

(b) after "the Commissioner" **insert** "or Deputy Commissioner (as the case requires)".'.

21. Clause 125, lines 25 to 27, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

'(1) In section 423(1) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

(a) for "a Mental" **substitute** "the Mental";

(b) after "Commissioner" **insert** "or Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner".

(1A) In section 423(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

(a) for "a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner" **substitute** "the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner or Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner";

(b) for "the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner" (where first occurring) **substitute** "the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner (as the case requires)";

(c) in paragraph (e), for "the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner" **substitute** "the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner".'.

22. Clause 125, line 32, after "Commissioner" insert "or Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner".

23. Clause 125, page 106, lines 1 and 2, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

'(b) for "the Chair's removal" (where first occurring) **substitute** "that removal";

(c) for "the Chair's removal from office" **substitute** "that removal".'.

24. Clause 126, after line 15 insert –

'(1A) After section 424(1) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 insert** –

"(1A) The Governor in Council may appoint a person to act in the office of the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner –

(a) during a vacancy in that office; or

(b) during any period when the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner –

(i) is absent; or

(ii) for any other reason is unable to perform the duties of the office of Deputy Commissioner.".'.

25. Clause 126, lines 16 to 18, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

'(2) In section 424(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

(a) for "a Mental" (where first occurring) **substitute** "the Mental";

(b) for "the office of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner" (where secondly occurring) **substitute** "that office".

(3) After section 424(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 insert** –

"(2A) The Minister may appoint a person to act in the office of the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner for a period of not more than 6 months during a vacancy in that office.".

(4) In section 424(3) and (5) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022**, after "subsection (1)" **insert** "or (1A)".

(5) In section 424(4) and (6) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022**, after "subsection (2)" **insert** "or (2A)".'.

26. Clause 127, lines 20 to 25, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

'(1) In section 425(1) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022**, for "A Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner, including an acting Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner," **substitute** "A person specified in subsection (3)".

(2) In section 425(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022**, for "a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner, including an acting Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner," **substitute** "a person specified in subsection (3)".

(3) After section 425(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 insert** –

"(3) For the purposes of subsections (1) and (2), the following persons are specified –

(a) the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner, including an acting Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner;

(b) the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner, including an acting Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner.".'.

27. Clause 128, page 107, lines 1 to 8, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

'(2) In section 426(1) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022**, for "Commissioners are collectively" **substitute** "Commissioner is".'.

28. Clause 129, omit this clause.
29. Clause 130, omit this clause.
30. Clause 131, omit this clause.
31. Clause 132, lines 14 to 16, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

    'For section 500(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 substitute** –

    "(2) The following persons may administer an oath or affirmation to a person for the purposes of subsection (1) –

    (a) the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner;

    (b) the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner;

    (c) a member of the staff of the Commission who is authorised to do so.".'.
32. Clause 133, lines 19 and 20, omit 'for "**a Mental**" **substitute** "**Mental**".' and insert 'after "**Commissioner**" **insert** "**, Deputy Commissioner**".'.
33. Clause 133, lines 21 to 23, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

    '(2) In section 508 of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

    (a) for "was" **substitute** "has been";

    (b) after "Commissioner" **insert** ", a Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner".'.
34. Clause 134, lines 26 to 28, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

    '(1) In section 517(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

    (a) for "a Mental" **substitute** "the Mental";

    (b) after "Commissioner," **insert** "the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner,".

    (2) In section 517(3) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

    (a) for "a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner," **substitute** "the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner, the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner,";

    (b) for "the person employed or the person engaged (as the case may be)" **substitute** "Deputy Commissioner or person".

    (3) In section 517(4) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

    (a) for "a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner," **substitute** "the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner, the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner,";

    (b) after "the Commissioner" **insert** ", Deputy Commissioner".'.
35. Clause 135, lines 31 to 33, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

    '(1) In section 518(1) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

    (a) for "A Mental" **substitute** "The Mental";

    (b) after "Commissioner," **insert** "the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner,".'.
36. Clause 135, page 111, lines 1 to 4, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

    '(2) In section 518(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

    (a) for "a Commissioner," **substitute** "the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner, the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner,";

    (b) in paragraphs (a) and (g), after "Commissioner" **insert** ", Deputy Commissioner".'.
37. Clause 136, lines 6 to 12, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

    '(1) In section 519(1) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

    (a) for "A Mental" **substitute** "The Mental";

    (b) after "Commissioner," **insert** "the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner,".

    (2) In section 519(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022**, for "a Commissioner," **substitute** "the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner, the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner,".

(3) In section 519(3) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022**, for "a Commissioner" **substitute** "the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner or Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner".

(4) In section 519(4) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

(a) for "a Commissioner," **substitute** "the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner, the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner,";

(b) after "the Commissioner" **insert** ", Deputy Commissioner".'.

38. Insert the following New Clause before clause 137 –

'**136A New section 524A inserted**

After section 524 of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 insert –

"**524A Requirement to disclose certain information to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission**

(1) The Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, by written notice, may request from the Health Secretary information that is relevant to the performance of the Commission's functions or the exercise of the Commission's powers.

(2) On receiving a request under subsection (1), the Health Secretary must give to the Commission the information specified in the request that the Health Secretary holds.

(3) Information that is disclosed under subsection (2) must not include information that identifies an individual.".'.

39. Clause 137, omit this clause.

40. Clause 138, omit this clause.

41. Clause 139, omit this clause.

42. Clause 141, page 114, line 11, omit "section 420 as amended" and insert "section 420(1) as substituted".

43. Clause 141, page 114, line 14, omit '**2025**.".' and insert "**2025**.".

44. Clause 141, page 114, after line 14 insert –

'**793 Appointment of interim Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner**

(1) Despite anything to the contrary in this Act, the Minister, by instrument, may appoint a person to be the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner for a period beginning on or after the commencement of Division 2 of Part 8 of the **Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Act 2025** and ending on a day that is no later than 6 months after the commencement of that Division.

(2) Despite anything to the contrary in the instrument of appointment, a person appointed under subsection (1) goes out of office on an appointment of a person under section 420(1A) as substituted by Division 2 of Part 8 of the **Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Act 2025**.".'.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert) (16:32): Before the house considers these amendments, I direct the attention of the house to amendments 18, 25 and 26 made by the Legislative Council. Following examination, I am of the opinion that the amendments are a direct infringement on the privileges of the house as they seek to force an appropriation from the Consolidated Fund. Under the Constitution Act 1975, an appropriating clause can only be initiated by the Assembly.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (16:33): I move:

That:

(1) Amendments 1 to 17, 19 to 24 and 27 to 44 be agreed to.

(2) The Assembly refuses to entertain amendments 18, 25 and 26 as they infringe the privileges of the Assembly.

(3) The Assembly makes the following further amendments to the bill:

1. Clause 123, after line 15 insert –

'(1A) After section 421(1) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 insert** –

"(1A) The Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner –

(a) is to be appointed for the period, not exceeding 5 years, specified in the instrument of appointment; and

(b) is eligible for reappointment; and

(c) holds office on any other terms and conditions, including remuneration and any travelling or other allowances, that are determined by the Governor in Council.".'.

2. Clause 126, lines 16 to 18, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

'(2) In section 424(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022** –

(a) for "a Mental" (where first occurring) **substitute** "the Mental";

(b) for "the office of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner" (where secondly occurring) **substitute** "that office".

(3) After section 424(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 insert** –

"(2A) The Minister may appoint a person to act in the office of the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner for a period of not more than 6 months during a vacancy in that office.".

(4) In section 424(3) and (5) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022**, after "subsection (1)" **insert** "or (1A)".

(5) In section 424(4) and (6) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022**, after "subsection (2)" **insert** "or (2A)".'.

3. Clause 127, lines 20 to 25, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

'(1) In section 425(1) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022**, for "A Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner, including an acting Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner," **substitute** "A person specified in subsection (3)".

(2) In section 425(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022**, for "a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner, including an acting Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner," **substitute** "a person specified in subsection (3)".

(3) After section 425(2) of the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 insert** –

"(3) For the purposes of subsections (1) and (2), the following persons are specified –

(a) the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner, including an acting Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner;

(b) the Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner, including an acting Deputy Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner.".'.

I thank the other place for their work in amending the Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025. I have been advised there is an amendment which could not be moved by the other place because it had an appropriation attached to it, meaning it must be moved in this place. Therefore, I will now move on behalf of the government an amendment which enacts a commissioner and deputy commissioner model for the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission. This amendment inserts a new section into the bill to provide for the terms and conditions of the appointment of a deputy commissioner who will support the commissioner in performing their role. It clarifies that both the commissioner and deputy commissioner are covered by the Public Administration Act 2004, providing consistent accountability, ethical obligations and governance under the new leadership model. Moving from a four-commissioner model to a two-commissioner model, as this amendment will deliver, will streamline leadership and governance at the commission and provide clearer and more effective leadership. Moving to a commissioner and deputy commissioner model strengthens accountability. It reduces duplication while maintaining the commission's independence and core functions.

These amendments make targeted changes to strengthen lived-experience leadership and retain the commission's existing oversight powers. The amendments require that at least one of the mental health and wellbeing commissioner or the new role of deputy commissioner has lived experience. This embeds lived experience at the highest level of leadership, ensuring it remains a focus of every aspect of the commission's work. I commend the amendments.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (16:36): Today is an important day for the mental health sector because today we see amendments that will be passed through this house that will ensure that the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission have the teeth to be able to do the job that they were originally intended to have, as set out by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System back in 2021. It is an incredible day whether you are one of the lived-experience people, people who are carers or consumers; whether you are a stakeholder working within the mental health sector; or whether you just care a lot that people can have access to mental health support where and when they need it.

The fact of the matter is that in implementing the royal commission's recommendations we needed a commission to be able to have oversight of this important work. We needed a commission who were able to access the relevant data, able to have that level of oversight, so that they could provide recommendations to government and so that they could ensure that where recommendations had not been implemented the government could be held to account and that when recommendations had been implemented well they were able to acknowledge that to give consumers comfort that the mental health system was actually designed and would work for Victorians.

Unfortunately we have had a situation where the commission has been unable to do its job. Having four commissioners has been challenging in working out that dynamic over how they could actually fulfil the role of an organisation or entity which had been newly established. Taking in the aspects that were previously under the mental health complaints commissioner and also having the responsibility for oversight of the implementation of the royal commission's recommendations, it was a heaving role. There were challenges in being able to deliver the aspirations of what the commission was set out to achieve. Unfortunately some of those challenges were because the commission could not fulfil its role because it could not access data from the Department of Health. This may be because there were loopholes and information was intended to be provided, but there were restrictions that provided for that within the existing legislation.

Given its oversight role, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission have an obligation to access a high level of detail and have a higher threshold around the level of detail that they should be able to access to fulfil their role. They were unable to access that data, and as a result information was not able to be received. The workload that the commissioners would have liked to provide to the government and to the community was not able to be delivered. As a result, there has been some contest over whether the commission was actually designed correctly and whether it could ever fulfil its role. There is incredible frustration right across the mental health sector and indeed for many Victorians, particularly Victorians who live in rural and regional Victoria, in regard to mental health supports.

When we first heard that the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System was going to go ahead, there was a sigh of relief. Victoria used to have the best mental health system in Australia, if not the world, and over time that had eroded. There was a glimmer of hope that we might actually get to a position where Victoria was again a world leader when it came to delivery of mental health services. There was certainly a great hope when the royal commission handed down its interim report in 2019 and then, further, its final report in 2021 that we would finally have a responsive and accessible mental health system and, importantly, that lived experience would have a key voice in that. Over the past five years, can I say, it has been a bitter disappointment. Access to mental health supports in Victoria has got worse. Our suicide rate is at a tragically high level. We know that we simply do not have the workers to fulfil the demands that Victorians are facing at this time. I will acknowledge that there have been challenges over the last five years. We had the challenges of COVID, which turned mental health for many Victorians on its head. People were turning to alcohol to cope with that

situation, and for some that is still a challenge that they are working through. The dissociation from the community and the inability to talk to others in the community about what they were going through has had a significant impact on Victorians' mental health, and it has been a long road to recovery to regain that resilience and strength in their decisions and in their own actions and in their own mind and body.

We know, though, that we can do better. We are five years into a 10-year reform. The Liberals and Nationals are committed to getting Victoria's mental health reforms back on track, and I am so proud today that we are able to support amendments that will see the commission being able to fulfil its role to be an appropriate oversight body and give it some teeth and make sure that we have reporting undertaken and made in a transparent way so that all Victorians can understand how far we have got to go before we make Victoria's mental health system work in a way that supports all Victorians.

It should not matter where you live. It should not matter if you are in the heart of Melbourne or in the outer reaches of regional Victoria. It should not matter whether you are a young person – a child who is battling an eating disorder or being bullied at school. If you have got a diagnosable mental illness, if you are going through the heartache of what we see in regional Victoria at the moment – whether it is about rising input costs like the cost of fuel that we are seeing, whether it is about the incredible impact of the emergency services tax or energy infrastructure being rolled out across the state or whether we look at just changes of land use around mining or the urban sprawl taking over otherwise productive agricultural land – there are many, many pressures on people living in rural and regional Victoria, and unfortunately the access to mental health services is simply not available in the way that it should be.

I know that my office gets many, many inquiries from people who come to me, a member of Parliament, because it is their first thought of where they can go to access support. I am not sure whether I would ever think of going to a member of Parliament's office to seek mental health support, but this is the level that we are at across the state. I know my colleague the member for Mildura has done the same thing, and she has been a strong advocate for better mental health services in the electorate of Mildura and also has been a strong support for people in her electorate who are looking for mental health supports, who may even need inpatient support and they are unable to access it. This is a huge step forward today in giving the commission some teeth so that they can deliver transparency and we can get mental health reforms back on track.

I would also like to note the amendments in relation to the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing. Within these amendments that have come through tonight there is a reaffirmation of the importance of people with lived experience having their voice, having their say within the mental health reforms and in oversight within the relevant bodies. The Victorian collaborative centre was designed to, and it was hoped it would, deliver the mental health training and learning that was required to get our workforce back on track, particularly with reflection upon the lived experience in making sure that we could build that workforce. My understanding is the collaborative centre has not quite delivered on these aspirations. However, it is very, very positive that we have been able to fight for the voice of people with lived experience to be represented as deputy commissioners, and part of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission and the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing.

I would like to thank the many people who have fought so hard for mental health reforms in this state – people with lived experience, the carers of consumers, the stakeholders and the peak bodies who have worked tirelessly to ensure that we improve Victoria's mental health system and who believe that it is worth the fight to make things better. I would like to acknowledge also the Health and Community Services Union, who have been tireless advocates to achieve the amendments within this legislation, and the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council, Tandem and Self Help Addiction Resource Centre, who have been amazing advocates for people with lived experience and carers of consumers. We are all thankful that we were able together to achieve the amendments that are before the house today.

I would also like to thank the support and trust of my colleagues within the Nationals and the Liberals. It is wonderful to have enormous support for improvements in mental health. We have got fierce advocates for mental health supports within the Nationals and within the Liberal Party. Knowing that when you put forward amendments there is no question that it is the right thing to do and that you have got people behind you and beside you that will support you gives me great comfort. When it comes to next November, if we are elected to government, we will continue to fight for improved mental health outcomes for every single Victorian in this state. I commend this amendment to the house.

Motion agreed to.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision and requesting their agreement to the further amendments.

Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ros Spence:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (16:47): I rise to speak on the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026, which we are returning to. It has been, I think, good to listen to a number of contributions both on this bill but also on the mental health amendments which have come back to the house from the Council. I do want to talk about the Safe Food Victoria Bill specifically. It is a really important bill. It is a bill which seeks to safeguard the entire supply chain of food production, distribution, sale and retail in Victoria through the restaurant trade, through cafes and through food retailers of all stripes. It is a bill which I think will improve the regulatory frameworks within which so many food manufacturers and food distributors who serve Victoria's northern suburbs work. I am very conscious that we are home to – and indeed the Preston electorate is also home to – a significant concentration of Victoria's food manufacturers and distributors who rely upon the primary produce grown by communities in the seats of members across this house.

The intent of this bill is to simplify what are presently very complex administrative and regulatory arrangements for farmers, for distributors, for manufacturers and for retailers. With four separate acts, two responsible ministers, a system that is regulated by the Department of Health, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Dairy Food Safety Victoria, PrimeSafe and 79 separate local councils, these arrangements self-evidently, I would argue, are administratively complex and challenging for entities within that entire supply chain to navigate as they seek to contribute very significantly to Victoria's economy, while also ensuring that the produce that they grow, transport, manufacture, process and sell is safe at every step of that journey. I want to thank the Minister for Agriculture for the exhaustive consultation that has been undertaken in the context of this bill, because of the number of entities and the number of dimensions of that supply chain. That consultation is important. It is really important to get a bill of this complexity right, because the safety of food is absolutely paramount. And I will come to proven risks to the broader economy when entities and when jurisdictions get things like food safety wrong.

But I want to speak briefly about the importance of the food sector to the broader Victorian economy, both up and downstream, as it were. If you look at areas like your own hinterland in north-west Victoria, broadacre farming, the food bowl of Victoria in a literal or perhaps metaphorical sense, it is a very significant economic driver as well as a food production area. In total, exports from the food sector are worth over $20 billion to the Victorian economy each and every year, and that number is growing. It reflects the extraordinary productivity of Victorian farmers, the way in which innovation has been embraced on-farm, both in that kind of broadacre farming sector but also the diversification that farmers have engaged in perhaps in areas of Victoria further away from Sea Lake, where there is higher rainfall, where there is that capacity to undertake things like dairying and to move into – I think

someone mentioned Meredith Dairy earlier, in another contribution – those kinds of value-adding in the context of agriculture creates that economic dividend to our state which both employs Victorians but also enables us to provide exports and contribute to the national balance of payments and to the things which keep our entire economy and society prosperous and viable.

I also am mindful of the regional tourism dimensions as well as obviously exports. Regional tourism can in and of itself be perceived as an export if somebody is visiting Australia from another part of the world. We can think about particularly regional economies where very high-profile restaurants, for example, have established themselves. I have never been to them, but I am well aware of them, Acting Speaker Lambert – you are probably much more au fait with these things than I – but places like Brae in Birregurra and Stefano's up in Mildura are obviously well-regarded restaurants and predicated upon the presence very nearby of locally grown, world-leading and, crucially, safe food. There is a risk therefore to that entire supply chain and to those local economies if we do not have a regulatory framework that is fit for purpose.

I think very particularly about the litany of failures that has beset the British economy and the British food sector over recent decades. I was living in the UK as a very young person when the BSE – mad cow disease – outbreak first really became known, and the human impacts of that in the form of vCJD, variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease I think, from memory, were incredibly pernicious both to humans and life and livelihood but also to the British beef farming sector. It decimated that sector. It saw exports onto the continent of Europe and other parts of the world fall off a metaphorical cliff with a huge impact upon rural economies and rural communities, such as the one that I was living in as a very young man. But the effects of that impact on the British beef sector have been long-lasting. There remains a taint in regard to British beef that continues to bedevil agricultural economies and rural communities in Britain to this day. It remains also a significant public health challenge because of the way in which vCJD manifests and may continue to manifest in people many decades after they have been first exposed to that bovine disease. Initially, vCJD can manifest as mild symptoms of MS, and it becomes very difficult for clinicians to diagnose that disease. The reason that is so challenging from a public health perspective is because, obviously, in the context of blood transfusions, people may give blood, and that is a carrier for that incredibly dangerous and ultimately irrevocably lethal condition. It is why I have only, along with many hundreds of thousands of other Victorians, been very recently able to actually give blood in this state, because of that enduring risk.

I return to why that is important. If you do not have proper control over the supply chain – if governments abdicate that responsibility and if they do not get the regulatory frameworks right – then you have farming practices, as took place in the UK, where effectively you had cattle cannibalising other cattle in the form of the feedstock that was being supplied to them, and that then led to BSE taking root and to vCJD becoming a challenge in the human population. With no diagnosis fundamentally until after somebody who has vCJD has died, whereupon their brain can be interrogated, that is not a position we want to be in. It is obviously an extreme example in some respects, but it is one that I think speaks to the real dangers of not having appropriate regulatory settings in the context of food safety. I also recall, when living in the UK more recently, the horsemeat scandal, which was enabled as a consequence of horsemeat entering the supply chain because of lax labelling and lax food standards which remained problematic in the UK. This undermined consumer confidence in prime meat production more generally and again had a massive impact on farm gate prices and on the rural communities which depend upon them.

As I have sought to articulate, it is important to get these settings right, and that is why the consultation that the minister has undertaken was really important to avoid unforeseen consequences but to make sure that there is a clear process should issues in the context of food safety arise. There will be one point of contact for farmers, food distributors and retailers so that they do not have to navigate that complex web of multiple regulators, of 79 councils – of a multitude of different regulators having a part to play in something which we all rely upon as consumers, as people who eat food, and as people who rely upon a Victorian agriculture sector that is, as I say, generating over $20 billion of exports a

year. We need to get this right for the entire supply chain, and I think this bill goes a long way to doing that. I commend it to the house.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (16:57): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this very commonsense bill that ensures not only that we look after the food bowl, which is so important to our community, but that with the creation of Safe Food Victoria we are representing a long-planned merger of food safety regulators. People may not know this about Cranbourne, but being an interface with other parts of Melbourne, we have really important asparagus farmers and other people who are providing agricultural and food goods into the Melbourne market. This is an opportunity for me to thank the many people who work particularly at our asparagus farms and some of the other suppliers that are in my electorate and are at the edge of Melbourne. As others have done, I am going to take the opportunity not just to reflect on the important role that our farmers play, especially the ones in the area near where I live and in the community that I represent, but also I am conscious of the role that they play in making sure that in our cafes and restaurants in the places where our community comes together we can rely on a safe and secure food supply. I know we have got restaurants like The Amazing Grace in Cranbourne, somewhere that people come together and really enjoy time with each other and enjoy the conviviality of Adam Sadiqzai, who is a great host.

Emma Vulin interjected.

Pauline RICHARDS: Yes, the member for Pakenham knows Adam well, and he has always made us feel welcome. I am always grateful to have the opportunity to experience the fresh produce as well as the hospitality that are on offer at The Amazing Grace. So many of our restaurants in Cranbourne represent the diversity of our community. The Afghan Star is certainly a meeting point and a place that I always make sure people come and spend time. Fresh food that the people of Afghanistan have brought to Melbourne and to Cranbourne in particular is what makes us so much stronger.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Crime

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (17:01): (1599) My adjournment is for the Premier. The action I am seeking is for the Premier to explain why since she became Premier in 2023 criminal offences in Boroondara have increased every single year, putting the community at risk and leaving residents afraid in their own homes. My community, like all Victorians, has serious concerns about rising crime, especially when it comes to violent crime, home invasions, carjackings and knife crime. For too many residents, their homes are no longer the safe havens they should be, where people expect to be able to come home at night without the fear of armed offenders breaking in while they and their children sleep. That sense of safety has been completely eroded under this Premier's watch. Under Labor crime is up and police numbers are down. Criminal offending has reached a new record high, and Victorians have never been less safe. The latest stats, just released today, show that in Boroondara total offences are up 13 per cent; motor vehicle theft is up 16 per cent; residential aggravated burglary is up 6 per cent; residential non-aggravated burglary is up 14 per cent; and prohibited weapons offences are up a staggering 43 per cent.

Just a few weeks ago one of my constituents arrived home at around 9:15 to find their street in lockdown. Police had established a perimeter following reports of attempted carjackings nearby. He was told to go inside, stay at the back of his home and remain alert in case offenders were hiding in the backyard. Police, including dog squads, then moved through neighbouring properties and ultimately arrested two individuals. It later emerged that those involved were allegedly armed with firearms and had attempted to carjack vehicles in the area, including outside a school while a father was waiting to pick up his daughter in broad daylight. That is not something Victorians should have to experience.

Reports of machete attacks, carjackings and home invasions across Melbourne are leaving Victorians feeling anxious, frustrated and frankly scared in their own homes. The constituent who contacted me expressed what many are feeling right across this state: disbelief that this type of offending is happening day in, day out under this Labor government and frustration that consequences do not match the seriousness of the crime. They are asking a very simple question: when is this going to stop?

Victorians understand that policing alone cannot solve every issue, but it does help. There are currently 367 fewer full-time police officers than when Jacinta Allan became Premier, and more than 40 police stations remain closed or operating on reduced hours. Victorians expect a justice system that backs police in, holds offenders accountable and acts as a real deterrent. Victorians want to feel safe again in their own neighbourhoods. My question to the Premier is: why does crime continue to rise under your watch?

Electric vehicle charging infrastructure

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:04): (1600) My adjournment is for the Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for Climate Action. The action I seek is for the minister for energy and climate action to visit the new EV charger installed at the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre in Albert Park. This EV charger is one of four recently installed in my electorate with Victorian Labor government support. As we strive for a 2030 target of half of all new light vehicle sales to be zero emissions, Victorians need greater access to EV charging. This includes public chargers at destinations and along your journey. Labor knows this, which is why we are getting on with installing EV chargers

across the state. EVs have zero exhaust emissions. This makes them better for the environment and our health than fossil fuel vehicles. The EV chargers in Albert Park are exactly the kind of practical, visible investment that encourages confidence in EVs and removes barriers to uptake. I look forward to having the minister join me to celebrate the delivery of the latest EV charger in the Albert Park electorate.

Birchip five-ways intersection

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (17:05): (1601) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the safety issues at the Birchip five-ways intersection to be addressed. Deputy Speaker, I do not know that you would know Birchip very well, but the five-ways intersection there has proven to be quite dangerous, and there have been a number of accidents there over the last 12 months, and going further back than that. Yes, it is a country road, but it serves the communities of Corack, Birchip, Donald and Charlton. It is quite unsafe and hard to navigate. If you are not a local, it would be a hard-to-navigate type of intersection. It is a main thoroughfare for a lot of grain trucks, in particular; fuel trucks, when they can get them; and local families as well. It is dangerous. There was an accident there recently. The Birchip Development Group have contacted me on a number of occasions. They would love an update on whether there is a plan to reconstruct it. They are of the opinion that a small roundabout – because trucks do not like big ones – might be the best way to clear that up, or a reconstruction altogether, turning it into a crossroad. There is a pub on the corner, though, and we do not want to see that pub in any way interrupted in its business, because it is a wonderful establishment. But the five-ways intersection is in desperate need of a reconstruction or at least the planning for one.

While we are talking about Birchip roads, I drove the Birchip-Sea Lake Road the other day and then the Birchip-Rainbow Road. I wear a Garmin and even though I had not been up any stairs or any hills, because there are not many of those in the Mallee, I did manage to get my 10 floors of climbing stairs whilst driving the Birchip-Sea Lake Road and the Birchip-Rainbow Road, so that probably needs addressing as well, whilst we are in the process of addressing the issues at the Birchip five-ways intersection.

Glen Waverley electorate multicultural communities

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (17:07): (1602) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Can the minister update the house on what the Allan Labor government is doing to respond to the rise of hate and division and to ensure families in communities like the Glen Waverley district feel safe and respected and that they belong? In Glen Waverley we are a community built on families from all over the world – families who came here for opportunity, who work hard, raise their kids and build a life in our schools, our businesses and our workplaces. That diversity is our story. It is our strength, and I will always stand up for it. But right now families in my community are telling me something is not right. Following the anti-immigration rallies we saw last year, I heard from many parents in my community that were worried about their children travelling to the city. We have seen anti-Chinese signs appear in our neighbourhoods, with consequences of children being racially abused on buses and at school. If you are a parent, that cuts deep, because it does not stop at the school gate. It comes home; it stays with you. It is what hate does, and that is not who we are, because in Glen Waverley the Chinese Australian families working hard for their kids, that is us. The Indian Australian small business owner, that is us. The Sri Lankan, Tamil, Pakistani, Malaysian, Korean and Vietnamese families building a future, that is us. They are not separate from our community; they are our community.

Racism and fear do not happen in a vacuum. When the Liberal Party's federal deputy leader Senator Jane Hume talks about Chinese spies, it does not stay in Canberra; it lands in my community. It lands on volunteers who give their time to participate in our democracy, only to be made to feel like their loyalty is somehow suspect. That is wrong. And when the Nationals then Liberal senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price makes offensive remarks about Indian migrants, that too lands here, on families

raising children, running businesses and contributing every day. It creates doubt, it creates hurt and it makes people question whether they truly belong. That is the damage of careless, divisive language. To every family in Glen Waverley, to every parent, to every student, to every volunteer, I say: you should never feel like you have to hide who you are. Your children deserve to feel safe, proud that they belong, because you do belong. Glen Waverley is your home. Victoria is your home.

I also want to place on the record my deep appreciation for my staff, who serve our community with integrity, professionalism and an unwavering commitment to the people of the Glen Waverley district. They work long hours, often behind the scenes, helping residents navigate complex issues and supporting families in need and helpfully communicating in language so we can best serve our community. It is deeply disappointing that Anthony Galloway of the *Australian* has chosen to target my electorate officers, including naming one of them in an article, simply for doing their job, exposing them to unfair scrutiny and personal distress. That does not strengthen accountability, it undermines it. My staff deserve respect, and I will stand with them every single day.

Berwick electorate crime

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (17:10): (1603) The adjournment I raise is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to come out to the Berwick electorate and attend one of our crime forums with the local community. I note that the government, today of all days when the crime statistics have come out, have tried to highlight to Victoria that the crime crisis is over. Those are the words they want to use – that crime is on its way down and people are safe across the community. Well, let me assure you that is simply not the case in Casey. In Casey alone, aggravated burglaries in houses have increased 21 per cent; 583 homes in my electorate, throughout Casey, have had aggravated burglaries in the last 12 months. That is 583 families that will never feel safe in their own homes again, and yet the Premier puts a media release out today saying the crime crisis has finished.

Motor vehicle theft in Casey is 31 per cent up; 2014 cars were stolen in the communities in Casey. Again, people are worried about where they park their cars and what is going to happen. We have got aggravated robbery up 18 per cent. The total offences alone are up 14 per cent. Stealing from a motor vehicle is up 18 per cent. Stealing from a retail store is up 40 per cent. Again, it is the community, those people working in those stores, that are the ones that are threatened continuously by thugs in these communities who are coming out there. They are not there for anything else other than violence and theft. They are just the crooks that we have to get off the street that continue to get back on the street.

So my message to the Premier is: maybe it is time, instead of standing in here and putting a media release out, to come and meet the real victims, those out in those areas in Clyde North, in Berwick and in Berwick South.

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

Brad BATTIN: I note that the Minister for Health at the table says she does it all the time. Well, I can tell you the Premier has never, not once, ever come out to the Berwick electorate and met with victims of crime and spoken to the people who are the ones that now feel unsafe in their homes, those that have had aggravated burglaries with knives, baseball bats and machetes whilst their kids were home, those that have rung 000 and found that there are no police at the Clyde North police station. The community out there is angry, and they just want answers. What they want is a Premier that takes accountability. So my adjournment today is for the Premier to come out, take accountability and meet with my community to assure them that we can do more to fix the crime crisis that this government created, in the Casey electorate.

Highpoint shopping centre

Katie HALL (Footscray) (17:13): (1604) The action I seek is from the Minister for Police, and I am seeking an update on Operation Pulse as it relates to Highpoint shopping centre. Minister, what benefits has Operation Pulse seen for community safety in my electorate, and how will the extension

and government investment continue to ensure that families, workers and shoppers are safe and feel safe at Highpoint and other shopping precincts?

Brad Battin: Deputy Speaker, I direct your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Collingwood College

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (17:15): (1605) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action that I seek is for the minister to visit Collingwood College and make their classrooms safe and functional. On Monday I visited Collingwood College, and what I saw was absolutely shocking. Concrete from the roof is falling through the ceiling into the classrooms below, chunks large enough to seriously injure or even kill a student. There are large pools of water across the entire floor and literal stalactites where the ceiling has been leaking for years. This is not an isolated incident; this is the result of long-term water damage, a failure to maintain and a failure to act from the Labor state government, a government that has known about this problem for years.

The Victorian School Building Authority's emergency response program Make-safe came along and rightly closed off the entire top floor of the building. These classrooms and all the school's science labs are now out of bounds. Students are crammed into the remaining spaces, and staff and families are rightly anxious about whether other parts of the building are even safe. We are at a point of neglect now where the concrete is collapsing, steel reinforcements are corroding and water is leaking through the ceiling into floors below, down stairwells and into hallways. This issue remains seriously unresolved, and the government is missing in action. There have been no further responses from the government or the VSBA since the floor was blocked off, and the school has had to contract an engineer themselves just to assess the damage in a report that the Labor state government has ignored. Minister, this is a matter of urgent safety and of equity. This school community deserves to have safe learning spaces like everyone else, without the risk of concrete collapsing into the school. I ask that the minister urgently visit Collingwood College to see the damage, direct the VSBA to assess the site and fund the necessary repairs to make this school safe without delay.

Narre Warren South electorate multicultural communities

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (17:17): (1606) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the other place, and it concerns the increase of hate and fear in my very multicultural community of Narre Warren South. The action that I seek is that the minister visit my electorate of Narre Warren South to meet with our multifaith leaders. In Narre Warren South we are a community that is built by many families from all over the world – people who came here, worked hard, raised their kids and built a life. You see it in our schools, our shops and our workplaces everywhere, and it is what makes our community the incredibly great place that it is. As the son of migrants from Sri Lanka who made a very similar journey – they came to Australia in search of a better life for our whole family, and they found that in Melbourne's outer south-east – it is a story I know really, really well. As the local member I will always stand up for diversity, I will always stand up for inclusion and I will always stand up for understanding, but jeez, I will always stand up against hate because we are a state and a nation that is built on immigration, which has contributed immensely to the fantastic state that Victoria is.

When people across our multicultural communities tell me that they are now feeling targeted, that they are now feeling picked on because of their background, because of their name, because of the way they dress or because of how they look, just know that it really gets my goat and just know that it goes against every single thing that this government stands for. I recognise that many in my area, including our Muslim community, have felt this acutely, particularly in the face of recent antagonistic, emotional and fearmongering rhetoric – and it is rhetoric. But this does not happen out of nowhere. It happens when people start finger-pointing and unfairly blaming and targeting our migrant communities, and that is exactly what Pauline Hanson and One Nation do – no policies, no plans, no idea. When the

Liberals and Nationals stand silent, they stand right beside the One Nation party, they support them and they support that division, that fear and that hate. I want everyone from the Muslim and other multifaith and multicultural communities across my electorate to know this: you do belong here. The electorate of Narre Warren South is your home. Labor stands with you. We stand against hate, and we stand for your safety as well. You can guarantee we will not let the Liberals and Pauline Hanson divide our community. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Colac police station

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (17:20): (1607) My adjournment matter this afternoon is directed to the Minister for Police. The action I seek from the Minister for Police is a simple one: fix the front door on the Colac police station. Since 12 February, more than a month ago, the doors of my electorate's only 24-hour police station have been slammed shut in the face of my community. You cannot access a police service in my community without having to ring 000, if in fact that connects. This is a huge problem to my community. It is leading to great uncertainty. The nearest available police presence is in fact in excess of 1 hour to Geelong, in excess of 1 hour to Ballarat and in excess of 1 hour to Warrnambool, and it is simply not good enough, with rising crime issues in our state. We have had crime statistics out today: we know there is one crime every 50 seconds, we know there are three cars stolen every hour and out in country Victoria there are increases in cattle theft and animal duffing going on in our community. It is simply not good enough. The community expects to be able to get the services of a police station. It is really akin to a pharmacy having its door shut or a hospital having its door shut. These are essential services in a community.

The government say that in over a month they have been unable to repair a door that is not visibly broken. In fact Australia's largest electric door salesman visited the Colac police station this past month, and he diagnosed the brand of door and the fact that the mother door was broken. He believes it is at maximum a $4000 fix and should take no longer than an hour, and yet the resources of this state have been unable to be mustered. We have seen ministers – police ministers and health ministers and others – roaming around spending all sorts of dollars, but they cannot find the resources to let the police doors of the Colac station open. Some of us might think that the reason they cannot is because we simply do not have enough police – not enough police to man a brand new 24-hour police station. Mind you, this brand new 24-hour police station last year was downgraded to only 16 hours. At the start of this year this careless, heartless government downgraded it to business hours only. Since 12 February – it only lasted on business hours for less than a month – it has been closed completely. It is not good enough. Minister, I seek your support to fix the front door.

Box Hill electorate multicultural communities

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (17:23): (1608) My adjournment is also for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the action that the Labor government is taking to support our multicultural communities in the Box Hill electorate. It was almost 30 years ago that Pauline Hanson delivered her inaugural speech to federal Parliament. In that speech she stated, 'We are in danger of being swamped by Asians,' and ever since then Pauline Hanson and her One Nation party have demonised migrant communities, who have worked hard to build lives for themselves in Australia, and questioned their loyalty to our country. Prior to the 1996 federal election the federal Liberal Party disendorsed Pauline Hanson because they understood that her message of hate and division had no place in Parliament or in our public discourse. At the time, coalition members such as the late Petro Georgiou and the late Senator Ron Boswell took a strong and principled stance against One Nation and its legitimisation through preference swaps. I wish I could say the same thing about the modern Liberal Party today. Not only has the Liberal Party refused to rule out the possibility of doing a preference deal with One Nation at the November state election but former Premier and Liberal Party elder Jeff Kennett has called on the Liberal Party to form an alliance with One Nation. The fact is that a Liberal–One Nation alliance would do untold damage to our multicultural communities and undermine the enormous contribution that migrants from all backgrounds have made to our great state.

Responses

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (17:24): The member for Kew raised a matter for the attention of the Premier concerning crime in Boroondara. The member for Albert Park raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Climate Action and has invited the minister to come and inspect some new EV charging stations in her electorate. The member for Mildura raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding the Birchip five-ways intersection. The member for Glen Waverley raised a very important matter for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and specifically he is seeking an update on what our government is doing to tackle hate and division. The member for Berwick raised a matter for the attention of the Premier seeking for her to visit his electorate. The member for Footscray raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police, and she was seeking an update on Operation Pulse, which has been very successful, and I am sure the Minister for Police looks forward to providing that update to her.

The member for Richmond raised a matter for the Minister for Education regarding Collingwood College. The member for Narre Warren South, who I want to commend on his contribution, raised a very important matter for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and he is seeking that the minister come and meet with multifaith leaders in his community to assure them that our government will always stand against racism, hate and division. The member for Polwarth raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police. The member for Box Hill raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, again recognising the cultural diversity in his community, and in particular he is seeking that the minister outline our ongoing support to multicultural communities.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: As is customary at the end of the week, I would like to thank our clerks, our attendants and all of our parliamentary staff for keeping the wheels running. The house stands adjourned until we come back.

House adjourned 5:27 pm.