Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 26 August 2026

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

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

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

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

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

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

Party abbreviations

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

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Wednesday 26 August 2026

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

Announcements

Victoria Police deaths

The PRESIDENT (09:33): Today marks the one-year anniversary of the Porepunkah tragedy. To honour the service and sacrifice of Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart, who were tragically killed in the line of duty at Porepunkah on 26 August 2025, I ask members to rise in their place for 1 minute's silence.

Members stood in their places.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General – Delivering the Suburban Rail Loop, August 2026 *(Ordered to be published)*.

Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978 – Register of Interests – Returns submitted by Members of the Legislative Council – Ordinary Returns, 1 February 2026 to 30 June 2026 *(Ordered to be published)*.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notice of approval of the Surf Coast Planning Scheme – Amendment C146.

Production of documents

Construction industry

Box Hill brickworks site

The Clerk: I table two letters from the Attorney-General, both dated 25 August 2026, in response to resolutions of the Council on 29 July 2026 relating to the John Merritt review of infrastructure worksites on the motion of Mrs McArthur and on 12 August 2026 relating to the Box Hill brickworks site on the motion of Mr Welch. The letters each state that the date for the production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the orders as soon as possible.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (09:37): I move:

That these outrageous letters be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

Melina Bath giving notice:

David Davis interjected.

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, President, I thought I would miss Mr Davis as he moved to the other side of the chamber, but I am not missing him at all because he is so loud that I cannot help but hear, which makes it somewhat paradoxically difficult to hear Ms Bath, who is directly opposite.

The PRESIDENT: I call the house to order.

Further notices given.

Members statements

EMILY's List Australia

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (09:47): I rise today to wish EMILY's List Australia a very happy 30th birthday. Last sitting week it was fantastic to welcome so many passionate advocates and members to Parliament to celebrate three decades of groundbreaking work. Since 1996 EMILY's List has been an unstoppable force in transforming politics across our country, providing the financial backing, mentoring and strategic support needed to get progressive women elected to public office. I wish to extend my thanks to the CEO of EMILY's List Pamela Anderson for her leadership, along with the staff, committee members and every single sister across the movement who donates, volunteers and champions our fierce candidates every single day. Because of that collective effort, the Victorian parliamentary Labor Party is proud to have a strong majority of women across our caucus. When women are fairly represented across the decision-making table, they deliver better policy and stronger outcomes for all Victorians. EMILY's List has fundamentally reshaped the face of our Parliament over the past 30 years, and I have no doubt that we will continue to see this important work for many, many decades to come. Happy birthday, EMILY's List.

Dolly Parton

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (09:48): Today the world lost one of the greatest entertainers and philanthropists of our time, Dolly Parton. Dolly was not only an amazing singer and songwriter, she was a great philanthropist and touched the lives of millions of children through her Imagination Library, which is dedicated to inspiring a love of reading in children from birth to age five. Thirty-one years ago Dolly founded Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which has distributed more than 332 million free books to children under five since its inception, including more than 12 million in Australia. In 2013 I was the early childhood minister when the Imagination Library partnered with United Way Australia to extend the program to Australia. It was launched in Melbourne during Dolly's February 2014 tour of Australia, and I was invited to the launch and gifted tickets and a backstage pass to her concert. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend either event due to the Hazelwood open-cut mine fire and my responsibilities as Minister for Housing. Not being able to attend will forever be one of my biggest regrets, but the needs of the state had to come first. In April 2020 Dolly donated more than US$1 million to the Vanderbilt University Medical Center to fund research to develop the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, and in March 2021 she received her own Moderna COVID vaccine. Vale, Dolly Parton. You will always be remembered as an amazing singer, songwriter and humanitarian.

Australian Football League

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:50): I rise to send my love, my support and my solidarity to the victim-survivor at the centre of the sexual assault allegations involving Sydney Swans players. What has been striking is how quickly the conversation has centred on the blokes – their careers, their football club and their teammates – and what this means for the AFL. That is not accidental. Her career, her safety and her future matter too, but that is barely even mentioned. We live in a culture where men's careers and reputations are routinely treated as more important than women whose dignity and autonomy are violated. Despite that, this week the AFL CEO denied the league has a culture issue, but it is clear they only claim to care about gender equality as window-dressing for being complicit in a culture where misogyny, entitlement and disrespect towards women are minimised, excused or treated as just part of the football environment. Their denial of this is, ironically, another example of the culture problem itself. This is bigger than one team, and it is about more than just a few players. It is about the impact it has on all sporting clubs in our country – the locker room banter, the sexist jokes and the countless examples where women are expected to absorb the consequences of male behaviour while men are given endless opportunities for redemption. The AFL has enormous influence on men and boys in this country, and that influence comes with responsibility.

It is not up to them to tell us if there is a culture issue; it is up to them to listen when we are already saying that there is.

Victoria Police

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (09:52): Victoria Police play a vital role in keeping our community safe, which is why the Carroll Labor government is giving them the resources they need to detect and deter more crime in more places more often. Last week, with the member for Bentleigh Nick Staikos, I visited Moorabbin police station, which is one of the first police stations across Melbourne to have police reservists deployed behind the front desk. While we were there, we saw the reservist who had taken over the front counter operations, allowing more uniformed officers, frontline officers, to get back out onto the streets where they are needed. These reservists and the investment in them will allow our stations to remain open longer without sacrificing the time that officers can spend on patrol. Fifty reservists have been deployed since July and another 150 are in training, and the government have just announced another 200 reservists in addition to that will be recruited. With 400 reservists available, more frontline officers will be able to undertake an additional 86,000 shifts. We are not stopping there. We are recruiting additional PSOs to support operations across Victoria at train stations and in shopping centres. Since April PSOs have been out staffing earlier shifts at stations right across Southern Metro, including at Moorabbin, where they are patrolling from 9 until the last train every day. They are also in our shopping centres for the first time with these new recruits, and Victoria Police has designed a statistics-based model of deploying reservists and PSOs where they are most needed to keep Victorians safe.

International Overdose Awareness Day

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (09:53): Monday 31 August marks International Overdose Awareness Day, an initiative of the Penington Institute that raises awareness of overdose as a major public health issue and advocates for overdose prevention. This year's theme, '25 years on. Still needed', is still, unfortunately and sadly, relevant. Accidental overdose deaths continue to outnumber our road toll by a wide margin. In 2022 there were 2356 overdose deaths recorded in Australia, with 80 per cent of them unintentional. In the same year there were 1182 road fatalities – around half the number of overdose deaths. Every one of these deaths is a tragedy, yet overdose prevention does not receive anywhere near the same level of funding as road safety. Victoria's statewide action plan to reduce drug harms includes important life-saving measures, including trials of naloxone vending machines, and we also commend the government's continued support for Victoria's pill-testing service. However, it is profoundly disappointing that the government rejected Ken Lay's recommendation to trial a supervised injecting room in Melbourne's CBD, a service that certainly would have saved lives. Overdose deaths are preventable. We can and we should do everything we can to avoid these entirely preventable tragedies.

St Kilda Police and Citizens Youth Club

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:55): I recently had the opportunity to attend the reopening of the St Kilda PCYC. This is a place that has provided a welcoming and non-judgemental space for kids in our community. It was a sad situation to hear of the plans to close it down a few years ago, but due to the tireless efforts of members and the community the situation has turned around. I want to pay tribute to the locals and the community members who fought tooth and nail to make sure that the centre kept the doors open. I do not think there is any doubt as to the value of the service that the St Kilda PCYC provides, and it is great to see such an important institution continue to operate. I want to congratulate Port Phillip council, community activists, the federal member for Macnamara Josh Burns and the team at PCYC on their success, and I wish them all the very best going forward.

Transport Workers' Union

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:56): I also had the opportunity to spend time at the Transport Workers' Union delegates conference. It was great to have the opportunity to catch up with

so many old friends from the union and to see important milestones and the achievements of hardworking organisers and delegates. Many of these delegates work tirelessly for better pay and conditions for members of the transport industry, and the Carroll Labor government will always have their back for that fight.

Electricity infrastructure

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (09:56): The Liberal–National–One Nation plan to cut transmission and pray for new gas will cost Victorians and cause more climate-killing emissions. Cancelling the VNI West transmission project, as the Liberal Party has pledged to do while chasing One Nation announcements, would kill jobs and investment in cheap renewables and drive up power bills for Victorians. It will not magically stop the busted old Yallourn power station from closing in 2028, but it will stop us building the renewables that we need to replace it. Even delaying VNI West for the four-year term of the next Parliament would cost Victorians $4816 per household in the long term. The Liberals say that instead of building the necessary infrastructure we need for cheaper renewables they will just burn more gas. But there is a problem with that, and not just with the carbon emissions it would cause – the Liberals cannot say where that gas would come from. Victoria has already used up 90 per cent of commercially viable gas reserves. To quote Joy Toose from Environment Victoria:

> There's no such thing as cheap new gas anymore. But what we do have are endless reserves of solar and wind.

The Liberal Party's anti-renewables ideology will mean more expensive, less reliable electricity for Victorians and more carbon emissions cooking our planet. Labor also continues to approve new polluting fossil fuel projects. Only the Greens stand for a fossil fuel free future powered by cheap and abundant renewable energy.

Vietnam Veterans Day

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): It was a great honour to attend the Vietnam Veterans Day commemoration service in Croydon on Sunday 17 August. Standing alongside our local veterans, their families and the wider community at the Croydon war memorial, we paused to mark the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan and to honour those who served during the Vietnam War. I was honoured to lay a wreath on behalf of the Victorian government and represent the Minister for Veterans the Honourable Natalie Suleyman MP. More than 60,000 Australians served in Vietnam, including over 10,000 Victorians and 5000 animals, many of whom were working dogs, mules and US Navy dolphins, to name but a few. They faced extraordinarily difficult conditions, fought with incredible bravery and returned to a nation that did not always give the welcome or support that veterans deserved. Services like the one held in Croydon are a vital reminder of our enduring duty to say thank you, to ensure that the service, sacrifice and legacy of our Vietnam veterans are never forgotten and that they and their families receive the respect and ongoing care that they deserve. I want to extend my deep gratitude to the Croydon RSL sub-branch and the Yarra Valley Vietnam Veterans Day committee for bringing our community together for such a moving and dignified service. To all our Vietnam veterans: we honour your service, we remember your mates who did not come home and we thank you. Lest we forget.

Community safety

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (09:59): I just want to start by giving a shout-out to those amazing apprentices who did a citizen's arrest on that guy who was stabbing a 10-year-old boy and his mother. It was just so good to see the best of men and those protective instincts out there, so thank you for that.

Apprenticeships

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (09:59): But I was already thinking of doing a members statement on the woeful state of apprenticeships in Victoria. Half of apprentices quit their

apprenticeship before they are qualified. We have dropped to the lowest trade commencement rate since 2001. We are losing tradies faster than we can even train them. The plumbers, chippies, sparkies – all of our best qualified tradies who would have taken on apprentices and built up their own small private businesses – are now being sucked up by the Big Build sites. Obviously there are more big sinkholes than big projects being built, but never mind. These apprentices cannot get positions, and the ones that they can get have low pay and poor conditions. They are seeing no benefit for the hard work that they are doing, and they are quitting. This is the government competing against its own citizens, and of course the government always wins because the government can always pay more using our money, which means Victorians are left with less of everything. The government brags about the Big Build, but all I see is a big tradie crisis as well as a big debt crisis. What we need to do is cut the red tape on employers, stop taxing tradies and small businesses as though they were the problem, make apprenticeships available and attractive and survivable for Aussies. These kids can help rebuild our state if we let them. The government just needs to get out of their way.

Ukraine Independence Day

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:01): Thirty-five years of freedom, independence and striving for a better future is what we gathered for in Federation Square to mark the 35th anniversary of Ukraine's Independence Day earlier this week, along with Mr Tarlamis, Mrs Hermans and the members for Caulfield and Bulleen. It was an opportunity to reflect on a relatively young nation's history, but a young nation with a very ancient culture, a culture that has sustained and endured through all attempts to suppress it in the past and that is doing so again right now. It was wonderful to gather with Melbourne's Ukrainian community in Federation Square this week, as it was to gather with our south-east Ukrainian community at the Noble Park Ukrainian hall just a week ago, for a wonderful afternoon of celebration of Ukrainian food and culture, with some very special guests from our local Latvian and Lithuanian communities as well. These events remind us that the freedom that we take so easily for granted here is very fragile and that whilst countries like Ukraine are fighting for their survival on the other side of the world, it is their fight that is on behalf of the whole world. I certainly hope that all world leaders, including here in Australia, do everything that we can and redouble our support for Ukraine. Slava Ukraini.

Bills

Domestic Gas Choice (Repeal of Gas Appliance Ban) Bill 2026

Statement of charter compatibility

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:02): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

> In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Domestic Gas Choice (Repeal of Gas Appliance Ban) Bill 2026.
>
> In my opinion, the Domestic Gas Choice (Repeal of Gas Appliance Ban) Bill 2026, as introduced to the Legislative Council is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.
>
> This Bill seeks to ensure Victorians have the choice how to cook and heat in their own homes. The legislation that this Bill repeals removed choice for Victorians and forced expensive electrification.
>
> Advancing the choice of energy source that Victorians use to cook, heat and heat hot water in their own home is a matter that should not be controlled by government.
>
> The ban on new gas installation restricted choice within the home and the choices of businesses in the fuel they used, and this inherently restricted the rights and choices of those families and businesses. This repeal Bill restores those rights.
>
> It is my view the Bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

Statement of treaty compatibility

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:02): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Statewide Treaty Act 2025:

> In accordance with S 66 of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025, I table a Statement of Treaty Compatibility for the Domestic Gas Choice (Repeal of Gas Appliance Ban) Bill 2026.
>
> In my opinion, the Bill is compatible with the objectives set out in section 66(3)(d) of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.
>
> The Domestic Gas Choice (Repeal of Gas Appliance Ban) Bill 2026 seeks to revoke planning scheme amendments that bans the installation of natural gas connections for new dwellings. The Bill further repeals legislative changes enforced by the Labor Government that actions the banning of replacement of gas appliances and gas hot water services.
>
> Labor's war on gas unjustly effects all Victorians including indigenous Victorians. This Bill will restore choice to indigenous Victorians whose freedoms have been restricted under this Labor Government. Under this Bill indigenous Victorians will have the choice to connect to natural gas and not be forced into costly electrification for the sake of Labor's extreme ideology.
>
> The infringement of the right to choose energy source in one's own home whether for hot water services, cooking or heating is a matter which should apply equally to indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

Second reading

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:03): I move:

> That the bill be now read a second time.

Labor's War on Gas

Over the last 12 years the Australian Labor Party and its fellow travellers have conducted a strong unrelenting war on gas in Victoria.

This has included effectively preventing exploration for gas with the last gas exploration permits issued in Victoria in 2013, the banning of gas connections on new estates and new homes, the introduction of legislation and regulations designed to ban gas replacement appliances in Victorian homes. That legislation, the Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Bill 2024, was introduced on 11 September 2024 and passed on 31 October 2024. The Governor signed this act into law on 12 November 2024.

The Andrews–Allan–Carroll government had initially intended to ban replacement cooktops, replacement heating systems and replacement hot water services from March 2027. Officially they retreated, saying they would not ban domestic gas cooktops or domestic heaters. However, when confronted with an amendment that prevented them regulating gas cooktops, including banning them, the Labor Party opposed that amendment.

There can be no doubt that if re-elected at the November state election Labor will refresh their attacks on gas and introduce bans on gas heaters and gas cooktops in addition to replacement gas hot water services, which they currently claim will be banned.

Labor also use the planning system through planning scheme amendment VC250 to continue the outlawing of the connection of gas to new estates and new homes.

The previous Minister for Energy and Resources constantly referred to 'fossil gas' and made other disparaging comments concerning gas in her ideological drive to forcibly electrify Victorian homes.

Provisions of the Bill

The objectives of the bill are to revoke an amendment to the Victoria Planning Provisions that prohibits new gas connections for new dwellings.

The bill also amends the Building Act 1993 to repeal regulation-making powers for prohibiting the connection of reticulated gas brought into force by the Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Bill 2024.

Clause 3 reverses the planning changes made in the planning scheme amendment VC250 that 'prevents a permit being granted to connect to reticulated natural gas when constructing a new dwelling, apartment development or subdividing land for residential purposes'.

Clause 4 repeals the penalties and machinery which Labor used and intended to expand in its restriction of choice for Victorian households by banning replacement gas appliances.

Conclusion

The Liberals and the Nationals opposed Labor's war on gas from the start, and if elected we will unwind it and commence onshore conventional gas exploration. We will also unwind Labor's ban on replacement gas appliances and their ban on the connection of gas to new estates and new homes.

The Liberals and Nationals believe in the choice of individuals to choose the fuel used within their own home. Ben Carroll or any other Premier should not be empowered to enforce draconian bans. Victorians should be left to choose how to cook and heat their own home and the form of hot water production they choose for their houses.

I commend this bill to the house.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:06): I move:

That debate be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Local Government Amendment (Stability of Councils) Bill 2026

Statement of charter compatibility

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:07): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

Introduction

In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility:

Pursuant to section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Local Government Amendment (Stability of Councils) Bill 2026 (Bill).

In my opinion, the Bill, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter.

I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The main purposes of the Bill are to amend the Local Government Act 2020 (Principal Act) to enhance the integrity and governance standards of Councils and to make other miscellaneous amendments to that Act, and to amend the City of Melbourne Act 2001 to increase the permitted ratio between the lowest and highest differential rates if the Melbourne City Council uses the net annual value system of valuation.

Amendments to the Principal Act carried by the Bill include amendments to:

- Permit Councils to declare the office of Mayor or Deputy Mayor vacant, with additional procedural fairness requirements, and to provide for the chairing of meetings at which such a motion is considered
- Provide for Councillors to take a candidate leave of absence when nominating for election as a member of the Victorian Parliament,

- Clarify the operation and effect of the standing down of a Councillor under sections 228 and 229, including the suspension of Councillor conduct processes and the consequences for training, personal interests returns, allowances and reimbursements.
- Confine the automatic standing down of a Councillor under section 229 to proceedings commenced by, or on the complaint of, a law enforcement agency.
- Provide for the appointment of replacement arbiters and replacement Councillor Conduct Panel members, and for the validity of hearings where an appointment to a panel list expires
- Require the Principal Councillor Conduct Registrar to publish prescribed information about the operation of the internal arbitration and Councillor Conduct Panel processes
- Strengthen requirements for disclosing and managing conflicts of interest.

Human rights issues

The Bill engages the following human rights under the Charter:

- privacy and reputation (section 13);
- freedom of expression (section 15);
- taking part in public life (section 18);
- property rights (section 20);
- fair hearing (section 24);
- rights in criminal proceedings (section 25);
- right not to be tried or punished more than once (section 26); and
- retrospective criminal laws (section 27).

Where a right is limited, I have considered whether the limitation is reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

Privacy and reputation

Section 13 of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with and not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked.

Candidate leave of absence

Clause 13 inserts new section 38A into the Principal Act, which provides that a Councillor who nominates for election as a member of the Parliament is taken to have been given a leave of absence from the office of Councillor. New section 38A(3) requires the Councillor to give the Chief Executive Officer written notice of the nomination as soon as possible after nominating, and no later than the day after nominating.

That requirement engages the right to privacy because it obliges a Councillor to disclose information about their political candidacy. Any interference with privacy is neither unlawful nor arbitrary. The obligation is confined to the fact of nomination, which is in any event a matter of public record under the Electoral Act 2002. The notice serves the legitimate purpose of ensuring the Council has adequate notice to put acting arrangements in place, and of ensuring that the leave of absence, and the consequences that flow from it, can be given practical effect. The obligation is therefore compatible with section 13.

Reporting of conflicts of interest

Clause 26(1)(a) amends section 130(2)(a) of the Principal Act to require that a relevant person make the disclosure of a conflict of interest as soon as practicable after becoming aware of it. That amendment does not alter what must be disclosed or to whom, and does not of itself engage the right to privacy. It goes only to the timing of an obligation that already exists.

Clause 26 also inserts new section 130(5A), which provides that where a Councillor fails to comply with the disclosure obligations in section 130(2) in respect of a material or general conflict of interest, the Chief Executive Officer may notify the Chief Municipal Inspector as soon as practicable after becoming aware of the failure.

To the extent that this may be said to limit the right to privacy and reputation, the limitation is demonstrably justified. Failure to declare and manage a conflict of interest is a potential indicator of an integrity issue, and there is a strong public interest in ensuring that such failures come to the attention of the integrity body charged with investigating them. The provision is discretionary and is confined to the two most serious categories of conflict of interest, and does not of itself trigger any investigation or further action. There is no less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purpose.

Publication of prescribed information

Clause 21 requires the Principal Councillor Conduct Registrar to publish, on an annual basis, prescribed information in relation to the operation and use of the internal arbitration process and of Councillor Conduct Panels.

The purpose of these provisions is to provide the sector and the public with reliable information about how the Councillor conduct system is functioning. The information to be published is to be prescribed by regulation, and any regulation would itself be subject to the requirements of the Charter and to Parliamentary scrutiny. To the extent that publication could engage the right to reputation, the provisions are directed at the operation of the system rather than at individuals, and any limitation is lawful, confined and proportionate.

Relief from personal interests return obligations

Clause 18 inserts new section 134A, which relieves a Councillor who is stood down from the obligation to submit an initial or biannual personal interests return during the period the Councillor is stood down, with the obligation resuming within 30 days after the Councillor is no longer stood down. This provision promotes rather than limits the right to privacy.

For these reasons, I believe these provisions are compatible with the right to privacy and reputation in section 13 of the Charter.

Freedom of expression

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression. Section 15(3) provides that the right may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights of other persons and for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

Clause 26 inserts new section 130(2)(c), which provides that a relevant person who is a Councillor or a member of a delegated committee and who has a conflict of interest in a matter must not direct, influence or attempt to influence, or discuss the matter with, another relevant person who is participating, or is expected to participate, in the decision making process in relation to that matter.

This provision limits the right to freedom of expression. The limitation is reasonable and proportionate. It is confined to a matter in which the person has a declared conflict of interest, it is directed squarely at preventing the exercise of improper influence over other decision makers, and it is consistent with the person's existing obligation to exclude themselves from the decision-making process altogether.

The limitation is also expressly qualified. New sections 130(9) and 130(10) provide that a conflicted Councillor or committee member may nonetheless provide information about the matter to the Chief Executive Officer, or to a nominated member of Council staff where the Chief Executive Officer is themselves participating in the decision or is conflicted. These provisions ensure that a person with relevant information is not silenced altogether, and that the prohibition does not operate to deprive the Council of information it needs. The limitation is therefore no more than is necessary to achieve its purpose and is compatible with section 15.

Taking part in public life

Section 18(1) of the Charter provides that every person in Victoria has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Section 18(2)(b) further provides that every eligible person has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to have access, on general terms of equality, to the Victorian public service and public office.

Standing down of a Councillor charged with an offence

Clause 24 inserts new section 229(2A), which provides that the automatic standing down of a Councillor under section 229(1) does not apply unless a proceeding for the offence is commenced by or on behalf of a law enforcement agency, or the complainant is a law enforcement agency. Clause 4(2) inserts the Chief Municipal Inspector into the definition of law enforcement agency for that purpose.

These provisions substantially promote the right to take part in public life. As the Principal Act presently stands, a Councillor is removed from the office to which they were elected upon the commencement of proceedings by any person, without any evidence having been tested and without any finding having been made by a court. The Bill confines the operation of the provision to circumstances in which charges have been brought by an agency exercising an established prosecutorial discretion. The addition of the Chief Municipal Inspector to the definition of law enforcement agency ensures that proceedings brought by the sector's own integrity body continue to attract the provision.

Declaration of the office of Mayor or Deputy Mayor to be vacant

Clause 8 amends section 23 of the Principal Act. It repeals section 23(1), with the effect that the process for declaring the office of Mayor or Deputy Mayor vacant is available irrespective of the length of the term for which the officeholder was elected. It also imposes new procedural requirements: the notice of motion must specify the reasons for the proposed motion, be signed by an absolute majority of Councillors, and be lodged with the Chief Executive Officer at least 14 days before the meeting at which it is to be considered.

Clause 8 engages the right to take part in public life because it broadens the circumstances in which a Council may resolve to vacate these offices. Any limitation is reasonable and justified. The offices of Mayor and Deputy Mayor are leadership positions that depend on the confidence of the Councillors who elect them. Where that confidence is lost, it is in the public interest that the Council be able to act.

The limitation is accompanied by significant procedural fairness protections that do not presently exist. New section 23(3A) requires the Chief Executive Officer to provide the notice of motion to the officeholder at least 14 days before the meeting, to advise them that they may respond in writing within 7 days of receipt, and to provide the notice and any response to every Councillor without delay. New section 23(3B) expressly preserves the right of an officeholder to respond notwithstanding that they are on a candidate leave of absence or have been stood down, and new section 37B(3) puts beyond doubt that providing such a response is not the performance of a function or duty of a Councillor. Clause 16 further requires that a meeting at which such a motion is put be chaired by a person other than the officeholder concerned. A person whose office is declared vacant remains an elected Councillor.

Candidate leave of absence

Clause 13 limits the right to take part in public life insofar as new section 38A prevents a Councillor from performing the functions, duties and powers of the office of Councillor from the day after they nominate for election as a member of the Parliament until 6.00 pm on election day.

The limitation pursues the legitimate objective of separating campaign activity from the performance of a public office, and of avoiding both actual conflicts and community confusion as to the capacity in which a person is speaking. The limitation is confined and proportionate. It arises only upon nomination, which is a voluntary act of the Councillor. It ends on election day, or earlier if the nomination is withdrawn, in which case section 38A(2) cancels the leave the following day. The Councillor is not removed from office and resumes their duties if not elected. Clause 11 ensures that the period of leave does not count towards the absence that would otherwise cause a Councillor to cease to hold office under section 35, and clause 17 ensures that the leave does not affect the validity of Council proceedings.

Continuity of Council leadership

Clauses 5, 6 and 7 make consequential provision for acting arrangements. Clause 5 amends section 20A(3) of the Principal Act so that the provisions governing the office of Deputy Mayor apply where the Deputy Mayor is incapable of performing the duties of that office for any reason. Clauses 6 and 7 amend sections 20B(1)(b) and 21(b) so that an Acting Mayor may be appointed, and the Deputy Mayor may perform the role and exercise the powers of the Mayor, during an initial candidacy period.

These provisions promote the right to take part in public life. They ensure that a municipal community continues to be represented by a functioning Mayoralty during a period in which the officeholder is unable to perform the duties of the office, and they avoid any hiatus in the leadership of the Council.

Chairing of meetings concerning a Councillor's own conduct

Clause 16 inserts new sections 61(3B), 61(3C) and 61(3D), which provide that a Councillor, including the Mayor or Deputy Mayor, must not chair a Council meeting where a question before the meeting concerns whether an application should be made in respect of that Councillor's own alleged misconduct or serious misconduct, whether an application to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal should be made for review of a Councillor Conduct Panel decision in respect of that Councillor, or any other conduct of that Councillor. New sections 61(3C) and 61(3D) provide for who is to chair in those circumstances.

These provisions promote the right to take part in public life and the right to a fair hearing. They ensure that a Councillor does not preside over the conduct of business concerning their own conduct, and they protect the ability of other Councillors to participate in that business free from the influence of the person whose conduct is in question. To the extent that a Councillor is prevented from chairing a particular item of business, the restriction is narrow, is confined to the item concerned, and does not prevent the Councillor from otherwise participating in the meeting.

Prohibition on acting while stood down or on leave

Clause 12 inserts new section 37B, which makes it an offence for a Councillor who has been stood down and who knows, or should reasonably know, that they have been stood down to perform the functions, duties or

powers of a Councillor. New section 38A(4) makes equivalent provision for a Councillor on a candidate leave of absence. Clause 24(2) substitutes section 229(3)(b) in corresponding terms.

These provisions do not alter who may hold public office. They give enforceable effect to a restriction that already exists in the Principal Act, and are confined to the period during which the Councillor is stood down or on leave. New sections 37B(1)(c) and 38A(4)(c) expressly preserve the person's ability to attend Council premises in a personal or private capacity, so that a person is not excluded from the ordinary services and facilities of their own municipality. To the extent that the right is limited, the limitation is reasonable and demonstrably justified.

Suspension of Councillor conduct processes

Clause 12 inserts new section 37A, and clause 13 inserts new section 38A(5), which suspend the examination of misconduct and serious misconduct applications, internal arbitration processes, and Councillor Conduct Panel proceedings while a Councillor is stood down or on a candidate leave of absence.

These provisions promote the right to take part in public life and the right to a fair hearing. They ensure that a Councillor is not the subject of conduct proceedings at a time when they are prohibited by law from performing the duties of their office and may be constrained in participating in their own defence. The suspension is qualified: new section 37A(1)(c) preserves a Councillor Conduct Panel proceeding where the Minister made the recommendation to stand the Councillor down as a consequence of that very application, and new section 37A(2) preserves the ability to make or withdraw applications and the ability of the Chief Municipal Inspector to stop consideration of a matter.

Property rights

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. The right requires that powers authorising the deprivation of property be conferred by law, be confined and structured rather than unclear, be accessible to the public, and be formulated precisely.

Allowances and reimbursements

Clause 14 inserts new section 39(5A), which provides that a Mayor, Deputy Mayor or Councillor on a candidate leave of absence is not entitled to receive an allowance for the period of the leave. Clause 15 inserts new section 40(3), which provides that a Councillor is not entitled to reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses incurred while on a candidate leave of absence or while stood down.

These provisions engage the right to property. Any deprivation is in accordance with law. The provisions are expressed in clear and precise terms, they identify with certainty the circumstances in which and the periods for which the entitlement does not arise, and they are publicly accessible. It is not in the public interest for a person to receive an allowance or to be reimbursed for the expenses of an office whose duties they are not performing and are prohibited from performing. The deprivation is temporary in each case, and entitlement resumes when the leave or stand down ends.

Order to return allowances

New section 37B(2) provides that where a person is found guilty or convicted of the offence in section 37B(1), the court may order that the person return to the Council any allowances, reimbursements, equipment or materials received as a result of acting as a Councillor during the period they were stood down.

This provision engages the right to property. The deprivation is in accordance with law. It is confined to property received as a result of the very conduct constituting the offence, it arises only following a finding of guilt or conviction by a court, and it is discretionary rather than automatic, so the court may take account of all the circumstances. It is restitutionary in character rather than punitive.

Declaration of the office of Mayor or Deputy Mayor to be vacant

Clause 8 may be said to authorise a deprivation of property to the extent that a person whose office is declared vacant ceases to receive the higher allowance payable to the holder of that office. Any deprivation is in accordance with law, given the procedural requirements described above, including notice, reasons, a right of written response and a requirement that the motion be carried by the majority prescribed by section 23.

Differential rates

Clause 27 amends section 28(2) of the City of Melbourne Act 2001 to increase the permitted ratio between the lowest and highest differential rates from 2 times to 4 times where the Melbourne City Council uses the net annual value system of valuation.

To the extent that the imposition of rates engages the right to property, any deprivation occurs in accordance with law. The clause does not itself impose any rate. It adjusts a statutory ceiling within which the Melbourne City Council may exercise its existing rating powers, and those powers remain subject to the requirements of

Part 8 of the Principal Act, including the requirement to specify the objectives of a differential rate and the processes governing the declaration of rates.

Fair hearing

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing.

Clauses 19, 20, 22 and 23 make provision for the continuity of internal arbitration processes and Councillor Conduct Panel hearings. New sections 144AA and 155A provide that where a person's appointment to a panel list expires during a process or determination, the person is taken to continue to hold office until the process is concluded or the Panel is dissolved. New sections 144AB and 156A provide for the appointment of a replacement arbiter or Panel member where the original decision maker becomes unavailable, and permit the replacement decision maker to have regard to information or evidence previously provided, including any record of or evidence taken in an earlier hearing.

These provisions engage the right to a fair hearing. In my view they promote rather than limit it. Without them, the expiry of an appointment or the unavailability of a decision maker may require a matter to begin again or leave it unresolved, to the detriment of the Councillor who is the subject of it and of the parties who brought it. The provisions ensure that matters are determined by a person who remains competent to determine them.

To the extent that the ability of a replacement decision maker to have regard to earlier evidence could be said to limit the right, the limitation is reasonable. The replacement is appointed from the same statutory panel list, and in the case of a Councillor Conduct Panel, new section 156A(2)(b) requires that a replacement Chairperson be an eligible person under section 153(3)(a). The parties must be given written notice of the appointment. The provisions are permissive rather than mandatory, so the decision maker retains the discretion to hear evidence afresh where fairness requires it, and the ordinary requirements of natural justice continue to apply.

New sections 144AB(3) and 156A(3) preserve the validity of acts and decisions made before the replacement appointment. This is necessary to avoid the disruption of proceedings and does not affect any right of review.

Rights in criminal proceedings

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law.

Clause 12 inserts new section 37B(1), and clause 13 inserts new section 38A(4), each creating an offence punishable by 120 penalty units. Each offence is directed at a person who performs the functions, duties or powers of a Councillor while prohibited from doing so.

The offence in new section 37B(1) applies only to a Councillor who knows, or should reasonably know, that they have been stood down. Neither provision reverses the onus of proof or creates any presumption against the accused. Each element of each offence must be proved by the prosecution beyond reasonable doubt in the ordinary way, and all of the rights in section 25 apply to a person charged. The right to be presumed innocent is not limited.

As noted above, clause 24 promotes the right to be presumed innocent in a broader sense. Under the Principal Act as it stands, the mere commencement of a proceeding by any person, at a point when nothing has been proved, produces the immediate consequence of removal from elected office. The Bill confines that consequence to proceedings brought by agencies exercising an established prosecutorial discretion.

Right not to be tried or punished more than once

Section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which they have already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law.

The Bill creates offences in new sections 37B(1) and 38A(4) in respect of conduct that may also be the subject of the Councillor conduct processes in Part 6 of the Principal Act. Section 26 is not engaged. The internal arbitration process and the Councillor Conduct Panel process are not criminal proceedings, and a finding of misconduct or serious misconduct is not a criminal conviction. This position is consistent with the operation of the Principal Act as it presently stands.

The order that may be made under new section 37B(2) is restitutionary rather than punitive, and it may be made only by the court determining the offence, in the same proceeding. It does not involve a second trial or a second punishment.

I further note that new sections 37A and 38A(5) reduce the potential for concurrent processes, by suspending conduct proceedings while a Councillor is stood down or on a candidate leave of absence.

Retrospective criminal laws

Section 27(1) of the Charter provides that a person must not be found guilty of a criminal offence because of conduct that was not a criminal offence when it was engaged in, and section 27(2) provides that a penalty must not be imposed that is greater than the penalty that applied when the offence was committed.

The Bill contains transitional provisions in clause 25. New section 331(2) provides that the new sections 37A and 37B do not apply to a Councillor who is stood down unless the Councillor receives notification under section 228(3), or is charged with an offence specified in section 229(2), on or after the day on which clause 12 comes into operation. The new offence in section 37B therefore has no application to conduct engaged in before its commencement. New section 331(3) provides that the candidate leave of absence provisions do not apply to a nomination unless election day is on or after 1 January 2027, and the offence in section 38A(4) accordingly has no retrospective operation either.

Provisions that do not engage Charter rights

For completeness, I note the following provisions.

Clauses 1, 2 and 3 are preliminary provisions dealing with the purposes of the Bill, its commencement and the identification of the Principal Act. Clause 28 provides for the repeal of the Bill on 1 July 2028, which does not affect the continuing operation of the amendments made by it. None of these provisions engages a right protected by the Charter.

Clause 4(1) inserts a definition of candidate leave of absence into section 3(1) of the Principal Act. It is definitional and engages no right of itself. The provisions to which it gives effect are addressed above.

Clauses 9 and 10 make provision for training. Clause 9 inserts new sections 27A(5A) and 27A(5B), which provide that a Mayor, Deputy Mayor or Acting Mayor who is unable to take or complete Mayoral training because of a leave of absence, an initial candidacy period or a stand down must do so within one month after returning, after the period ends, or after no longer being stood down. Clause 10 makes corresponding provision for Councillor induction training. These provisions promote the right to take part in public life. They ensure that a person is not exposed to the consequences that flow under the Principal Act from a failure to complete mandatory training in circumstances where the failure is attributable to a period during which the person was prohibited by law from performing the duties of their office.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out above, I consider that the Bill is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. Where the Bill limits a right, I consider each limitation to be reasonable and demonstrably justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

Beverley McArthur MP
Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council
Shadow Minister for Local Government
Shadow Minister for Small Business

Statement of treaty compatibility

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:07): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Statewide Treaty Act 2025:

Feedback was sought from the First Peoples' Assembly of Gellung Warl on the Local Government Amendment (Stability of Councils) Bill 2026 (the Bill). The First Peoples' Assembly requested, and was provided with, a copy of the Bill. However, in the time provided, no advice or representations about the effect of the Bill on First Peoples was received.

Beverley McArthur MP
Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council
Shadow Minister for Local Government
Shadow Minister for Small Business

Second reading

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:07): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Introduction

Today, I am doing what the government should be doing: progressing a bill that is based on evidence, not ideology, a bill that closes genuine loopholes and advances important improvements in the local government and City of Melbourne acts, all without creating more flaws and more loopholes. It amends the Local Government Act 2020 to strengthen council integrity and governance, to correct defects in the councillor stand-down framework, and to improve the operation of council governance and conduct processes. It also amends the City of Melbourne Act 2001 to increase the maximum permitted ratio between the lowest and highest differential rates from two times to four times.

What is deliberately excluded or corrected is everything in the government's bill that is opposed by councils and ratepayers. Our key omissions relate to the government's dodgy local government fair jobs code and regulator, the minister's power to direct a council's internal dispute resolution process, and the mandatory model governance rules and CEO employment framework. We believe the code is built on a false premise – that local government jobs are insecure. They are not. It is wrong for the state to be undermining workforce flexibility and service delivery in local government.

And we reject the government's undermining of parliamentary oversight by seeking legislative power without a single draft regulation being made public. A common cry from councils is that this government does not consult with the sector when it makes law. That is not my approach as shadow minister. Views were sought from all 79 councils, from more than 600 councillors, from every key peak body, and from legal, governance, and consulting experts. Their views were clear, and I trust that this bill provides a genuine alternative for this Parliament to support.

Background

The case for local government reform is indisputable. IBAC's Operation Sandon special report made 18 recommendations directed at council governance and corruption risk under the Local Government Act, most of which have been implemented. The Whittlesea commission of inquiry, reporting in 2025, made a further 17 recommendations, 13 directed to the Victorian government. Together they exposed real weaknesses in conflict-of-interest requirements, councillor conduct processes, mayoral accountability, and the legislative framework itself. The coalition has supported acting on those findings from the outset, and this bill is the proof of it.

I do want to say that this bill is not exhaustive. My goal is to make the act workable for the remainder of this term of government. Under a Wilson-led coalition government, we will work closely with the sector to make it even better. We will cut red tape for councils, empower councillors, and enable value-for-money services for ratepayers – all while ensuring appropriate integrity standards.

Key provisions

I now turn to the main provisions of this bill.

Mayoral and council governance

The bill improves the operation of the deputy mayor and acting mayor provisions. It extends the process for declaring the office of mayor or deputy mayor vacant, so that it applies whether the office holder was elected for a one-year or a two-year term. It does so with proper safeguards. A notice of motion must specify the reasons for removal, be supported by an absolute majority before it can be lodged, and be lodged with the CEO at least 14 days before the meeting. The office holder must receive the motion and an opportunity to respond in writing, and both must be circulated to all councillors beforehand. The office may then be declared vacant only if the motion is supported by at least three-quarters of the councillors in office – not just an absolute majority.

The bill also provides that a mayor, deputy mayor or councillor may not chair a meeting dealing with their own conduct. A mayor who has lost the confidence of the council should not be able to sit immovably in the chair. Equally, a mayor should not be removed without natural justice.

The stand-down framework

The stand-down framework this government previously introduced contained a series of oversights, and the bill corrects them. A councillor who is stood down should not be disqualified for failing to attend meetings they are prohibited by law from attending. Neither should they be penalised for failing to lodge a personal interest return while excluded from office. They should have a reasonable period after returning to complete mandatory training, for as long as that training regime remains in place. Decisions lawfully made during their absence should not be open to challenge on that basis.

The bill suspends conduct proceedings while a councillor is stood down, so a person cannot be required to answer a complaint at a time when they are barred from exercising the office. It expressly excludes private or personal attendance at council premises, because a stood-down councillor remains a ratepayer, entitled to visit a library or a leisure centre like anybody else. The government's bill leaves the term 'council premises' undefined, and that is an invitation to litigation.

Candidate leave

The bill requires a councillor who nominates for election to this Parliament to take unpaid candidate leave from the day after nomination until 6 pm on election day. The government's bill has the declaration of results as its end point, which could differ from seat to seat. A councillor in one electorate could return to duty weeks before a councillor in another, for no reason connected to anything either of them has done. Election day is a single, known, statewide date, and it is the right end point.

The stand-down trigger

Under section 229, a councillor is automatically stood down when certain proceedings are commenced against them. That provision is the government's own. It was written into the Local Government Act 2020 by this government, and it was drafted without any distinction between a charge laid by a law enforcement agency and one laid by a private individual with a grievance. The consequence is that any person, with no evidence tested and no finding made by any court, can commence a private prosecution and remove a democratically elected representative from office.

Councillors at Hepburn Shire were stood down in exactly those circumstances, following private prosecutions brought by an alleged vexatious litigant, proceedings later discontinued by the court on the application of the Director of Public Prosecutions. It waited several months and even floated appointing an administrator as Hepburn slowly descended into chaos. When the government finally moved to close the loophole, it did so only for the future.

Councillors who had already been removed from office would have been told that Parliament had identified the injustice done to them and decided to do nothing about it. I wrote to the minister and asked him to make the correction retrospective. I am pleased to say he relented and circulated amendments in the other place. Soon affected councillors will be taken never to have been stood down and will be repaid the allowances withheld from them.

Conflicts of interest

The bill strengthens the obligation on a councillor with a conflict of interest not to direct, influence or discuss the matter with another decision-maker. That acquits recommendation 29 of the Sandon report without qualification. It requires annual reporting by the principal councillor conduct registrar on internal arbitrations and conduct panels, acquitting recommendation 32.

On recommendation 33 we take a different route to the same destination, allowing information to be provided to the CEO and providing that the CEO may notify the chief municipal inspector of an apparent breach. The government prefers a mandatory reporting duty. Consider what that means. A CEO is placed under a legal obligation to report a councillor, with no capacity to investigate first and no guidance on handling a report that is vexatious or baseless. It transfers a question of political

judgement onto the administration and blurs the very line between governance and administration that Sandon and Whittlesea told us to hold.

City of Melbourne differential rates

The bill increases the permitted differential rating ratio for the City of Melbourne from two times to four times where the net annual value system is used. On this the coalition agrees with the government that this amendment is designed to change behaviour rather than raise revenue. What changes is how that burden may be distributed, giving the city flexibility to apply a higher rate to long-term vacant property and to create a financial reason for owners to redevelop or activate sites left derelict for years.

Conclusion

This bill is not exhaustive. But it is what this Parliament can sensibly do in the time it has left. It fixes a framework that is removing elected councillors from office on the strength of a private grievance. It gives councils a workable process for dealing with a mayor who has lost their confidence, with natural justice. It strengthens conflict-of-interest obligations without dragging council officers into political disputes. And it gives the City of Melbourne a practical tool to deal with derelict property. It does all of that without a single additional dollar of pressure on the rates paid by Victorian councils, households and small businesses. It was built with the sector, and it is the better bill for it. I commend the bill to the house.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:18): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Functions) Bill 2026

Statement of charter compatibility

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:18): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

The *Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Function) Bill 2026* is compatible with the human rights protected by the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

Overview of the Bill

The Bill repeals section 15(1A) of the *Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011*. Section 15(1A) requires IBAC to deprioritise complaints about police misconduct and criminality, subjugating them in favour of corruption related complaints.

Human Rights Issues

The Bill does not directly limit any human right protected by the Charter.

The amendment does not expand IBAC's coercive powers, alter existing safeguards, create new offences or remove any existing legal rights.

The repeal may promote a number of Charter Rights and values, including:

- the right to equality before the law under section 8, by supporting the equal consideration of complaints regardless of whether they are characterised as serious, systemic or individual in nature;
- the right to protection and equal benefit of the law under section 8(3), by strengthening the capacity of integrity oversight mechanisms to respond to allegations of corruption and misconduct;
- the protection from torture and cruel, in human or degrading treatment, by levelling the ability to investigate police misconduct matters, including excessive use of force, release of confidential material, or racial slurs;
- the right to an effective and accountable public administration system that is consistent with the rule of law, a value reflected throughout the Charter.

The Bill preserves IBAC's discretion to determine how best to allocate resources and perform its statutory functions. It does not require the investigation of any particular matter and does not interfere with the operational independence of the Commission.

Conclusion

The *Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Confirmation of Function) Bill 2026* is compatible with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

Statement of treaty compatibility

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:18): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Statewide Treaty Act 2025:

Overview

In accordance with section 66 of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025, I make this Statement of Treaty Compatibility with respect to the *Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Functions) Bill 2026*.

The Bill amends the *Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011* to repeal section 15(1A), and this amendment strengthens the operational independence of IBAC and allows for IBAC to make decisions for what warrants investigations, how these investigations are conducted and where its resources are best directed.

Effective and independent oversight of police is particularly critical for First Peoples in Victoria, who experience disproportionate levels of police contact, intervention and use of police powers.

This disparity must be understood within the broader historical and contemporary context of colonisation, dispossession, and the longstanding over-representation of First Peoples in the criminal justice system.

Section 66(3)(a)–(c): Opportunity for advice and representations

The Assembly advised that it did not wish to make a representation at this time, as its Community Governance and Answerability Framework required under the Statewide Treaty Act is yet to be implemented.

The Assembly noted that the Framework will provide the mechanism through which the views of Community are reflected in its representations.

Section 66(3)(d): Compatibility with Treaty objectives

In forming my view regarding the compatibility of this Bill with the objectives set out in section 66(3)(d) of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025, I have considered whether the repeal of section 15(1A) of the *IBAC Act 2011* may affect First Peoples differently from other Victorians, having regard to the ongoing impacts of colonisation and the overrepresentation of First Peoples within Victoria's criminal justice system.

Advancing the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples

The Bill does not confer, remove or alter rights specific to First Peoples, nor does it affect arrangements relating to Traditional Owners, self-determination structures, Treaty processes or First Peoples' representative institutions.

The Bill provides an opportunity to express a view on a significant public policy question. However, the Bill does not itself advance or diminish First Peoples' self-determination and does not alter any mechanisms through which First Peoples exercise self-determination rights.

Accordingly, I consider that the Bill is neutral in its effect on the objective of advancing the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples.

Addressing the unacceptable disadvantage inflicted on First Peoples by historic wrongs and ongoing injustices of colonisation

In considering this objective, I have had regard to the disproportionate impact that First Peoples experience from police misconduct because they are disproportionately exposed to systemic racism by Victoria Police and the criminal justice system. This means that misconduct, excessive use of force, discriminatory treatment, inappropriate searches, arrests, detention and failures to properly respond to complaints can have a particularly significant effect on First Peoples.

First Peoples continue to experience higher rates of contact with the criminal justice system than non-Indigenous Victorians, reflecting broader patterns of disadvantage associated with colonisation.

The relationship between First Peoples and police cannot be considered separately from the history of colonisation. First Peoples have experienced generations of discriminatory laws, dispossession, exclusion and

disproportionate involvement in the criminal justice system. These experiences have contributed to a profound and continuing mistrust of police.

Ensuring the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by First Peoples

I have considered whether the Bill may affect the equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms by First Peoples when compared with other Victorians.

It strengthens the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by First Peoples by seeking to ensure that police misconduct and neglect are subject to independent oversight, rather than being disproportionately dealt with through internal police processes.

The Bill provides a stronger accountability mechanism where police conduct that may involve discriminatory treatment of First Peoples can be addressed.

Having regard to the considerations above, I have considered whether the Bill compounds existing disadvantage, undermines self-determination, or increases unequal enjoyment of rights experienced by First Peoples. I have formed the view that the Bill establishes a meaningful pathway for addressing police misconduct affecting First Peoples.

Given the longstanding concerns about the disproportionate contact between First Peoples and police, including experiences of over-policing, discrimination and the use of police powers, there is a particular need for strong, independent and accessible oversight mechanisms.

Conclusion

Accordingly, in my opinion, the *Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Functions) Bill 2026 is compatible* with the objectives set out in section 66(3)(d)(i)–(iii) of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025.

I therefore consider that the Bill does not adversely affect the advancement of First Peoples' rights and self-determination, does not compound disadvantage resulting from historic wrongs and ongoing injustices, and does not diminish the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by First Peoples.

Rachel Payne MP
Member of Southeastern Metropolitan Region
Legalise Cannabis Victoria

Second reading

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:18): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Police officers are given significant powers and responsibilities over Victorians. With this power, must come strong and independent oversight.

A week ago, the Premier Ben Carroll announced his intention to expand the jurisdiction of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC). In his announcement, the Premier mentioned that legislation is being drafted to give IBAC strong 'follow the money' powers and broaden the definition of 'corrupt conduct'. We welcome this announcement, but these reforms fall short.

The Premier has an opportunity to go further and ensure these reforms also strengthen IBAC's ability to independently oversee and investigate police misconduct, so that stronger anti-corruption powers are matched by equally strong police oversight.

If we are serious about integrity and accountability, IBAC must have the powers and resources to properly investigate allegations of police misconduct. IBAC should not have to choose between police oversight and its broader anti-corruption and 'follow the money' role.

This bill amends the IBAC act, to repeal section 15(1A). The repeal of section 15(1A) would restore IBAC's original mandate and discretion, ensuring allegations of corruption and police misconduct are independently assessed on their merits. The repeal of section 15(1A) will ensure that IBAC has greater discretion to assess and investigate complaints about police misconduct.

This amendment is the result of more than a decade of recommendations, reviews and reports calling for stronger and more effective integrity and oversight arrangements in Victoria.

At present, and due to an unforeseen technicality, IBAC cannot effectively act on police misconduct. In fact, right now IBAC only investigates 1 per cent of all police complaints. This is a far cry from the independent, merit-based oversight Victorians were promised.

We know that this system is failing. Repealing section 15(1A) is a good and necessary fix. It is consistent with the recommendations of the Integrity and Oversight Committee's December 2025 report into the adequacy of the legislative framework governing IBAC.

The Integrity and Oversight Committee heard that IBAC's different responsibilities can create a tension between investigating corruption and investigating police misconduct. That is why the committee recommended changing section 15(1A) in recommendation 18 of the report, so that serious police misconduct is clearly treated as a priority, alongside serious and systemic corruption.

Recommendation 19 of the report spoke to the need for IBAC to establish a dedicated police corruption and misconduct division:

> … to increase public confidence in Victoria's system for the handling of complaints about police corruption and other misconduct, improve its capacity to conduct effective investigations, enhance its independence, develop its expertise and improve its overall performance.

It was also recommended that IBAC should 'retain the discretion to allocate resources' between divisions.

At its heart, this bill is about ensuring that IBAC has the independence and discretion it needs to do its job properly and as intended. IBAC needs the powers, independence and resources to properly assess allegations of police misconduct, investigate where necessary, and ensure serious complaints receive the scrutiny that they deserve.

Strong oversight only works when the oversight body is genuinely independent and has the freedom to follow the evidence wherever it leads. This bill sends a clear message: restoring IBAC's discretion and strengthening its operational independence is important for police oversight and accountability.

Victoria has now entered a new chapter through treaty. Treaty requires that we acknowledge the lasting and present inequities for First Peoples in Victoria. Treaty means that we have committed to changing the systems that produce unequal outcomes for First Peoples today. This includes the overpolicing that First Peoples continue to face and the unfair treatment they are known to experience by Victoria Police.

It is an uncomfortable truth that Aboriginal Victorians are not treated the same way by Victoria Police as other Victorians. Every representative body – First Peoples, legal, health – knows this to be true, as do First Peoples themselves.

To quote the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service:

> Within the criminal legal system, systemic racism plays a significant role which greatly impacts the lives of Aboriginal people every day. This can look like racial profiling, racial abuse, over-policing, use of force, higher rates of searches, arrest, fines, bail refusal and remand.

This is quite simply shocking in 2026 and completely counter to treaty.

There are numerous high-profile cases of police abuse of power against First Peoples. Just two weeks ago, IBAC charged two Victoria Police officers with assault. It is alleged a senior constable unlawfully struck an Aboriginal man in the head with a taser multiple times.

Aboriginal men in Victoria are **6.5 times more likely to be processed by police** than non-Aboriginal men. These figures show why strong, independent oversight of police is so important.

For many Victorians, expensive and drawn-out litigation is the only meaningful avenue for police accountability. Litigation should not be the only option for people harmed by police.

Police accountability lawyer Jeremy King said:

> I see too many cases where victims of police brutality feel their only option is to take legal action against police because the system has failed them.
>
> But civil litigation is a blunt instrument and people should not have to face adverse cost consequences to hold police accountable.
>
> A properly-resourced, independent oversight mechanism would save victims and their families the trauma of legal action and get them justice more quickly and efficiently.

We are in the so-called 'tough-on-crime' era.

As Victoria Police are given broader powers, the need for strong, independent oversight becomes more important. It becomes imperative. There is already a strong basis for making this argument. In November 2024, I spoke on the lack of transparency around police oversight in Victoria within this chamber. Only 1 per cent of police misconduct cases – including brutality – are investigated by IBAC, the rest are either dismissed or sent back to police. This figure should concern every Victorian.

Police should not be responsible for investigating their own. IBAC was established precisely because Victoria needed independent oversight of public sector corruption and police misconduct. If we want Victorians to have confidence in police, then we must ensure that allegations against police are investigated independently. Police cannot independently investigate themselves. This should be made a priority for IBAC.

In 2022–23, IBAC reported that almost 70 per cent of investigations conducted by Victoria Police resulted in a recommendation of no action. Independent scrutiny is not about undermining police – it is about strengthening the police force. When police know their conduct is subject to fair, independent and transparent oversight, it helps build a culture where good practice is recognised, misconduct is addressed and accountability is taken seriously.

That matters for recruitment and retention too. Victoria Police is facing a significant workforce shortage, with current estimates pointing to a shortfall of roughly 1500 vacant positions. Workplace culture and independent oversight matter because they help create a police force where good officers are supported, respected and want to stay.

Strong accountability isn't about undermining police. It is about building trust, improving culture and making sure Victoria can recruit and retain the best people. Police officers should be able to work in an environment where professionalism, integrity and speaking up are valued, not one where toxic behaviour is allowed to become part of the culture. If we want to attract and keep good police officers in Victoria, we need to create a police culture that allows for this, and independent oversight can play an important role in making that happen.

Too many victim-survivors are unheard, unseen and let down by a system that is meant to deliver justice and accountability. Behind every statistic, every failed investigation and every gap in police oversight is a real person whose life has been impacted. Victim-survivors deserve to be heard. They deserve accountability. And they deserve a system that puts their rights and safety first.

I must take a moment to acknowledge the people who we have worked closely with. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge victim-survivors who are here with me this morning and the victim-survivors of police-perpetrated sexual and family violence advocacy group Flat Out and its Beyond Survival program. I would like to take this moment to share a couple of victim-survivor stories.

Dr Jana Katerinskaja is an advocate for preventing police perpetrated family violence:

> As someone who was experiencing family violence from a police officer, when I lodged a complaint my safety plan was leaked to my perpetrator.
>
> Police were protecting their own. IBAC referred my complaint back to those same cops to handle, with catastrophic outcomes. IBAC should not have to prioritise corruption complaints over complaints about life endangering or criminal conduct by police.

> As the Attorney General later formally found in 2024, Victoria Police's lawyers responded to that by breaching the Model Litigant Guidelines: Unnecessarily protracting the lawfare for years and not producing smoking gun documents. My ex was convicted of high-end family violence, but this battle consumed 7 years of my life.

Victim-survivor 2:

> I was raped by a member of Victoria Police. First police perpetrators silence us and then the system silences us further. When I went to IBAC, I expected my complaint would go back to Victoria Police, but I didn't expect to be treated callously, and basically hit with a statutory NDA and denied updates or information.
>
> We give police so much power, so they need proper oversight. We are letting good cops down if we don't set up a system that cleans out the bad cops, and that lets everyone down and causes the sort of thing I've suffered.

Stakeholders that we have worked closely with: the Police Accountability Project, Inner Melbourne Community Legal, Melbourne Activist Legal Support, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Human Rights Law Centre and Youthlaw. Thank you! These organisations do critical work in this space and have been advocating for police accountability for decades.

Lastly, I would also like to pay tribute to my grandmother Doll, whose legacy will forever be cherished by our family. Doll was a woman of extraordinary strength. She was the matriarch of our family, a quiet achiever who held her family together through circumstances that no one should ever have to endure. She was an amazing cook and had a cheeky sense of humour. But behind that quiet strength was a life marked by violence. Doll's husband, my grandfather, was a senior police officer, an alcoholic and a brutally violent man. He was untouchable. For Doll, escaping that violence was not simple or easy. She had to find a way to survive, to protect herself and her children, and ultimately to build a life of her own.

My grandmother could not speak out against a police officer. She knew she would be dismissed and not believed. Many others could not either. Many still can't. We should not accept a society where survival depends on a person's ability to escape quietly. We owe Victorians more than that. I owe that to Doll. We owe them a system where they can speak without fear, where their allegations are taken seriously, where police misconduct is properly investigated, and where no person, regardless of rank, position or reputation, is beyond accountability. That is what this bill is calling for. It means that no one is above the law, including those entrusted to enforce it.

I, on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria, commend this bill to the house.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:34): I move:

> That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Production of documents

Bushfire recovery

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:34): I move:

> That this house:
>
> (1) notes that documents recently released under freedom of information concerning the 2024–25 western Victoria business bushfire recovery grant program reveal that:
>
> (a) $22.84 million was allocated;
>
> (b) more than four months after applications opened, only 23 grants had been approved, totalling a paltry $115,000;
>
> (c) $16.356 million remained in contingency, with the department recording the program's 'mixed reception', 'low demand and uptake' and that it was 'unlikely to access further contingency funding';
>
> (d) $784,000 was released in July 2025 'to support with the administration of the BBRG';

(2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, by 12:00 noon on 10 September 2026, all documents held by the Minister for Small and Family Business, the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions and the Department of Treasury and Finance that record or relate to:

(a) the modelling or advice used to determine the $22.84 million allocation, including anticipated eligible businesses, applications and expenditure;

(b) final program outcomes, including pre-application eligibility checker submissions and reasons for ineligibility, applications received, approved, refused or withdrawn, total grants paid, and funds unspent, lapsed or reprioritised;

(c) any review, evaluation, analysis or stakeholder feedback concerning uptake, eligibility or accessibility;

(d) the request and approval for the $784,000 administration funding, actual administrative expenditure and its apportionment between this grant and other recovery programs; and

(e) decisions to reprioritise unspent funding, including for the Porepunkah and Alpine region business support package.

To summarise this motion in a sentence, I would say: what happened to the $22.84 million the government allocated to helping western Victorian businesses recover from the 2024–25 bushfires? What happened to it? I am obviously very concerned about this specific question, but it is also a case study in this government's way of operating more generally. After fires tore through the Grampians and Little Desert, the government did what they do very well: they made an announcement. On 11 March 2025 Victorians were told more than $24 million would provide crucial support to western Victorian businesses, including $5000 recovery grants for small businesses and eligible primary producers. That sounded substantial, urgent and like help was on its way, but the documents I have obtained under freedom of information tell a rather different story.

The business bushfire recovery grant (BBRG) opened on 13 May. By 19 September, more than four months later and less than eight weeks before it closed, the department told the minister:

> Grant uptake to date has been low with only 23 grants approved (total grant payments $115,000).

The FOI records that $22.84 million has been allocated to the grant program. This is not opposition language. The department itself described the scheme's mixed reception and its low demand and uptake and advised Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions was unlikely to access further contingency funding. We need to know why. There was certainly no shortage of need across Ararat, Hindmarsh, Horsham, Northern Grampians, Southern Grampians and West Wimmera. Businesses had lost trade, visitors, income and, in some cases, assets.

But the grant was extraordinarily difficult to assess. Under the ordinary criteria a business had to employ staff and be registered with WorkSafe Victoria. It had to demonstrate at least $10,000 in lost revenue over three consecutive months and show that loss amounted to at least 40 per cent of ordinary revenue. It then needed a qualified accountant, a tax agent and a BAS agent to certify that loss, all to obtain a $5000 grant. The government later drew on the experience of this very scheme when advising on another program, warning that grants were likely to get a mixed reception from stakeholders, particularly if few businesses meet the eligibility requirements.

That is why this motion seeks the data behind the preapplication eligibility checker. We want to know how many businesses tried to assess the scheme, how many were screened out before they could even apply and which criteria excluded them. We also want to know how the government arrived at $22.84 million in the first place. What modelling was done? How many eligible businesses did it expect? How many grants did it think would be paid? Once it became obvious that the money was not getting out the door, the FOI shows the government began to move it elsewhere. A September brief records that $1.7 million of the unused bushfire allocation was to be reprioritised to the Porepunkah and Alpine region business support package, so money announced with great fanfare for one disaster response could become available for another announcement because so little of the original scheme

had actually been accessed. How many times can the same unspent dollar appear in different government press releases?

Then there is administration. In July the Treasurer approved the release of $784,000 from BBRG funding for support, with the administration of the BBRG. Two months later only $115,000 had been paid in grants. That seems an extraordinary figure, given the low grant payouts, and this makes the documents very important indeed. How much was spent administering the funding total? How much of that $784,000 – some, all or more – was to fund the administration? This house is entitled to know the actual administration cost and how that money was apportioned. This motion therefore seeks the final program outcomes, the eligibility data, the modelling behind the original allocation, the reviews, the stakeholder feedback, the actual administration expenditure and the documents showing what happened to money that was unspent, lapsed or prioritised. If the program ultimately performed better than my FOI documents indicate, the government can demonstrate that by producing the records.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (10:41): The 2024–25 fires were for some communities the second fires in two years, and they were focused in the Grampians and the Little Desert area. In the Grampians region the main impact was in the national park. About 80 per cent of the national park was burnt, and communities like Halls Gap, Pomonal, Moyston, Willaura and Dunkeld were all impacted. In the Little Desert area, fires burnt almost half of the national park and destroyed the Little Desert Nature Lodge. Dimboola was evacuated, with the fire coming within metres of that town. Again the tourism industry was affected, not only around the area of the fire and in Dimboola but right along the Glenelg Highway, as many tourists were put off.

The fires happened very early that first week of January, sort of around the Christmas–New Year period. It was one of those reporting periods that was very quiet in the mainstream media, and a lot of the businesses that I met with and visited pretty much straight afterwards said that a lot of the information reported was overestimated because of the gaps in the news reporting and that they felt their businesses were not being visited because of that. I want to acknowledge that this was the second year in a row for Pomonal. They had lost 44 houses the year before, so there were a lot of members of that community that were retraumatised after the previous year.

In this motion the Liberals have taken an interim figure from four months in a six-month application period and presented it as if it is the entire program's result. It is a little bit like putting blinkers on and looking at only one thing rather than standing back and looking at the whole picture. It just really looks a bit more like pointscoring rather than focusing on the real issues. The communities that suffered from the bushfires in 2024–25 deserve better advocacy than that. I have met with many of those communities and seen the devastation they suffered firsthand, as have many of my colleagues on this side of the chamber. We have responded with practical support. The business bushfire recovery grant program was one targeted element of a broader $29 million recovery package. Every eligible business that applied and was approved received support, with 29 successful grants ultimately paid. This motion also ignores the free advisory service, financial counselling, mental health assistance, tourism support, hardship payments and income support provided alongside this specific program. The grant settings were agreed with the Commonwealth under national disaster recovery arrangements, supported by governments of all political persuasions. If the Liberals now oppose those nationally established arrangements, they should explain which eligibility accountability safeguards they would remove.

The Carroll Labor government will always account carefully for public money while ensuring help reaches people who are eligible and need it. We will continue working with western Victorian communities as they continue to recover. This motion feels a little bit more like short-term pointscoring rather than genuine concern for impacted communities. Labor will keep backing communities through the difficult work of rebuilding.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:46): Well, it is motion 1584, and the theme of my contribution is: show us the money or show us where the money has gone. I want to put on record my concern around the fact that we have well and truly seen in Victoria – one of the most fire-prone

regions in the world – a government over many years not perform the preparation to prevent bushfires in the first place, and I have gone on record many times in this place on that. We have seen the devastation that those bushfires can cause not only to forests and forest systems but to communities, to roads and to businesses. They can certainly close roads, they can close national parks and they can bring about the cancellation of events and accommodation. There is a loss of tourism and there is a loss of supply chain flowthrough to businesses, and indeed there can be a pervading sense that the whole entire region is lost and shut, and I know that was the case in the 2019–20 bushfires.

I want to draw attention in my contribution to the fact – and I thank Mrs McArthur for her very good investigative work on this – that almost, let us round it up, $23 million was offered by the government in grants, with big fanfare. How many grants have been taken up? We have heard that 23 grants have been taken up – only $115,000 in terms of grants – and around $16 million is still in contingency. And then we see the administrative facilitation of that smaller number of grants. How much money is being wasted there? We have heard this time and time again with many implementation phases of the Andrews–Allan–Carroll government.

I want to just paint a picture of the difference in some of the grant schemes. In the 2019–20 bushfires 900 businesses in East Gippsland were able to access grant funding. At the time the administration worked with the community to design those grants to serve this impacted community. They set the bar. They enabled a way for small businesses, who were incredibly impacted, and others to be able to facilitate 900 grants. Now, that sounds like a good outcome for this very devastated region. There were $10,000 small business bushfire support grants, as I said. Across Mallacoota, Buchan, Bruthen and East Gippsland there were fire evacuations, road closures and impact, and that has to be the story. There is already a blueprint that this government has for how to work with community to best serve the very pain and agony that that community has held. I know my colleague the member for Lowan has raised issues around the Grampians on this and the impact of removal of water on the caravan parks and the like and how much fight she had to have to get these 23 grants of $5000. Surely a government with a conscience, surely a government with integrity would actually find a way to facilitate and expedite that facilitation and not, as we are led to believe, reprioritise funding somewhere else. It may well definitely be needed in Porepunkah for that poor community, but do not announce the same funding twice for your media headlines.

I think it is very important that this house passes this motion to get to that nitty-gritty, to understand where that funding has gone, where it has not gone and why it has not gone there. What we will see again – and it will not be any shock to anybody who is not in government – is that sometime in the next few sitting weeks the clerks, God bless them, will stand up and say, 'I'm sorry, the government has not had enough time. We can't facilitate this. There is no show.' There is no transparency in this government. At the end of the day, these are people hurting out in the regions, which need to be able to access this funding to encourage people to come back into the regions, for our tourism to flourish and to rebuild and regenerate after devastating bushfires.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:51): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mrs McArthur's documents motion. As is convention, the government does not oppose documents motions. I want to echo Ms Ermacora's remarks about the obviously devastating impact that the fires in 2024–25 had in many communities across Western Victoria. We do know that Victoria does face severe bushfire conditions all too often, and often those conditions result in devastating fires. We just last week had the latest season preparedness report released at the 2026 Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council conference, and that report shows that once again there are extraordinarily difficult seasonal conditions confronting Victoria in the coming six months.

I want to just make a couple of remarks about this motion. After the disaster in 2024–25, consistent with the national disaster funding arrangements and agreed with the Commonwealth, a range of supports were made available. This was not the only support that was made available. It was one of the supports made available, the business bushfire recovery grant program. Those eligibility conditions are consistent with those national arrangements and are consistent with practice. The funding envelope

that was identified was not a spending target. It was an expectation of what might be required. Businesses were invited to apply, businesses were contacted and applications were received. Of the 32 applications that were received over the six-month period following the fires, 29 applications were successful. I think what this demonstrates is that there is support for businesses available, there is engagement with local communities and applications are received and assessed. But if businesses are not eligible or they do not apply, the government cannot just hand the money over without compliance with the guidelines. I do not think anyone would suggest that governments should be handing out financial assistance to businesses or individuals that are not eligible.

One point I want to make about the contributions that both Mrs McArthur and Ms Bath made criticising funding going towards the administration of bushfire recovery programs: what it demonstrates is that they do not want to put resources into supporting communities affected by fire. They have said that unless the communities are big enough –

Melina Bath: On a point of order, Acting President, our standing orders state that we must speak truth, and this member is actually verballing the exact opposite of what Mrs McArthur and I said.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): It is a point of debate, not a point of order.

Ryan BATCHELOR: They have said that if it is a small fire and there are only a small number of people affected – if a small community is affected – they do not deserve support. That is the absolute consequence of the National Party's and the Liberal Party's position.

Melina Bath: On a point of order, Acting President, the member is not speaking truth, and I ask you to draw him back to the topic of debate.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Further to the point of order, Acting President, they are very sensitive to the fact that they do not like small communities, aren't they?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): Neither of those are points of order.

Ryan BATCHELOR: The Liberals cannot handle the fact that they do not support small communities affected by fires.

Bev McArthur: On a point of order, Acting President, $784,000 was used in administration, and $115,000 was paid out in grants. We just want the figures.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): Mrs McArthur, that is a point of debate, not a point of order. There is no point of order.

Motion agreed to.

Magistrates' Court of Victoria

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:55): I move:

> That this house, in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within four weeks of this resolution being agreed to, all documents produced by the Magistrates' Court of Victoria that outline the:
>
> (1) total number of current imprisonment warrants issued by the Magistrates' Court of Victoria following default on an instalment order made under section 160(4)(b) of the Infringements Act 2006 or section 165A(2)(b) of the Fines Reform Act 2014;
>
> (2) number of warrants relating to unpaid toll infringements and the number relating to other infringement notices for each local government area.

This documents motion is about recent data on fines and infringement notices from the Magistrates' Court. Imprisonment for unpaid fines is unjust. It punishes people for poverty rather than for wrongdoing. The risk of imprisonment for failing to pay a toll fine is significant. Magistrates' Court data shows that up to 83 per cent of fines in enforcement warrant cases are toll fines. Victorians who cannot afford to pay their fines should not be punished with imprisonment. The evidence is clear that

imprisonment and even the threat of imprisonment cause severe and avoidable harm to vulnerable Victorians and their families and communities. That harm falls particularly heavily on First Nations people and other marginalised Victorians.

Access to de-identified data on imprisonment warrants for unpaid fines, including postcode and demographic information, is essential to understanding who is being subjected to imprisonment and whether the fines system is disproportionately affecting people experiencing disadvantage. This data would allow the government to identify patterns, including where warrants are concentrated and which communities are most affected, and assess whether people are being imprisoned because they are unwilling to pay or because they are simply unable to pay. Without this information it is difficult to determine whether the fines system is operating fairly, proportionately and where and as intended or whether it is effectively punishing people for poverty and disadvantage. Victoria does have safeguards intended to prevent vulnerable people from being imprisoned for unpaid fines, but those safeguards are failing in practice. Many people affected by these orders incurred these fines during periods of family violence, mental illness, drug and alcohol dependency or homelessness – circumstances that would enable them to avoid imprisonment.

This information should help Fines Victoria to target the use of its existing powers under the Fines Reform Act 2014 to distinguish between people who cannot pay and those who are willing to pay. By identifying communities and cohorts experiencing high levels of imprisonment warrants, Fines Victoria could undertake more proactive reviews of individual circumstances, including whether fines were incurred during periods of family violence, mental illness, drug and alcohol dependency or homelessness. This would support a fines system that uses imprisonment as a genuine last resort rather than punishing people whose circumstances mean that they are unable to pay. This would allow the government to understand the size of the debts involved and whether people are being imprisoned for relatively small amounts. It can also ensure we look at the repayment capacity of Victorians living in poverty and take into consideration cases where repayment plans are so low that debts could take decades or even centuries to clear.

Access to this data will give the government a clearer picture of who is being impacted and where the system is failing. It can help inform better policy and ensure fines are recovered in a way that is fair, proportionate and effective, without punishing Victorians simply because they cannot afford to pay. Data can provide a much clearer picture of a person's circumstances, income, payment history and engagement with the fines system. This information, if used appropriately, could help identify people who are experiencing financial hardship or other forms of vulnerability, rather than simply treating every unpaid fine as a failure or refusal to pay. For a person with the financial capacity to pay, enforcement may be appropriate, but for someone living in poverty or experiencing homelessness, family violence, disability or other significant disadvantage, escalating enforcement action may simply make an already difficult situation much worse. We should be using the data available to government to make the fines system smarter, fairer and more targeted. Understanding data can help the government fix a system that should recover money, not punish vulnerable Victorians for being unable to pay.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (11:00): As per convention, the government will not oppose this short-form documents motion. Since entering government in 2014 Labor has worked to make Victoria's fines system fairer, more proportionate and more understanding of individual circumstances. We recognise that while fines play an important role in enforcing the law, the system must also account for financial hardship, vulnerability and a person's capacity to pay. That is why Labor has implemented significant reforms that have expanded access to payment arrangements, strengthened protections for vulnerable Victorians and created more pathways for people to address fine debt before enforcement action escalates, keeping the core principles of enforcement in place while also understanding the broader context of individual infringements.

The Fines Reform Act 2014 was the first step in Labor's work to build a fairer, more compassionate and more modern fine system in Victoria. The reforms recognised a fundamental reality that there is a difference between people who refuse to pay a fine and people who are simply unable to pay. For

too long vulnerable Victorians could find themselves caught in an enforcement system that did not adequately account for hardship or personal circumstances. We set out to change that. Through the establishment of Fines Victoria and a stronger focus on payment arrangements, early intervention and alternative pathways, the reforms created a system that is more focused on engagement and resolution than punitive enforcement.

Perhaps the clearest example of this approach is the family violence scheme, which was introduced as part of the Fines Reform Act. Labor recognised that many victim-survivors can incur fines as a direct consequence of coercion, control and abuse perpetrated against them. A fair system cannot ignore those realities. Through the family violence scheme, victim-survivors have a pathway to have those circumstances properly considered, ensuring that they are not unfairly penalised for conduct that arises from family violence. By embedding safeguards such as these we have strived to make Victoria's fines system more human, more sympathetic and more responsive to the lived experience of vulnerable Victorians, while maintaining the enforcement principles necessary to uphold respect for the law and confidence in the justice system.

The government continued their reform agenda in 2018, making further changes to ensure the fines system remains fair, this time focused on toll infringements. The tolling compliance and enforcement Act 2018 introduced a more proportionate enforcement framework for unpaid tolls, including a cap on the number of infringements that could arise from multiple tolling offences within a prescribed period. It was another practical step towards a system that encourages compliance while ensuring enforcement remains fair and reasonable.

Labor has always sought to get the balance right when it comes to fines enforcements. Some advocate for a purely punitive approach, regardless of the circumstance; others would remove meaningful enforcement mechanisms altogether. We reject both extremes. Our reforms have been guided by the principles of enforcement and compassion – they are not mutually exclusive. Victorians should be supported to pay the fines they owe wherever possible whilst preserving the integrity of the system. This is the balance Labor has pursued since 2014, and it is the balance that we will continue to uphold. Victorians know that if they break the law, yes, they may receive a fine, but they should also know that they have a government that believes fairness matters and in understanding personal circumstances and also a government that is committed to a justice system that treats people with the dignity that all Victorians deserve. Can I finish my remarks by thanking Ms Payne for bringing this motion before us, and I look forward to other contributions on this motion later this morning.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (11:04): Notice of motion 1585 in Ms Payne's name is a documents order that seeks the following:

(1) total number of current imprisonment warrants issued by the Magistrates' Court of Victoria following default on an instalment order made under section 160(4)(b) of the Infringements Act 2006 or section 165A(2)(b) of the Fines Reform Act 2014;

(2) number of warrants relating to unpaid toll infringements and the number relating to other infringement notices for each local government area.

This is an important piece of information. We strongly support the provision of this information and this documents motion. The motion seeks the information within four weeks of its resolution. I do not hold much hope that it will be provided, given the way the government has been behaving with documents in the recent period.

There is an issue with the tolling arrangements in this state. The opposition is very concerned about them. There are people who have a range of hardship cases. Of course there is an important role for enforcement of people who do not do the right thing, but I want to say that we do think there is a broader problem here. The West Gate Tunnel deal was a terrible, dud deal that was done by Labor. It was done in circumstances that I do not think stand up to proper scrutiny. Pallas's office's involvement and the movement of Considine and others across there within a very short period of time had all the hallmarks of corrupt decision-making going on. I think the West Gate Tunnel deal blew out massively

with huge state costs. It got Transurban, frankly, what they wanted: the extension of their concession to 2045. There are huge amounts of toll money paid through early instalments and with quarterly increases all the way through. To this day people can come across the Bolte Bridge or through the tunnel, and they are paying an additional levy to support the West Gate Tunnel. They may never, ever use it. I have used the West Gate Tunnel once just to see it and to understand what it was like. I can tell you there were only three cars in the thing going both directions, but nonetheless people were paying for that tunnel.

Ryan Batchelor: How can you see them going in both directions?

David DAVIS: Well, because you can see it at the end.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: I will tell you what, you know that this was a bad deal for Victoria, and Victorians are paying through the nose.

Ryan Batchelor: You just said something that is not physically possible.

David DAVIS: It is if you go to the ends of the tunnels. I want to be clear here that the opposition has some important responses to the problems people are having with tolls. We have offered a $50-a-week cap on tolls for families and for small businesses for two years from 1 July 2027 if elected. The toll cap will apply to cars, light commercial vehicles and small business fleets of up to five vehicles, including a number of tradies' popular models: Toyota Hilux, Ranger, Isuzu D-MAX and others which attract higher tolls currently. Many tradies are being clobbered hard with massive costs to their businesses because of the deal that was done. Mr Batchelor might like the deal, but most tradies and families that are paying the tolls do not like the deal. The toll cap will be a first step in a broader review of tolling arrangements in Victoria to ensure the system is delivering the best possible outcomes for motorists. There are a number of points that we can work our way through with Transurban, but in the first instance, a two-year toll cap is a very significant addition for many families and businesses.

We are conscious of the harm and the damage that is being caused, the cost-of-living impact and the hit on so many small businesses that has been implemented through this process. I for one say Jess Wilson has made a very important announcement here; she has understood that there are a range of issues with these tolling arrangements that are impacting on families and small businesses. We have got a first step. There are obviously going to have to be a number of discussions, but we need to work our way through them. I see the documents motion today as a useful step in providing additional information about the impacts on many individuals that occur with this set of tolling arrangements.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (11:09): I rise to support this wonderful motion as well. I think the house is asking for something very reasonable, something every Victorian should know, and that is how many warrants are now sitting behind unpaid toll infringements, as if our courts and police do not have better things to do. They should be out catching actual thugs and all the violent teens on our streets. The road toll system in this state seems to me to have been designed from the get-go to exploit Victorians who have already contributed taxes to build and maintain the roads and then as toll payers on every single use. Even worse, toll companies alone get to use Victoria Police as their private enforcers. You start with a $4 trip through the West Gate Tunnel, and if you miss a payment, then you will receive your first invoice in the post on paper, letting you know that you have missed your $4 toll and you are also being charged $16.13 for an admin fee. Why are these being sent by post at all if not to rip off taxpayers for that extra amount? If you miss that, ignore that or could not pay it on time, then eventually, again through the post on paper, you will get your second warning. You will get told about the toll you missed, and you will be charged $31.49 in admin fees. If you miss that, then Victoria Police can issue an infringement notice; the infringement cost is $209.10. Then comes Fines Victoria, then the licence suspension, then a hold on your registration, then a garnish on your wages and then at the very end of that chain waits an enforcement warrant for a $4 toll and $31.49 in admin fees – in the middle of a crime crisis.

No other private business in Victoria gets to use Victoria Police to collect their debts for them. They do not do it for plumbers, they do not do it for mechanics, they do not do it for schools and they do not do it for dental clinics. When an ordinary Victorian business sends an invoice and you fail to pay, they have to bear the risk of following you up for that money, taking you to court and selling your debt to a private debt collection company, and they risk never getting paid. But not these big toll companies – no, they get to use Victoria Police to back them up as their enforcers. I think that is an incredible conflict of interest, and it is just not right; that is not what the police are for.

The Melbourne City Link Act 1995 is legislation that really exploits and condemns Victorians. These administration fees have already been brought up: a Senate inquiry recorded that a Victorian Auditor-General examination found that the genuine cost of admin sat somewhere between 28 cents and 93 cents. I mean, that is outrageous; that is just pillaging Victorians who are already suffering through a cost-of-living crisis. New South Wales has already switched all of those administrative fees off. They are the same companies and the same roads, but it is a far better deal for ratepayers across the border than it is for Victorians. Victorians are being absolutely pillaged left, right and centre by this government. They hide it behind private companies and blame them, but really it is this place that started this system.

CityLink is doing just fine. Public reporting put its revenue at $987 million in 2024–25, and this year Transurban admitted to a billing error that overcharged roughly 90,000 Melbourne motorists. Advocacy groups have warned that most of the old imprisonment warrants for unpaid fines were toll debts. This house deserves to see the truth of those numbers. Again, I remind everybody that this system was set up by this Parliament. Some members of this Parliament even have shares in these companies. Do not forget that the trucks that this was supposed to get off the streets are now banned on Francis Street and others around Footscray, meaning that trucks moving around the west have no safe, reasonable way of avoiding the tolls. This government is using its power to shovel money back into the pockets of private companies. It is not about serving Victorians, and it is not about fixing the road crisis. The documents produced by this motion are necessary for transparency. Victorians deserve to know how many people are being rorted by this system. I thank Ms Payne for bringing this motion.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Ministerial conduct

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (11:14): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

(a) the ministerial register of gifts, benefits and hospitality, between July 2025 and January 2026 shows:

(i) seven Labor ministers and parliamentary secretaries accepted at least 26 free tickets and VIP hospitality packages to Victoria's biggest sporting events from gambling corporations;

(ii) the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation accepted three hospitality packages for two people to attend Derby Day, the Brownlow Medal and the AFL Grand Final from Tabcorp Holdings, Crown Casino and Endeavour Group, despite having official responsibility of gambling, gaming and liquor regulation;

(b) the government has been criticised by experts for watering down gambling and alcohol harm reduction reforms;

(c) the ministerial code of conduct states a minister must not accept any gift, hospitality or other benefit that could reasonably be expected to give rise to a conflict of interest or could reasonably be perceived as an inducement or reward for doing or not doing something in the exercise of official functions;

(2) calls on the Premier to back up claims that integrity is not optional by making changes in time for this year's spring carnival, Brownlow Medal and AFL finals by:

(a) introducing legislation that implements all outstanding recommendations from IBAC's 2022 *Special Report on Corruption Risks Associated with Donations and Lobbying*;

(b) banning all gifts, hospitality packages and other potential inducements from gambling corporations to ministers; and

(c) investigating and taking strong action on potential conflicts of interest and breaches of the code of conduct by ministers.

Having spent much of the last four years in this place introducing legislation and amendments to strengthen the state's integrity regime and having been blocked in these efforts at each and every turn by the Labor MPs to my right and frequently, I should add, by my Liberal colleagues over on the left, I admit to somewhat bittersweet feelings when Premier Carroll announced earlier this month that integrity would not be optional under his Labor government. As I noted a few weeks ago, I am not sure the statement reflects all that well on the new Premier, given he was a senior minister and even Deputy Premier over the last 12 years when the state Labor government apparently considered political integrity as optional. But in introducing this motion today I am effectively taking Premier Carroll at his word that Victorian politics is now at long last entering into a post-optional integrity era, which I hope will mean that Labor and the Liberals will now stop blocking the essential legislation and other integrity reforms to hold all politicians in this state to higher standards of conduct.

The list of overdue public integrity law reform in Victoria is so long that I could not get close to covering it all within the 250-word limit of this motion, but at the very top of this list is the need for Victoria to introduce strong laws on corporate lobbying and influence on ministers and ministerial staff and to strengthen and legislate the management and oversight of the ministerial code of conduct. These measures were recommended not only in IBAC's *Special Report on Corruption Risks Associated with Donations and Lobbying* back in 2022 but also in recommendations from IBAC's Operation Clara, Operation Daintree, Operation Sandon and, most recently, Operation Richmond reports. Despite this litany of recommendations from IBAC, most of these key lobbying recommendations are yet to be implemented.

I have also introduced this specific motion today because nowhere is the effect of corporate lobbying more pernicious and destructive on the lives of everyday Australians than in regard to the hold that the corporate gambling industry, along with its money and lobbyists, continues to have over Australian politicians from the Liberal and Labor parties. Australians hold the infamous title of being the biggest gambling losers in the world by dollar value, and we have the highest rates of gambling harm in our society. Every day gambling addiction destroys families financially in this state and contributes to endemic levels of family violence we are experiencing, and in this nation it quadruples a person's risk of suicide. That we have got to this place today is not through chance or the vagaries of our society's cultural and commercial evolution; it is because of the deliberate choices of successive Labor and Liberal politicians and governments over decades in continually caving in to, backing down from or simply ignoring altogether the need for strong and effective regulation to control the gambling industry.

To say that Australians have had an absolute gutful of being sold out again and again by politicians effectively working on behalf of the gambling industry is an understatement. Just last week we witnessed another cave-in on gambling reforms, this time on legislation at the federal level that should have introduced a blanket ban on gambling advertising and gambling companies providing inducements to problem gamblers, but ultimately it ended up with Labor, the Liberals and One Nation once again siding with the gambling companies. Last week, yet again, Labor and the Liberals chose to put the corporate profits of the gambling industry over and above the unanimous recommendations from health experts, people who have lived experience of gambling addiction and their families and a committee chaired by a member of government but also went against the wishes of the overwhelming majority of sports lovers and regular Australians who just want to be able to watch a game of cricket or footy without being forcibly told every few minutes that they need to be betting on it. It is scarcely

believable to children and young people today that watching a game in such a way was not only possible but actually normal no more than 20 years ago. We have of course seen similar backdowns, obfuscation, delays and watering down of gambling harm reduction reforms by politicians at the state level in Victoria as recently as last year, when they delayed mandatory precommitment for pokie machines. Thanks to Labor's and the Liberals' efforts last week, gambling companies will continue to be able to shower gamblers with inducements to keep them gambling, such as free VIP tickets, hospitality and alcohol at major sporting events.

Gambling companies do not just provide these inducements to problem gamblers to keep them gambling; they also provide the very same inducements to greedy politicians to influence them to block, delay or water down gambling reforms and legislation. The extent of this systematic and predatory inducement of politicians by gambling corporations is no less shocking than that of problem gamblers. According to the most recent reports from the gifts register, in just six months seven Victorian ministers or parliamentary secretaries accepted at least 26 free VIP hospitality tickets to our biggest sporting events from the nation's largest gambling and pokies corporations, including Tabcorp, Sportsbet, Crown Casino and the Endeavour Group. The likely value of these hospitality gifts from gambling companies to Victorian politicians would be in the tens of thousands of dollars, if not more. These are ministers, by the way, who are being paid upwards of $450,000 a year by Victorian taxpayers yet still hold their entitled hands out for luxury freebies from the gambling corporations every year in September, when many of the state's biggest sporting events are held.

Gambling companies operate primarily for profit and to increase shareholder value. They are not benevolent organisations working for the social good. The only logical reason for gambling companies to incur the substantial costs of handing out expensive free gifts and hospitality to politicians, along with millions of dollars in donations to the Labor and Liberal parties, is to try and directly or indirectly influence politicians' decision-making to favour the gambling companies over other stakeholders, primarily the general population. The effectiveness of these inducements from gambling companies to politicians and political parties is there for everyone to see. It is evidenced in every policy backdown, in every watering-down of harm reduction legislation and regulation and every time the Labor and Liberal parties choose to side with the gambling industry over the public they are meant to serve, and ultimately it is evidenced in the very real harms and devastation lived by countless people every day.

I have mentioned the most recent watering-down of reforms at the state and federal level, but here are some more decisions we could explore. Why else would Premier Andrews deny that there were any issues and turn a blind eye to the obviously illegal goings-on at Crown Casino for almost a decade, until the weight of media pressure ultimately required a royal commission? It is a familiar story under Labor. For what other reason did Premier Andrews lock down every home and business in Victoria during the pandemic but somehow decide that the sole exception to this list should be Crown Casino? How, at the same time, could an Andrews Labor minister – who, due to a lack of current lobbyist laws, now sits on the board of Crown Casino – decide that the sole exclusion from the statewide lockdowns should be made not for funerals or family reunions but for the owners and connections of those involved in a horse race, the Cox Plate? These – let us be generous and parliamentary – completely irrational decisions from Victorian Labor ministers only make any kind of sense when we consider the uniquely pernicious relationship that the gambling companies and lobbyists have with Victoria's politicians and the political parties that they donate to.

Not even Labor or Liberal politicians are naive or stupid enough to try and claim that the gambling corporations and lobbyists are not trying to buy influence in our politics. If we all accept that this is the case, then we must also accept that it is the minister for gambling regulation that is particularly susceptible to improper lobbying or influence from the gambling lobby – just as, say, the Minister for Health is to tobacco or the planning minister is to property developers. Yet despite this risk, the latest gifts register shows that the biggest grafter from the gambling companies, incredibly, also happens to be the Victorian minister directly responsible for regulating the gambling industry. In just six months the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation accepted entertainment packages for two to

Derby Day, the Brownlow Medal and the AFL Grand Final from Tabcorp Holdings, Crown Casino and liquor and pokies giant the Endeavour Group. Indeed if there was a Brownlow Medal for conflicts of interest, there is no doubt the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation would be taking home the Charlie this year.

While we have all seen that it is common for Labor to claim that no rules or laws have been broken when defending the indefensible political integrity scandals, unfortunately for the minister involved, even in Victoria the ministerial code of conduct expressly prohibits Victorian ministers from accepting hospitality that could be reasonably seen as a conflict of interest or an inducement to reward for doing or not doing something in the exercise of official functions. Rules have been broken, yet the minister yesterday displayed no genuine contrition and offered no plausible excuse or explanation in response to his serious and repeated conflicts of interest in direct breach of the ministerial code with regard to accepting luxurious hospitality from the gambling companies he is meant to regulate. In fact the minister's response seemed to indicate that he considered breaching the code of conduct to accept expensive gifts and hospitality from gambling companies an essential part of the job of being a minister. Whether the minister's actions and response come from a sense of impunity from consequences or accountability, whether it shows just how normalised the influence of the gambling corporations has become or whether it simply demonstrates what the Premier intimated this month – that Labor ministers really have considered integrity as an optional extra up until now – is not easy to determine. But what we can call out is the astounding cognitive dissonance and complete lack of professional awareness on display.

I say to the minister: whether you like to think about it or not, there is a direct relationship between you being wined and dined at great expense by the gambling companies and the level of gambling losses and harm that occurs to individuals and families in this state. While you are enjoying playing dress-up and schmoozing with rich-listers in a glitzy corporate box, an everyday Victorian is remortgaging their house, unable to pay for their groceries at the check-out or burying a loved one because of gambling. In fact this is the exact reason why under the ministerial code you are expressly directed to avoid accepting hospitality that could be perceived in any way as creating a conflict of interest. It is simply not good enough for you as a grown man, let alone the responsible minister, to make-believe otherwise. It is public integrity 101 for a junior public servant, let alone the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation.

But now a line in the sand has been drawn on integrity, at least rhetorically, by the Premier. Whether or not this line is genuine or just another empty line for the media from an under-pressure Labor Premier comes down to what happens next. This motion is unashamedly presented as a test for the new Premier on integrity. It asks: is the ministerial code of conduct worth the paper it is written on under Ben Carroll, or is it just window dressing? Will there be real consequences under Premier Carroll for breaches of integrity, standards and rules that apply to ministers? A good place to start in answering these questions would be by publicly banning his Labor ministers from accepting tickets to hospitality at next month's AFL finals, Spring Racing Carnival, Brownlow Medal count and any other sporting event from gambling corporations.

As I have outlined, this issue is not isolated to individual ministers accepting gifts and hospitality from gambling companies. It is part of a much bigger problem in Australian politics, which is the pernicious relationship between the corporate interests, lobbyists and money, and politicians and political parties. So the Greens are also testing this Parliament and the Premier to go further than just addressing the broader stain that gambling money and corporate lobbying has had on our politics for far too long. This motion also demands the Premier urgently introduces tough lobbying laws for all corporate lobbyists, ministers and ministerial staff in line with IBAC's well-overdue recommendations. Integrity is supposedly no longer optional for the Victorian Labor government. Today we will see if this statement holds any truth.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (11:28): If there was a Norm Smith Medal for hypocrisy, the Greens would win best on ground every time. I am going to come to the utter hypocrisy

that we see from the Greens when it comes to gambling interests and taking money from the gambling industry in a minute, because it is truly breathtaking that they can stand up in this place and cast aspersions on members of the government for accepting gifts properly disclosed from gambling corporations while accepting more than $3.8 million in political donations from gambling interests in the last 11 years, including nearly $1 million in 2025 alone. I will come to this, because the looks of incredulity on the faces of the members on the crossbench right now might give them pause to reflect on the exceptionally large glass house that they are living in.

The government does take integrity seriously, and one of the reasons for the details of the benefits and the gifts that have been received by ministers and parliamentary secretaries is because of the disclosure rules put in place by the Labor government. This material is on the public record because Labor passed the laws to require it. Labor put in place the practices to require it – and not just the gifts, benefits and hospitality received by ministers and parliamentary secretaries; all members are required in their register of interests to disclose interests which could give rise to conflicts of interest above a certain threshold. That is good. It is there for everyone to see – just as this Labor government has been the one to introduce electoral donation disclosure laws here in the state of Victoria. The reason that we know here in the state of Victoria that individuals and corporations donate to various political parties, including to the Greens political party, is because those donations are required by law to be disclosed. The transparency that is at the heart of the information this motion calls out was put there by Labor. That is because Labor does believe in transparency and accountability when it comes to electoral donations and gifts, benefits and hospitality. That is why we think it is important that things like gifts, things like meetings and things like donations are put in the public domain, and we do not resile from that for a moment. We think it is incredibly important that these matters are placed on the public record.

It is just slightly galling to hear the Greens accuse one particular minister, but Labor and others more broadly, of staining our politics through gambling money. I think the quote from Dr Mansfield was 'the broader stain that gambling money has had on our politics for far too long'. Let us talk about the influence of gambling money on politics in Australia, and particularly the money that has flowed from gambling interests to the Greens, because that should be in the public debate on a motion such as this moved by Dr Mansfield. According to the DonationWatch website, $3,811,223 has been donated to the Greens since 2014 by an individual, Mr Duncan Turpie, who is regarded by them as making his money from gambling.

Sarah Mansfield interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: They say it is completely different. It is really interesting, Dr Mansfield, that you say it is completely different. I am not sure that the gambling works any differently, whether it is online poker or poker machines or horseracing, because gambling in an online poker tournament means you are betting against other individuals. You are. The winnings that come from online poker do not come from a miraculous pot of money in the cloud; they come from other gamblers and potentially other problem gamblers. As Dr Mansfield said, gambling addiction destroys families. It is what Dr Mansfield said in her contribution: gambling addiction destroys families. I put it to you that the online poker industry is full of gambling addicts, and someone who makes enough money from online gambling and online poker tournaments to donate $3.8 million to the Greens is profiting off misery. You cannot get up here and suggest that online poker players do not involve some degree of problem gambling. You just cannot, and they do. We do know that there are significant concerns about people losing money in online poker tournaments.

We just do not hear it from the Greens. We just do not hear it from the Greens because, whilst they rail against certain gambling interests, they do not rail against those who donate to them. They try – they have tried now and previously – to say there is a difference between being a gambler and being a gambling company. That is in fact what the Greens said in 2025 when this issue was raised. But the money still comes from problem gamblers. It does not matter whether you are a gambling company or someone involved in a secretive gambling cartel that makes money from online poker playing, the money that you win still comes from other gamblers – and, as Dr Mansfield herself said, a large

number of those are problem gamblers. A large number of those are problem gamblers, because we do, as Dr Mansfield said, have some of the highest rates of gambling losses in the world. You cannot have money won from gambling donated to the Greens and suggest it is not coming from problem gambling when you also say that Australia has some of the highest rates of problem gambling losses in the world.

We also know that they do rail against billionaires not paying their fair share of tax too, right? According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Mr Turpie, the person who has donated $3.8 million to the Greens in the last 12 months:

> is reportedly part of the secretive Punters Club which came to the attention of the Australian Tax Office in a 2012 court case over reported activity of $2.4 billion a year.
>
> The ATO accused the club's 19 members of owing hundreds of millions in unpaid taxes after using software to maximise winnings. It alleged club members withheld information to give the impression its activities were recreational gambling.

So the ATO has taken action, for unpaid taxes and misleading the tax office, on gambling winnings, including on the person that, after this report came out, the Greens accepted $3.8 million in donations from. After this report came out, the Greens accepted $3.8 million from someone who, it has been publicly reported, was involved in gambling with an annual turnover of $2.4 billion, had millions in unpaid taxes and deliberately withheld information from the tax office to cover their tracks.

I do not think that anyone can take the hypocrisy of the Greens seriously here. And it was not 10 years ago. It was almost $1 million in donations in the first four months of 2025. This is not the deep, dark past; this is right now. It is very clear that the Greens are only critical of gambling interests that do not donate to them. They have not brought anything into this Parliament complaining about addiction caused through online poker being played by Australians. And we know why: because their political donors make money from it. Their political donors are making money from problem gamblers in online poker tournaments. And they sit there silent. The only gambling interests they appear to be concerned about are the ones that do not donate to them. If there was a Norm Smith medal for hypocrisy, the Greens would be best on ground.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (11:39): I rise to speak on this motion. Usually on a Wednesday when I am speaking after Mr Batchelor I am scribbling away with rebuttals, but I found myself agreeing with most of that contribution. It is pretty wild debating on Wednesdays; you never know what they are going to throw up. This is I believe a sledge motion, and the Liberals and Nationals do not support sledge motions. Sometimes I think the Greens come to this place with a solution in search of a problem. There are legitimate questions that can be and should be asked about gifts and benefits and hospitality received by ministers. There should be a high standard for ministers, particularly when a gift of hospitality is provided by an organisation that operates within the minister's portfolio responsibilities. But this motion goes much further. It draws conclusions that are not supported by the evidence presented, conflating separate issues and proposing a response that is arbitrarily poorly defined and based on a vibe rather than any kind of evidence.

The motion points to the ministerial register of gifts, benefits and hospitality and notes that ministers and parliamentary secretaries accepted tickets and hospitality from companies involved in gambling – and yes, they do. A lot of members in this place accept these sorts of gifts and hospitality because they engage with organisations that are relevant to their electorate or portfolio or broadly benefit the state of Victoria, adding lots of contribution to the state of Victoria and employing thousands of workers in this state. Ministers necessarily engage with organisations that fall within their portfolios. They attend events, meet stakeholders and represent the government at these kinds of events. Whether accepting hospitality is appropriate depends on the circumstances, the value, the purpose of the attendance and the nature of the relationship, and whether an actual or perceived conflict was properly managed is what actually matters.

I want to do something I do not do often in this chamber, and that is defend Minister Erdogan. The example involving the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation understandably attracts attention. The minister accepted hospitality associated with Derby Day, the Brownlow Medal, the AFL Grand Final, Tabcorp, Crown and the Endeavour Group. The Greens know this – that is why they put it in their motion – and we know this. Do you want to know how we know this? Because it was disclosed through the proper channels.

The AFL Grand Final, which I am looking forward to, is one of the most significant dates in the Victorian calendar – a significant date that they have just made us do more work in the lead-up to due to an additional sitting week. It brings significant economic benefits to this state. It puts Melbourne at the centre of the nation. It is a significant driver of tourism. It also has a growing international audience and boosts our state's economy. I do not for one moment begrudge a cabinet minister engaging with significant stakeholders in their portfolio in support of this. The motion also names Endeavour Group, which is a company that employs, according to its website, 30,000 Australians and, undoubtedly a significant number here in Victoria, in legitimate retail operations, including Dan Murphy's and the like. Does the proposed ban apply to an entire company because one part of its operations involves gambling? The Greens are trying to imply that they are just another gambling company, with the sort of university left academic insinuation that it brings.

It also makes me wonder how the Greens would act if, God forbid, they were ever elected to govern. Engaging with stakeholders and getting input on policy is a fundamental part of being a government – something the Greens are demonstrating they are not prepared to do. What this motion tells us is that a minister in a Greens government would be openly hostile to industry stakeholders and to the needs of the thousands, in some cases, of workers and their families the industry employs and represents.

There is another side of the spectrum to which the motion goes, where the Greens would have a minister who would have no relationship with the stakeholders they are responsible for and in fact would be openly hostile to them. That itself would create all sorts of issues. It would create conflict and would be completely unworkable to be openly hostile to those industries. I guess the Greens would say they want to shut down all of the industries that they are talking about here, but it would be completely unworkable to have a minister who is openly hostile to any stakeholders in their portfolio. The motion places hospitality by ministers alongside criticism of government gambling policy and then immediately quotes the ministerial code provisions dealing with inducements and rewards. The insinuation is obvious, yet no evidence demonstrating the connection is provided. If there is a legitimate piece of evidence, I welcome you to table it.

Then there is an artificial deadline imposed by this motion. Apparently these sweeping integrity reforms must be implemented by the time of the Spring Racing Carnival, the Brownlow Medal and the AFL finals, and I cannot help but wonder if this motion and this timeline are designed for social media tiles that we have seen from Greens HQ that have already been prepared ahead of this motion's likely defeat.

I understand that this motion is coming from a good place and that you want to insinuate that every Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation is somehow doing dodgy deals in front of probably a hundred people in a room that includes some stakeholders who, honestly – I have been to these events – he probably speaks to for 60 seconds before he has to speak to another stakeholder. It is not the way these things work, particularly at hospitality events and stakeholder events and breakfasts and things like that. What basically you are insinuating is that Minister Erdogan would go to an event, chat to someone for maybe 2 minutes and then say, 'I'm going to introduce laws that benefit you because you've given me hospitality to the value of $500.' I have criticism of Mr Erdogan, but I do not think he is that sinister. I do not think he is changing government policy for accepting a ticket to the Spring Racing Carnival or the grand final et cetera. As I said, the only reason we know about this and it is in your motion is because it was properly disclosed through the appropriate channel. I think this is a stunt motion that, through murky insinuation, seeks to cast doubt on the integrity of

individual ministers and members of Parliament based on engaging with legitimate stakeholders and employers simply because the Greens political party does not like them.

As I said, at the other end of the spectrum, in a hypothetical Greens government, you would have an unworkable situation where the minister responsible for that sector wants to shut it down so would be openly hostile to legitimate businesses. If you are having a crack at Endeavour Group, which employs thousands and thousands of people, tens of thousands of people, in Victoria, you are basically saying, because one part of that business deals in gambling affairs, the minister should not engage with it on a professional level or, with other businesses present, attend hospitality and stakeholder events. I think it is legitimate for a minister in the Victorian government, regardless of political stripe, to be present at some of these big, significant stakeholder events, particularly when they are meaningful for our state's economy and they are meaningful for our state's jobs. It does drive investment to our state, and Victoria does need a representative at these kinds of events.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (11:49): I rise to make a brief contribution on the motion before the house, and I thank Dr Mansfield for bringing this question before us. In addressing this motion I am reminded of an anecdote about a former Victorian Labor Premier, the late John Cain Sr. I am told that he kept a jar of stamps in his office that he used for his personal correspondence, rather than using taxpayer-funded stamps. This of course harks back to a time when the merest hint of ministerial impropriety could threaten to bring down a government, when the disclosure of a minister receiving gifts could lead to their resignation and political exile. I am sure those of us who are a little more senior would recall the Paddington Bear affair or the colour TV imports that cost ministers their jobs. But that degree of personal and political rectitude seems very quaint today, certainly in this Parliament, where ministers routinely shrug off questions of transparency and integrity. As Dr Mansfield explained, this was exemplified, I am afraid, yesterday by the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation in his nonchalant response to a question posed by Ms Copsey. This acceptance of hospitality from the very sector you are charged with regulating could be reasonably perceived as a conflict of interest.

Mr Batchelor conflating 'gambling' with 'gamblers' with 'gambling companies' is mind-boggling. And now that the government apparently has a newfound compassion for problem gamblers, I am sure we are all dizzy with anticipation, waiting for this government to introduce legislation with some guts on gambling that would address that question. But let us not let consistency stand in the way of a good cheap shot, Mr Batchelor. That sort of brush-off has become part of the culture of secrecy and non-disclosure that characterises this government. Week after week we witness the government's refusal to release documents that have been ordered to be released by this Council. How utterly pathetic to receive a letter from the Attorney-General that the government has not had time to release a single document ordered by this house. It is nothing short of contempt for this chamber. It is contempt for the Victorian Parliament, it is contempt for democracy, and ipso facto it is contempt for the people of Victoria.

The ministerial code of conduct states that each minister shall provide a diary summary within 10 days of the end of each quarter. We are now approaching two months since the end of the June quarter, and where are the diaries? What is so secret? Or has the Premier's private office had no time to release the diaries because it has been too busy refusing to release the documents ordered by this chamber? Well, we know what was in the last lot of diaries, don't we? As the *Age* reported, it was Danny Pearson duchessing a dozen data centre executives at the Australian Open, followed by a private industry dinner at Government House – and a few weeks later there was a gift to the ALP of $4300 from data developer NextDC. I mean, seriously, whether it is corrupt or not, it is the perception of corruption that you need to remove from your culture.

The value of that donation is as of nothing compared to the value of having a data centre approved at Fishermans Bend in only 75 days. A community cannot get a pocket park approved in 75 days by this government. It is nothing compared to the government's stoic resistance to releasing any meaningful information on how those plans are approved. It is nothing compared to having the then Premier

Jacinta Allan, Danny Pearson and Harriet Shing out there singing the praises of that project before it has even been approved. And it is nothing –

Ryan Batchelor: On a point of order, President, Mr Ettershank in his wideranging contribution appears to be straying quite a way from particular interests that have been alleged in the motion, going on to all sorts of other policy matters. I think he should be brought back to the motion.

The PRESIDENT: I urge Mr Ettershank to stick to the motion.

David ETTERSHANK: President, I appreciate that. Perceptions matter, and there is a very clear perception in the community that this government has been captured by vested interests – exactly this question of gifts. Whether it is data centres, waste-to-energy incineration, property development, the fiasco of public housing towers, the Suburban Rail Loop or gifts to ministers, this government keeps on saying, 'There is nothing to see here,' and then refuses every reasonable request to disclose information. For those who want to see, there is rejection, and that is utterly suspect.

Perceptions matter, and having one minister being both our first law officer as well as our Minister for Planning is glaring. Watching this government year after year reject any expansion of IBAC powers is glaring. We all welcome Premier Carroll's commitment to addressing this issue, and I am sure we are keen to see the issues, but again, these all strike to the culture of corruption. Maybe this government are not wrong in thinking that the public just accept these weaker standards of integrity these days and that they can just ride out these incidents, these minor corruptions. If people are cynical and have lost faith in government – well, what are they going to do about it? This is the status quo. The circus will move on.

Mr Mulholland, seriously, you had the opportunity to seize the moral high ground, and yet you took an opportunity just to bash the Greens. You have become an apologist for the government. It is remarkable. Do you not get that people are looking at exactly those gifts, disclosed or not, and see politicians that are compromised? You, sir, have abandoned the moral high ground and taken a delightfully precise deep dive into a pit of sewage. It is so disappointing.

People have a right to know their representatives are actually working for them. We all need to be assured that our leaders are working in the interests of Victorians and that they cannot be bought and cannot be influenced with trinkets, with gifts, with entertainment – seriously. That needs to be demonstrated through tougher action on conflicts of interest and breaches of the ministerial code of conduct. At the heart of this matter that is exactly what we are talking about. You have set a standard, and then you have turned your back on it. Legalise Cannabis Victoria wholeheartedly supports the motion moved by Dr Mansfield and commends it to the house.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Offshore wind energy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:00): (1437) My question is for the minister for energy. Minister, I refer to the government's offshore wind auction announced yesterday, closing in August 2027, and I ask what role contracts for difference will play. In particular, is it open for tenderers to seek state assurances through contracts for difference?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:00): Mr Davis, I will just check if I got your question. I think I got the general gist of it, even though people were talking over the top of us. Yes, I announced the auction this morning. The auction will run for 12 months. It is a reverse auction. It is about encouraging industry to bid in for the offshore projects, which will amount to 2 gigawatts of power for the NEM. In relation to what will be looked at in terms of those auctions, that is available in the documentation, which I am happy to provide you with.

As I have indicated, the auction is open, industry will be encouraged to bid in and there is a lot of industry excitement. This is not a project that starts today. There has been a lot of work undertaken by industry, which will be very keen to bid in over the next 12 months. Once the bids are submitted, Mr Davis, they will be assessed against the criteria. It is all about driving value for Victorians and energy consumers to keep Victoria best placed to keep our power prices low. As you know, they are the lowest in the country currently. We would like them to be lower going forward, which is why we are so excited about this auction. As I said, 12 months – it starts today. There will be a lot of interest. In relation to the contracts there are a range of commitments that need to be met, and they will be assessed once the tenders have approached. It is not going to be my practice to give a running commentary on the tenders before they come in.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:02): I note that my question was about whether contracts for difference were open in the tender, and the minister has not mentioned the words 'contracts for difference'. Let me therefore ask, with respect to the offshore wind auction: is it open to tenderers to request direct state government financial support, and if so, on what grounds will this be provided?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:03): Mr Davis, there are established guidelines for the tendering process. I have already offered to give you some of those details. I do not have them on me. I have got them in my office, so I can take you through some of that in greater detail. At the end of the day there will be rigorous assessments and confidential RFP documents will be provided from industry, but I am more than happy to give you the documents in terms of what they have to respond to, which will answer some of the questions that you have, I believe. We have said that contracts for difference are our preferred structure, but I am not going to give a commentary on the ones that come in as they come in. But I am more than happy to share with you the expectations that we have given to industry.

Health system

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:04): (1438) My question is for the Minister for Health. Last Monday in a media release you boasted about the government's surgery rates. Shane from Maffra broke his hip in a car accident on 25 September last year. Nearly a year later he is still waiting for surgery. That is nothing to boast about, Minister. Why has your government failed to provide vital, timely care for regional Victorians like Shane?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:04): Thank you for your question, Ms Bath, and I acknowledge your constituent Shane's issue with his health. As you would appreciate, I am not really in a position to talk about individual patients in the chamber, but –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Ingrid STITT: Ms Crozier, I am answering a question to Ms Bath, and I am about to ask her if she has consent from Shane and would like those matters followed up. I am very happy to take that up with my department. There is always the need to protect patient confidentiality, and so I know that people in the chamber appreciate that we cannot go into individual details, but I am more than happy to follow that up, Ms Bath.

It is the case that last year our public hospitals delivered record numbers of planned surgeries – 218,000 in fact – which was the third consecutive record-breaking year. I do want to acknowledge that that is an enormous effort on behalf of all of the health services that are delivering our planned surgery blueprint. I want to acknowledge in particular that I had the opportunity to go out to Northern Health and see the team out there doing incredible work and actually exceeding their –

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, this question is about Shane from Maffra. It is not about Northern Health. This is about the waitlist and somebody who has had a broken hip for 11 months and is still on the surgery waitlist. Could I ask you to bring the minister back to the subject of my question?

The PRESIDENT: On the point of order and what you referred to, the minister replied to it at the start of her answer, I believe.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, given the minister is talking about record surgeries, we still do not have the data, so I would concur with Ms Bath. Could you bring the minister back to answering the specific question around why Shane has been waiting for 11 months?

The PRESIDENT: That is not a point of order.

Ingrid STITT: As I was in the process of saying, Ms Bath asked me about our record surgery numbers, and I was –

Members interjecting.

Ingrid STITT: She prefaced the question with a question about planned surgery, and I am giving the context that 218,000 planned surgeries were delivered across our health system, which is a record. It is the third consecutive record-breaking year, and I think it is appropriate to acknowledge the effort of all of our health services and our incredible health workforce in delivering those record numbers. I have already indicated to –

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, I ask you to draw the minister back to the question. This is about Shane from Maffra – 11 months on a waitlist for a category 2 patient. Bring her back to the question, please.

The PRESIDENT: It is the same point of order, Ms Bath, that you brought up before. As I stated, the minister addressed that particular issue in the start of her answer. Since then I think the minister has been relevant, but it has been really hard to hear her. I am pretty confident she has been, and I will call her to the question.

Ingrid STITT: I want to thank the healthcare workforce right across the state for the job that they are doing caring for Victorians. I have already indicated that I am not in a position to talk about individual patients in the chamber, but I have offered to provide Ms Bath with a follow-up. If she has the consent of Shane to pass on those details, I will follow it up with my department.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:08): Thank you, Minister, for your response. As I said, Shane is a category 2 patient. He should have received surgery within 90 days. Instead, he has spent month after month trapped in his home, surviving on painkillers and moving in an agony state with a broken hip. His quality of life has been stripped away. He is isolated and suffering, and his doctor is concerned about his condition deteriorating further while he waits on the waitlist. Indeed Dr Iain Nicolson has stated, and I am paraphrasing but I am happy to give this to Hansard, that anybody east of Glen Waverley is in poor condition – and further east even more so. This is his concern about patients in the east of Melbourne. Mind you, Melbourne is no good as it is. What advice have you received regarding the impact on the health system of patients needing additional care as they wait longer and longer and the complexity of their conditions increase?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:09): Thank you for your supplementary. Again, I am not in a position to talk about individual cases in the chamber, and I will follow up if you provide me with further details, Ms Bath. In relation to the planned surgeries that are delivered across our system, again, we have seen record numbers of surgeries delivered. Our clinicians are always ensuring that we are – the only state in fact in Australia – delivering category 1 surgeries in the recommended timeframe. We have done significant work in our planned surgery –

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, my supplementary goes exactly to the health system and the delayed surgery wait list: what advice has the minister received?

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister was being relevant on what advice she has received.

Ingrid STITT: Again I reiterate that our planned surgeries are at record levels and our amazing health services across the state will continue to provide that excellent care to Victorians. If Ms Bath wants to provide me with individual details, I am happy to follow those up outside of the standing orders.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:11): I move:

That the minister's responses be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Ministers statements: offshore wind energy

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:11): Following on from Mr Davis's question, I want to talk today about offshore wind, and in particular the auction. As our ageing coal-fired power stations retire, Victorian households and businesses deserve and expect reliable, secure and affordable renewable electricity for future generations, and that is exactly what offshore wind will deliver. The auction is now live. It will help deliver 2 gigawatts of power in Gippsland, which has some of the best offshore wind resources in the world. The first auction alone will provide energy to power 1.5 million homes per year. Backing offshore wind means we are backing jobs and industry. The first 2 gigawatts of offshore wind will support up to 3000 jobs, and 1800 of those jobs will be ongoing. It is contributing $4.6 billion to Victoria's GSP, including $3.1 billion for Gippsland communities, who will keep powering Victoria for decades thanks to this investment.

We know that offshore wind is not in and of itself enough to keep the lights on. We need cheap onshore renewables and storage to back it up and the transmission to get power to households and businesses. When it comes to offshore wind, I genuinely have not worked out what the position of those opposite is, but we certainly know how they feel about everything else. A Liberal–One Nation coalition will rip up the transmission and renewable projects needed to support offshore wind and keep the lights on. It is only this Labor government that will take bold steps, like delivering offshore wind, to give Victorians the cheap and reliable energy they need and to power Victoria's economy for decades.

Illicit tobacco

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:13): (1439) My question is to the minister for liquor and gaming regulation. This morning Victoria helped Australia contribute to a grim milestone for our nation. In Footscray there was yet another firebombing attack, and this is our 300th in Australia so far since the start of the tobacco wars. My question to the minister is: how many tobacco-related firebombing attacks have there been in Victoria?

The PRESIDENT: I am not sure if the minister will have the level of detail, but I will let the minister answer as he sees fit.

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:13): I thank Mr Limbrick, and I understand his question in relation to these matters and his long-term interest in these matters. It is a matter that I closely follow. You would appreciate that incidents of violence or arson are matters for the Minister for Police in the other place. For that level of data or the causation, some of these are ongoing investigations, and there might not be necessarily that causation or link proven. I am reluctant to comment on the correlation. Nonetheless a large number are related to what we are seeing in relation to tobacco, especially the proliferation of illegal tobacco, an issue that is causing national concern

across the country. I am sure you are following the national debate. Premier Minns has spoken, leaders of one of the minor parties have spoken, I know the federal government has got a position and we have a position. Our position is that we are committed to stamping out crime in all forms, including that relating to the illicit tobacco industry. That is why we set up our first-ever regulator. That is why we passed closure powers in the last sitting week in this place – and I want to thank everyone in the chamber for their support for that part of the bill. We will continue to do more and work together with the Commonwealth to take tough action. There is a national disruption group that is working together with law enforcement, but I think specific incidents and the causes of criminal offences are questions for the Minister for Police in the other place.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:15): I thank the minister for that answer. Yes, there has been a national debate. Indeed last week the New South Wales Parliament tabled a report into the illicit tobacco trade, and frankly it is one of the best reports I have seen so far on this issue. Is the minister aware of this report and giving any consideration to it? In particular, one of the first findings of the report is that tobacco harm reduction should be one of the leading avenues to reducing the illicit tobacco trade, which I have been saying for years. I hope that the Victorian government will at least look at this. I would ask the minister: has he seen this report and is he willing to have a read of it?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:15): I thank Mr Limbrick for his supplementary question. Of course I am aware of the report and what is happening in Canberra in relation to this issue, but in Victoria we have not stopped. We have got our new tobacco regulator in place that is taking action. It is working across agencies and across borders, because we know this issue crosses borders. Some of the discussion is looking at some of the underlying causes, whether it be the excise, the border settings or, obviously at a local level, the symptoms – the crime that we are seeing police taking an approach to. Some of the policies about harm minimisation I am careful about commenting too heavily on, except to say that we are committed to reducing harm. I am sitting next to the health minister here, who is leading a lot of that work in terms of the harm in relation to tobacco. Smoking rates are lower than what they have historically been, but there is clearly more work to be done.

Offshore wind energy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:16): (1440) My question is again to the minister for energy. I refer the minister to the government's offshore wind auction announced yesterday and the minister's media release initially put out under Lily D'Ambrosio's name – later corrected – regarding the role of the electricity services entry mechanism, the ESEM. I ask: will the minister confirm that the ESEM is a subsidy paid by domestic and industrial electricity account holders?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:17): At the outset, just to pick up on the comments that you made, Mr Davis, the official announcement of the auction was made by me today. It is building on the work of many, many years of former minister D'Ambrosio, and she should be really proud of that work. Being able to step in at this critical moment of something that is going to be so transformational is an honour for me, building on her good work.

In relation to the ESEM, it is currently envisaged that the offshore wind project will form part of that mechanism. That mechanism is currently in development with the federal government and the NEM states, and I expect that will be a topic of conversation at my upcoming energy ministerial council. The way these types of mechanisms work, an ESEM model would be a first national model, but this is not a unique model in relation to attracting investment, ensuring the investment is bankable and attracting those projects.

David Davis interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: They are no different, Mr Davis, than the proposal that you have in relation to cancelling VNI and charging consumers to pay for gas. They are no different, except that our proposal would be much cheaper, more reliable and easier to deliver.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:19): I think that means that it is a subsidy; that is what it is. Will the minister confirm that the ESEM is not yet established and will depend on the agreement of all the NEM jurisdictional ministers?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:19): I answered your question, Mr Davis. There will be ongoing work with the Commonwealth and other NEM jurisdictions to finalise the design. Subject to further work on detailed design and implementation, the scheme is expected to be in place by the end of 2027. As I already indicated to you in my answer to your substantive question, these are discussions that I expect to pick up at the next energy min co.

Ministers statements: women's health

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:19): Too many girls and young people across Victoria experiencing pelvic pain are facing barriers and delays in diagnosis. That is why our government is making it easier for those experiencing painful periods and pelvic pain conditions and endometriosis to get the specialist care and support they need.

Last week I was pleased to join the member for Northcote Kat Theophanous in the other place at the Royal Children's Hospital to open a dedicated kids and teens pelvic pain clinic network. At the Children's we met Sarah, who bravely shared her story about juggling her study alongside managing her pain. Care will be delivered via a network of clinicians across Melbourne and regional Victoria, with a special nurse navigator triaging and connecting patients with the right care for them close to where they live. The network will include specialist GPs, physios, dietitians, occupational therapists, nurses and gynaecologists.

This new service is one of 20 women's health clinics being delivered by the Labor government across Victoria as part of our response to the Victorian inquiry into women's pain. As part of a $153 million package to transform the way women's health is delivered in Victoria, we are already delivering 20 sexual and reproductive health hubs, a virtual women's health clinic, a mobile women's health clinic and a dedicated and first-of-its-kind Aboriginal women's health clinic. We are delivering the care that Victorian women and girls deserve – free, accessible and close to home – and it means that kids and teens like Sarah can get the right care sooner.

Avian influenza

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:21): (1441) My question is to the Minister for Environment, and it relates to the spread of H5 bird flu across our state. We have seen reports of devastation of seal populations right across the Southern Ocean, with recent reports of over 13,000 elephant seal pups found dead on Heard Island. My question specifically will home in on black swans. Unlike many birds, I am informed black swans lack a key immune protein involved in recognising viral infections, a difference that may leave them vulnerable to a killer inflammatory response, with experts highlighting the potential to lose entire populations of black swans as a result of H5 bird flu. Can I ask: what is the status of the state's vaccination program, and specifically, how will it protect black swans?

Harriet Shing interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:22): You have got a supportive member next to me who welcomes your question. At the moment, our

wildlife vaccination program is confined to penguins. I went down to Phillip Island on Sunday night to personally thank the team that were involved in this world-first, largest wildlife vaccination program. The operation is really impressive; there are over a thousand penguins that have now received the first dose of the vaccine. There is work with zoos and other experts in relation to where potentially other species could be vaccinated.

I also went for a walk around Albert Park last week to personally have a look at the black swan population there. I am sure you would be familiar with the advocacy in relation to asking government to give consideration to the feasibility and workability of being able to vaccinate black swans. There are a number of reasons that penguins are such a viable species to vaccinate: they return, not nightly but regularly, to their burrows; they literally follow the same path, which is why they are easier to corral and capture and vaccinate; and there were previous trials of penguins to inform and give the green light ahead for why this should be something that we should embark on.

There are a range of other vaccination programs happening around the world. As I said, ours is the largest in penguins. There are continual conversations amongst chief vets and zoos and experts to see where things can go. There are some trials in relation to sea mammals in the US, for example. You touched on some of the devastating news of different mortality rates around other parts too close to us, to be sure, particularly in relation to juvenile sea lions. That is something that we are particularly concerned about; Phillip Island has got a colony down there, for example.

I do not have an update for you today on black swans, but I hope that you can deduce from my answer to you that it is something that I am very closely looking into, and these are questions that I am asking the experts. There is some possibility in terms of the activities of black swans of making them potentially eligible, but when we are dealing with wild species it is incredibly challenging, and it is not something that you can just go in on with gusto.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:25): Thank you, Minister, for that update. Speaking more broadly around transmission amongst bird populations in the state, does the government foresee that the dispersion of native bird populations due to duck shooting will further exacerbate the spread of H5 bird flu?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:26): In general, Mr Puglielli, we are looking at a range of measures in relation to the impact and measures that we can take to not only protect birds but also respond. We know it is here, we know it is going to spread. Some of those actions include making sure that our invasive species actions are beefed up and habitats are protected. There are a range of issues that we are looking at in response to where the disease may move to. I do not have anything in relation specifically to ducks, but it is something that is part of the expert working group that continues to look at a range of these issues.

Dental services

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:27): (1442) My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, yesterday you dismissed concerns about your free dental policy. Today the Victorian president of the Australian Dental Association Dr Carolyn Ng said your plan will worsen waiting lists:

> By opening up the funding, which is only $75 million per year, to everyone in the state, it means that ones who are already identified as being at most risk of dental disease are going to miss out.

She went on to say:

> The most vulnerable people will miss out on having their teeth saved.

The University of Melbourne dental expert associate professor Matt Hopcraft said the policy 'doesn't make any sense'. Minister, did you consult the Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch before announcing this policy?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:28): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. Of course our public dental health program and the announcements that we have made are a great example of the choice that Victorians will have come November when it comes to the provision and the expansion of dental health care. I have to say, the proposition that expanding eligibility for free dental is somehow going to add to the public dental list is nonsensical – absolutely illogical and nonsensical. Again, this is about recognising that Victorians right now are being locked out of dental care because they cannot afford to go to a private dentist. We already have a very strong public dental offering in our state, with eligible Victorians able to access free dental care at both our hospitals and also up to 40 community health services across the state. We will continue that strong investment in public health, and that is because we are a government that actually cares about people's dental care. We care about it. We care about the fact that people are currently locked out of dental care because they cannot afford a private dental appointment.

Members interjecting.

Georgie Crozier: Is the minister finished?

The PRESIDENT: It was hard to hear her; your colleagues were just yelling. I noticed, Ms Crozier, you were trying to hear the answer, and so was I.

Georgie Crozier: I was.

The PRESIDENT: I do not think your buddies were helping us.

Georgie Crozier: Can I get some clarity? Has the minister finished her answer?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, so a supplementary, please.

Georgie Crozier: She has finished? Well, I note that she did not even go anywhere close to answering the question about who the minister –

Ingrid STITT: On a point of order, President, I actually thought that you were calling the house to order, which is why I sat down. I had not actually concluded my answer.

The PRESIDENT: That will teach me to assume anything. I apologise, Minister. How much time was left on the clock? There is 1½ minutes. Maybe if Ms Crozier can hear her answer –

Tom McIntosh interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Mr McIntosh, you do not need to encourage the other people. The minister wants to give her answer in silence.

Ingrid STITT: Thank you, President. I apologise for my confusion. Because there was so much noise in the chamber, it was hard to follow exactly what was happening. The reality is that our government is absolutely committed to and focused on providing additional dental health care to Victorians, which is why we want to expand the eligibility beyond what our current public dental health program delivers. Of course we want to continue to work with all the stakeholders in this space, and we will certainly continue to engage with all of the organisations with a strong interest in these matters, including the dental association, including Oral Health Victoria and including our health services, who are already delivering brilliant public dental and who can help inform the way in which we build out with our 10 free dental clinics available to Victorians right across the state. That is our focus. Our focus is about structural cost-of-living relief for Victorians so that they can get the urgent and regular dental care that is going to mean they have much better oral health care.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:31): That extra time gave her no ability to answer my question. Clearly you did not consult with the Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch, because you did not even go anywhere near answering that question, Minister; you just made a broad statement. So I am going to ask: who did you actually consult with?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:32): That is an interesting line of questioning from Ms Crozier. I will tell you what we have done: we have listened to Victorians. We have listened to Victorians about what it is they want, and this has been talked about for decades. When I go around to visit the incredible work of our community health services and Smile Squad – how you would want to knock Smile Squad is beyond me. It is the most wonderful program, and every state and territory is asking us questions about Smile Squad because they want to replicate our effort here in Victoria. The reality is that our government will always listen to what the community are saying they want to prioritise, and they need access to free dental care.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:33): On a point of order, President, you know I will be asking for both of these questions to be reinstated. But I move:

> That the minister's responses be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Ingrid Stitt: Further to the point of order, President, Ms Crozier does not get to dictate how I answer her questions.

The PRESIDENT: I will rule on that point of order. The minister may answer in a way that the member does not particularly like.

Motion agreed to.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, the questions were very specific, but I will wait until after question time to ask that you review them and to ask that they be reinstated and that the minister answer them properly.

The PRESIDENT: That is the practice that we have every sitting day.

Ministers statements: economic policy

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:34): Victorian regulators gathered at the second Victorian Regulatory Reform Conference last week to explore what it takes to build a stronger regulatory system. With the theme 'Strengthening the system', the conference provided an opportunity to understand how their roles intersect and to share perspectives on emerging harms, AI and regulation, and information sharing.

It was a pleasure to address the conference on our government's commitment to reform in this area and the results we have already delivered for our state. This work is important work, but it is not simple. Good regulation protects workers, consumers and the community and also protects legitimate businesses. Balancing business flexibility against the safeguards communities rightly expect demands rigorous evidence-based analysis. No shortcuts can be taken, and the results can only hold up because discipline is applied consistently.

I think it is important to share with the chamber some of the body of work that has already been completed. Heavy vehicle transport permits that once took six months and cost $10,000 now take 15 days and can cost under $100, a change that has saved the industry $10 million and eliminated more than 165,000 days of waiting since January this year. For the sparkies in the chamber, electrical safety certificates have moved from paper to online, to the digital world, saving more than 50,000 electricians in our state up to an hour each time they lodge. Simplified food safety requirements have cut red tape for almost 30,000 Victorian cafes, restaurants and food manufacturers, saving workers and employers up to two weeks in getting credentials processed. These gains compound across our economy. Together they make Victoria a faster, more competitive place to start and grow a business.

None of this is accidental. It flows directly from our *Economic Growth Statement*, which is focused on regulatory reform, on productivity and on efficiency and helps deliver our government commitment

to halve the number of business regulators from 2030. We are also supporting similar initiatives across the board, including in partnership with local governments. The Business Acceleration Fund is providing more than $250 million in benefits to our economy, a lot of it through digitisation. This progress depends on people who make it happen, and that is why I want to take this opportunity to thank all our regulators for the difficult and challenging job they do. It is a balance that requires diligent work.

Youth mental health services

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:36): (1443) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, the tragic revelations of two suspected youth suicide clusters involving 10 young people in Melbourne's east are heartbreaking for all touched by these deaths. Your government has a dedicated suicide prevention and response office responsible for identifying and responding to emerging suicide clusters. How many other suspected youth suicide clusters are currently known or being investigated by your government across Victoria?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:37): I have some difficulty with the way in which Ms Crozier has framed this question because it makes a number of assumptions about these tragic matters. As I indicated in the chamber yesterday, these are matters that are currently with the coroner, and I will not comment on the individual circumstances. I will reiterate for those opposite the caution I made yesterday: it is not for any one of us in this place to attribute causes or factors to these matters. It is a matter for the coroner, and they are investigating these matters.

In relation to the issue of suicide, again, you cannot generalise about these matters, and we have to take a cautious approach when looking at the data, which of course the coroner verifies regularly and provides updates on through their review processes. Our government will continue to focus strongly on how we can prevent suicide in our community. It is what much of the effort that we have made since the royal commission has been about, and we have invested in programs at the grassroots level. Of course we have strong programs in place across our public mental health services around zero-suicide frameworks, and we have the office embedded within the health department.

One of the issues that I want to highlight as being an incredibly important program that has been delivered as a result of the evidence that was heard at the royal commission is the HOPE program, which is the follow-up program that many of our major hospitals deliver across the community post suicide attempts. These are of course always difficult issues to confront. I do again want to offer my sincere condolences to those families and loved ones of these young people. But the matters are before the coroner, and that is the right course of action.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:39): Minister, these are serious issues – very serious. No-one is taking it lightly, and they are very concerning for many, many people. I ask: given two suspected clusters involving 10 young people have now been identified in just one part of Melbourne and that yesterday you refused to establish an urgent independent inquiry into whether systemic failures in Victoria's child and youth mental health system are leaving vulnerable young people without the care they need, why isn't the government doing more for these vulnerable young Victorians who are so at risk?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:40): Again, Ms Crozier, you are repeating the assertion and you have no grounds to make those assertions.

Georgie Crozier: It is in the public domain that they are clusters.

Ingrid STITT: What is in the public domain is a matter that is currently before the coroner. I would again caution you not to make assumptions about these matters. It is really, frankly, inappropriate for you to do so. The other thing the opposition do not seem to appreciate is that how you speak about these things in the community can have a real, harmful impact. So I really urge you to educate

yourselves about the way in which you talk about these matters and resist the temptation to make political points about these tragedies.

Kangaroo control

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:41): (1444) My question is to the Minister for Environment. Minister, your government's own 2025 kangaroo harvesting program annual report says that the total take of eastern grey kangaroos through commercial harvesting and authority-to-control-wildlife approvals was 12.4 per cent of the estimated population. This is despite the government's own recommended maximum of 10 per cent of the population. The reported total of animals taken exceeded the 10 per cent in every harvest zone, while western grey kangaroo approvals in Loddon Mallee reached 17 per cent. The report admits that even after the government withheld the commercial quota late in the year, it could not keep the reported total within its own recommended limit. Minister, if your government cannot keep kangaroo killing within its own supposedly conservative safeguard, why is the commercial harvest program continuing in 2026?

The PRESIDENT: Sorry, could you repeat the last part of the question?

Katherine COPSEY: If your government, Minister, cannot keep kangaroo killing within its own supposedly conservative safeguard, why is the commercial harvesting program continuing in 2026?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:42): I thank Ms Copsey for her question, and they are important issues that she has raised. But I would say that we manage kangaroo harvesting under a plan that aims to protect kangaroo populations while making sure that the animals are treated humanely. Regular surveys and monitoring are carried out to track kangaroo numbers. The information is used to decide how many kangaroos can be harvested each year. Harvest limits can be changed when needed to help keep kangaroo populations healthy and sustainable in the long term. People involved in harvesting must follow strict rules to ensure it is carried out in a sustainable and humane way. There has been experience in the past where kangaroo harvesting exclusion zones were expanded to remove additional local government areas based on factors such as urban growth and low-harvest areas, so there is always different data and information that comes in before these decisions are made. In relation to the numbers each year and the changes there, I do not have any of that information at hand, but I am happy to have another look at it based on the specifics of your question.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:43): Thank you, Minister. Minister, the same report reveals that commercial shooters reported 22,136 dependent young joeys euthanised in 2025 as a consequence, as collateral damage from the commercial harvest. Extraordinarily, the government says that those dependent young are not counted when determining the commercial quota because the population surveys that you have referred to do not count them. The Greens have long called for an end to the commercial killing of kangaroos. This should not be done for profit. Last year I asked your predecessor to commission an independent review of both the population estimation methods and the animal welfare outcomes that you have just referred to, and I do not think either of those reviews have been done. Given the government's reported take exceeded its own recommended limit and we saw more than 22,000 dependent joeys excluded from the quota calculation, will you suspend the commercial harvest and commission that independent review before setting the 2027 quota?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:45): Ms Copsey, what I can commit to do is to take your feedback into consideration. It is very difficult for me to verify the accuracy of a report versus other advice and other reports that we get from government. You have quoted one particular report. You have also mentioned data and how it is collected versus your view of how it should be collected. I will take your feedback on board, but I cannot give any commitments in the way you have framed your question.

Ministers statements: child protection

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:45): I rise to update the house on the Carroll Labor government's nation-leading reforms for children and families. Since the supporting stable and strong families legislation passed, I have received an overwhelmingly positive response from across the sector, government and community. Last week I brought together key leaders from across the children and families sector, as well as key government departments, to discuss the legislation and its impending implementation. Central to the discussions were young people with lived experience from my ministerial youth advisory group, who presented on their vision for supporting stable and strong families. The parenting lived experience group from the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare also provided a valuable contribution to the discussion. Through this legislation our government has legislated responsibility across government in support of at-risk children and families. It brings into law the cross-portfolio work our government has started. Since becoming Minister for Children, I have been firmly focused on working across government to increase supports to at-risk children and families. This has included working with the Minister for Education to fund individual tutoring for children in care who need further education support, working with the Minister for Health on expanding comprehensive health checks for all children when they enter or re-enter care and working with the minister for housing to ensure that parents who are pursuing family reunification are now recognised as a priority cohort under the Victorian housing register.

On this side of the house we have been getting the work done to support the most at-risk in our community. Those opposite in 2012–13 invested $120 million in family services. Since then we have almost quadrupled funding to $460 million. This nation-leading legislation builds on the Carroll Labor government's commitment to children and families, and I want to thank everyone from across government and the sector who worked to put together such a collaborative and engaging discussion at the children and families sector forum last week. We look forward to seeing what we achieve across all government portfolios as we continue to put the needs of the child at the centre of a better connected and more integrated system.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:47): As Ms Crozier flagged, I will review the question to the Minister for Health, her second question around dental services – the substantive and supplementary. I will get back to the chamber before the end of the day.

Questions on notice

Answers

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:48): I have quite a number of unanswered questions. Can I just pass them on to the appropriate person?

The PRESIDENT: Are they questions on notice?

Gaelle BROAD: Yes, I have got questions on notice, constituency questions and adjournments.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:48): In the absence of a target, I will take on Mrs Broad's inquiry.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:49): I have a similar request. Mine predominantly are for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, who does not exist anymore, and/or the Minister for Environment, who does exist, so I will pass those on to the minister.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:49): I am very happy to take that on, Ms Bath. I am working through a range of those, so I am sure they will be with you very soon.

Constituency questions

Western Victoria Region

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria) (12:49): (2542) My constituency question is to the Minister for Government Services, who is sitting right next to me. The Labor government has so far provided cost-of-living relief to over 3.6 million Victorians through the 20 per cent rego rebate. Like cheaper public transport, the rego rebate provided real relief and has put money back into the pockets of so many households. The benefit to Victorian families from the rego rebate is substantial. A driver with one car can receive up to $186 back. A family with two cars could receive up to $372 back. This is real cost-of-living relief, and it was not backed by the opposition. My question to the minister is: how many applications have been made in Western Victoria, and what was the total value of rebates in the region of Western Victoria?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:50): (2543) My constituency question is to the Minister for Police. Crime is on the rise in my community, with weapons offences up 7 per cent in the City of Hume. This government has cut protective services officers from train stations, including at Roxburgh Park train station, leaving my community unable to get home safely. This is unacceptable. It demonstrates the utter failure of this government to exercise basic responsibility to keep Victorians safe. Will you join with the opposition in restoring PSOs at train stations across Victoria, including Roxburgh Park?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:51): (2544) My question is to the Minister for Education. The Murrumbeena Primary School community in my electorate has contacted me about their urgent infrastructure needs. Murrumbeena Primary School is a growing government school with more than 550 students, yet it continues to rely on a hall built almost 30 years ago through community fundraising. It was built at about half the size of a standard school hall and for a much smaller student cohort. The facility no longer meets the needs of the school community, with assemblies, phys ed, performances and whole-school events all competing for limited indoor space. The school community has also raised concerns about ageing facilities and ongoing plumbing issues associated with the facility. Minister, will you help fund a new school hall and associated facilities at Murrumbeena Primary School?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:52): (2545) My constituency question is for the Minister for Youth. The Labor government knows that when we back young people, the whole community benefits. It is fantastic to see the return of Victorian Youth Fest this September, bringing together a month-long celebration of brilliance. By supporting over 100 youth-led events across the state, this program gives young people a genuine platform to showcase their talents. From live music and art showcases to sports tournaments, Youth Fest empowers our kids to design and deliver events that they are truly passionate about. My electorate is home to incredible community groups that do wonderful work to empower local youth, and I love to see them having an opportunity to let themselves shine. My question to the minister is: which organisations in the Northern Metro have been successful in receiving a grant for this year's Youth Fest?

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:53): (2546) Murrumbeena Primary School is an important primary school in my electorate. A number of my colleagues from Southern Metro have raised this issue. The hall is not of sufficient size. It is now quite old, going back to the 1990s, and numerous parents and officials at the school have raised this with me and a number of my colleagues. The Minister for Education should act swiftly to deal with this matter. It is clear that Murrumbeena has been left without the support of an active local member. It is clear that Murrumbeena Primary School has not got the support that it deserves. I know that Ms Crozier and I will work very hard to ensure it does get that support. A new local member would improve the position greatly because they would at least be prepared to agitate and push for the developments at the school that are needed.

Western Victoria Region

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:54): (2547) My question is for the Minister for Health. My office has been hearing regular recent reports of emergency paramedics from Ararat, Stawell and Horsham transporting unplanned non-emergency patients to Ballarat because no non-emergency patient crews are available. This is leaving those towns uncovered for emergency transport, especially overnight. At the start of last year the government tabled a review into non-emergency patient transport. Recommendation 1 stated that:

> Planned … NEPT services should be separated, with Ambulance Victoria retaining responsibility for unplanned NEPT in line with its core organisational focus on serving people with time-critical emergencies. Planned NEPT should be managed separately to prevent its disruption by unplanned NEPT and to ensure timely patient flow into and out of healthcare facilities.

Why hasn't the government acted on this recommendation?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:55): (2548) My constituency question is to the Minister for Children on how the children of the Southern Metropolitan Region are benefiting from Labor's support for toy libraries. Last Friday I visited the Bayside Toy Library to give them the fantastic news they are receiving a $6000 grant to buy new toys, equipment and resources to support their operations. The toy library recently celebrated its 40th birthday – so it is pretty young – and provides families with access to high-quality educational toys to support a child's development. The building they are in has just recently been renovated by the City of Bayside, and they have reopened to the public. Chatting to the staff, this grant comes at the perfect time, because being back in new facilities they have gone through all their old toys and have found some that are very well loved and probably need to be replaced. The $6000 grant from the Labor government is going to help that toy library, local parents and local kids to get access to some great new toys.

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:56): (2549) My question is for the Minister for Planning. Geelong council has deferred a draft place-naming policy that prioritises Aboriginal names and requires 70 per cent of places named after individuals each year to recognise women or gender-diverse people. I respect the importance of appropriately acknowledging traditional owners and recognising the contributions of women and others, but Victoria's statutory naming rules state that all naming principles are equally important, that names should link to place and, crucially, that community support matters. Will the minister ask the register of geographic names to clarify publicly whether councils are required to adopt such hierarchies or targets and confirm that local relevance and genuine community support must remain central to every naming decision?

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:57): (2550) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Small and Family Business in the other place. Small businesses represent the lifeblood

of the Victorian economy. They employ around 1.3 million employees and add nearly $429 billion to the economy each year. It must always be a priority to ensure that they succeed due to the wider benefits their success provides to the Victorian economy. This Labor government understands that and has moved to ensure that small business owners have access to knowledge and training that meet their needs. Small business skills mentoring programs have helped small business owners to attain skills in crucial fields like marketing, finance and strategic planning, helping to support and grow the success of their businesses. This program helps ensure that small businesses can act with the confidence they need to invest, grow and innovate. When small businesses succeed, the whole of Victoria succeeds, which is why this program is so important. My question to the minister is: how have small and family businesses benefited from this program, like ones in the Southern Metropolitan Region?

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:58): (2551) My question is to the Minister for Environment. The fabulous towns and communities of Lang Lang and San Remo both have foreshore committees, and the government, in its lack of wisdom, perhaps, has decided to merge these two entities. Of course they each had their own funds and vision for their region. The San Remo community have raised funds through caravan park fees, through parking revenue and through local fundraising and are now very concerned that those funds will be somehow removed from their operation. They have many good ideas which they would like to achieve with those funds, including but not limited to walking tracks, retaining walls, piers and vital infrastructure. Clearly that requires more than just $500,000. My question to the minister is: will she ensure that the funds owned and raised by the San Remo community are spent on infrastructure and improvements in that community?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:59): (2552) My question is to the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence. Minister, family violence rates are horrifically high in this state, particularly in my region in the south-east. A constituent in my local area who is a victim-survivor of family violence has recently shared her story. Despite years of support from family violence services, police and other relevant authorities, she and her daughter have no permanent home to go to. Without a safe home, they stand at much greater risk of becoming involved with the perpetrator. The constituent has done everything she can to get a safe home, as have the various workers that have supported her. But she said:

> The whole reason why I can't receive help is no one has got funding.

People like my constituent – mothers, daughters, children – are sleeping in cars. Minister, when are you going to get your priorities right and adequately fund critical family violence services, including ensuring permanent homes for victim-survivors?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (13:00): (2553) My question is for the Minister for Health. Will the minister commit to funding an integrated cancer centre at Goulburn Valley Health in Shepparton? The Victorian government spent $2 million on planning for stage 2 of the Goulburn Valley Health redevelopment, which included an integrated cancer centre, and then betrayed Shepparton by putting stage 2 on ice and claiming the job was fully completed when only stage 1 had been constructed. The federal government has allocated $30 million towards design and the start of construction for the cancer centre, but the state Labor government has so far failed to provide its share of the funding to complete the vital project. An integrated cancer centre will bring all oncology services under one roof at the hospital, and this is a top priority for GV Health, as it is the only major regional health service without an integrated cancer centre. The Victorian government must now do its part and provide the necessary funding to complete the cancer centre.

Sitting suspended 1:01 pm until 2:01 pm.

Motions

Ministerial conduct

Debate resumed.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:01): We have had a few things go on since we started this debate on ministerial integrity, although we could be excused for thinking this is also a debate about racing or a debate about major events in Victoria – not quite sure. We did have a bit of an outbreak of conviviality between those opposite but not agreement with those on our right.

To get started I want to return to the topic in question, which is integrity. Integrity is so much more than allegations. It means respecting evidence, and that is where I fundamentally disagree with the approach taken by the Greens here today. It is definitely hard to work out if this motion is about integrity or a policy debate about gambling and horseracing and indeed whether or not Victoria should host major events. They have taken information that is publicly disclosed, listed a series of events and organisations and invited this house to draw a conclusion of wrongdoing. But disclosure is not evidence of corruption, attendance at an event is not by itself evidence of a conflict of interest and an allegation is not a finding. In fact, there is an irony at the centre of this motion: the Greens know about the hospitality they are criticising precisely because this government requires it to be disclosed. My colleague Ryan Batchelor mentioned that, but also from those opposite we had Mr Mulholland mentioning exactly the same point.

We – that is, the Labor government – established the requirement for ministers and parliamentary secretaries to disclose gifts, benefits and hospitality above a relevant threshold. The register is maintained by the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet and published every six months for every single Victorian to see, and that is transparency working as it should. This government also publishes a ministerial register of interests and quarterly summaries of ministerial diaries covering stakeholder meetings, external organisations and lobbyists. And in December 2023 we established Victoria's modern ministerial code of conduct. The code sets a high standard whereby ministers must act in the public interest. They must identify, disclose and appropriately manage actual, potential and perceived conflicts of interest. That is completely different. If you are the minister for racing, the absolute purest definition of 'public interest' is to look after the jobs of people who are in the racing industry and to make sure that everything is appropriate in that space, so attending races is absolutely appropriate. They cannot knowingly conceal a conflict from the Premier. They cannot seek or solicit gifts or benefits, and they cannot accept hospitality that could reasonably create a conflict of interest or be perceived as an inducement or reward for exercising an official function.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ERMACORA: I can hear the interjections from my right, and you would have us not attending any public events or supporting any public events if the principle from there was in place. These are serious obligations, and if somebody believes they have credible evidence that those obligations have been breached, there are appropriate avenues for those to be examined. What we should not do is reverse the burden of proof and decide that because something was transparently disclosed wrongdoing has occurred. Just because something has been transparently disclosed in an area that your policy does not agree with, it does not mean that that is inappropriate.

The motion identifies no ministerial decision that was improperly influenced. It identifies no private benefit that shaped a government decision. It identifies no direction to any agency resulting from this hospitality, and it points to no finding from an integrity body that a minister breached a code. Proper governance requires us to apply standards to facts, identify any conflict and assess the evidence. We should not appoint ourselves investigator, prosecutor, judge and jury simply because doing so produces a political headline or, in the case of what Mr Mulholland said, a great social media tile. But if those opposite want to have a debate about integrity, obviously we are in agreement.

Georgie Crozier: Perhaps you should read this report, Ms Ermacora. Maybe you should read that.

Jacinta ERMACORA: All right, I am happy to go there. In July this year the *Age* reported that retiring coalition MPs had claimed about $65,000 in taxpayer-funded travel, and some announced their retirements remarkably soon afterwards. One Liberal MP reportedly travelled to New York and Hong Kong at a cost of $8635 and announced their retirement five days later. Another travelled to Japan and Singapore at a cost of around $7000 and announced their retirement six weeks later. This is according to Annika Smethurst in the *Age*. And then there was a trip to Barbados costing $11,410, with the Liberal MP announcing their retirement three months later. According to the *Age*, one itinerary included New York's Hudson Yards, a meeting at a New York pub and sightseeing. Another MP travelled overseas to investigate what were described as political and economic opportunities, despite subsequently announcing their retirement – and who picked up the bill? Victorian taxpayers picked up the bill. These trips were funded through parliamentary travel allowances. The very same investigation by Annika Smethurst –

Renee Heath: On a point of order, Acting President, I believe that Ms Ermacora is misleading the house. She mentioned a trip to Barbados paid for by the taxpayer. It is just, quite frankly, not true, so I would ask her to withdraw.

Jacinta Ermacora: I am quoting the *Age*. I do not think that is a point of order.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Just for a point of clarification, Ms Ermacora, that was a CPA event, so there was no cost to the taxpayer. I will bring you back to your submission.

Jacinta ERMACORA: The very same investigation reported that six retiring Labor MPs had made no interstate travel claims before announcing their retirement, so if we are going to have a serious conversation about the moral high ground, then respecting taxpayers and the appropriate use of public money should absolutely be a part of it, because public money is a privilege. Victorians work hard for every dollar they earn, and they rightly expect public money to be spent in the service of the public. They do not expect it to fund an overseas trip on the eve of an MP's retirement. That is why integrity cannot be reduced to political allegations or guilt by association. It must be grounded in evidence, proper process and consistent standards, and that is the approach the Carroll Labor government takes. When IBAC makes recommendations, we take them seriously. Following IBAC's 2022 donations and lobbying special report, the government supported its lobbying recommendations in principle and referred the donations recommendations to the independent electoral review expert panel. I am almost out of time; I am still winding up here. Following the independent review, Parliament passed the Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026. I could go on about IBAC's Operation Richmond report, which was accepted; that work is underway. What we need to be very clear about here is that the moral high ground goes two ways, and you cannot apply it in one place and not in another.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:12): There are a couple of comments that I would like to make in relation to Dr Mansfield's motion. Basically it is looking at the integrity component of ministers and the government and looking at codes of conduct, and really I think there were some good points. I have not listened to all the debate, but I have picked up bits and pieces around the responsibilities we have as MPs when we are dealing with public moneys and dealing with people involved in various positions. Of course in government, when you are a minister of the Crown, you are dealing with a lot of people and you are making decisions on behalf of the Victorian taxpayer, and it should be up-front. There should be integrity, and that is I think what the taxpayer deserves. They deserve to understand exactly where taxpayer money is going. I note the comments around the ministerial code of conduct, which state:

> … a minister must not accept any gift, hospitality or other benefit that could reasonably be expected to give rise to a conflict of interest or could reasonably be perceived as an inducement or reward for doing or not doing something in the exercise of official functions …

I understand where Dr Mansfield is coming from with this. It is about not being bought and not being favoured. At times you do come across and meet people in your work. You might speak to them and they might say things that you agree with them on, and you are working through that. I know that I meet a lot of people, and I have never actually had so many stakeholders reach out to me. It is extraordinary. I think they, like the rest of the community, are so frustrated with this government and where they are going. It is about ensuring that we are up-front with them.

The motion calls on the Premier to back up claims that integrity is not optional by making changes in time for this year's spring carnival, Brownlow Medal and AFL finals, and goes on to talk about banning all gifts and introducing legislation. There are a few things that I do not quite agree with on this; I think this is going a bit far. We talk about the AFL. It is a great time for the state. It is a great part of our state, the AFL and the grand final. It signifies spring – that we are coming out of winter and all of those things and coming into the spring – with the racing carnival and the Melbourne Cup. It is a fantastic event. I know that there are some people in this chamber that do not agree with that. I certainly do. It is brilliant for the community, it is brilliant for the economy and it puts our state on the map. I, for one, am very, very supportive. The Brownlow Medal – I do not know about that. I look at it in the paper, and I am quite amused by some of the things I read and see when it is talking about the Brownlow Medal. I do think it is an opportunity for those AFL footballers, who are elite in their sport, to be able to come together to celebrate and to have the voting, if you like, for the best and fairest and to have a look at who it is decided wins that award. I have no problem with that at all. But I want to go back to this point that Dr Mansfield raises about 'calls on the Premier to back up claims that integrity is not optional'.

I have been just flabbergasted by the Auditor-General's report that has been tabled today, *Delivering the Suburban Rail Loop*, and the findings in this. If the Premier is fair dinkum about integrity, then he will come clean about what he has known around the secret tax that was applied on public transport fares. I am going off on a bit of a tangent, but I think it comes to the point about what the Premier said when he came to office, that integrity is not optional. I think the Premier has a lot to answer for, and I think there are many things that this government has to answer for. I will say more about this report in other opportunities, but I did want to say a little bit in terms of what Dr Mansfield has raised in her motion. I understand some of the intent and the motivations for it. I do not agree with it all, but I do think that all of us have a responsibility to manage taxpayers funds very carefully and to ensure that we are always, to the best of our knowledge, conducting ourselves with the highest of probity. That is what the community expect, and I think they have been severely let down, given the findings of not only today's report but whether it be red shirts, whether it is Operation Richmond, whether it is any other number of scandals, or the Commonwealth Games – I mean, I could just go on. The list goes on. I just wanted to place a few words on the record.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:17): Well, that was pretty depressing. It looks like the non-optional integrity standards lasted less than a month for the Carroll Labor government. What a spectacular and telling attempt to deflect attention on all sides. In particular, it was interesting that Labor barely made a mention of the ministerial code of conduct, which was really the essence of this motion. I have to make a special mention of Mr Batchelor's mind-boggling contribution. I really expected, I guess, a slightly more sophisticated argument for some reason. I have heard a lot of arguments about why we have a gambling crisis in this country. To blame gamblers themselves is really something else. Equating an individual gambler with – as somehow the same thing as – the gambling industry is like saying that having a Sportsbet account is the same as running Sportsbet or, let us use another analogy, like saying a smoker is somehow akin to the tobacco industry. The fact that this flimsy argument was the only arrow in his quiver I think really says everything. Gambling harm can only be addressed by regulating the industry itself, and the Greens have never wavered from this, ever. Harms from gambling are profound, and I talked about that in my previous contribution. It is astounding that neither party were willing to acknowledge that at all in their contributions today.

With respect to some of the comments made by Mr Mulholland, they were also rather outstanding, and perhaps more so since I think he would know that people are crying out for something better than what we are getting from Labor. All it would take is them giving up some of the perks and the free tickets to attend some of these events. He did not have a lot to say about the substance of this motion, making almost no mention of the ministerial code of conduct. He argued that accepting gifts and hospitality from the gambling industry is somehow an essential part of engagement. Putting aside the fact that he himself pointed out that these glitzy events do not really allow for proper engagement as you flit from one plate of hors d'oeuvres to the other, I fail to see how engagement has to take this form. What happened to organising a meeting in one of the many offices that ministers have? Or, if that is too hard, have a meeting over Zoom – make a phone call. Let us also acknowledge the fact that this is the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation attending sporting events. He is not the sports minister, he is the gambling minister. If it is that important that you attend these events, buy your own ticket. What better way would there be to support these events than to buy your own ticket?

Refusing hospitality and gifts from an industry a minister is charged with regulating is not hostility, it is actually just a requirement under the ministerial code of conduct. This requirement exists for a reason. There is a very real conflict of interest that arises, because these things do have a powerful influence over behaviour. It is called the reciprocity effect, and it has been well studied. It is where even small gifts have been shown to trigger a psychological sense of mutual obligation or reciprocity. There is a vast body of evidence showing how the pharmaceutical industry exploits this to influence doctors' prescribing habits. They give them stationery and morning teas and dinners, and they are more likely to prescribe that company's drugs.

Even if Victorian Labor ministers have special psychological immunity from any such forces, what has been lost here is that even the perception of a conflict of interest is profoundly damaging for democracy. People's faith in government and institutions is at rock bottom right now, and no wonder why. We only have to look at the display we have seen here today in this chamber to see why. It is actually frightening how normalised corporate lobbying has become for Labor and the Liberals and the lengths that they will go to to distract from it and excuse the behaviour.

Mr Mulholland asked what a Greens government might do. I will tell you what we would do. We would actually put the interests of the community first, and we would not be accepting lavish gifts from industries we were charged with regulating in the name of so-called engagement. I say that with full confidence and sincerity as someone who has seen the harm from gambling firsthand. We deserve so much better than what the major parties have shown here today. You should be ashamed of yourselves, and I am absolutely proud to be standing where I am over here.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (7): Katherine Copsey, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

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

Motion negatived.

Bills

Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Council's amendments

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora) (14:29): I have received a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026:

> The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012** in relation to forfeiture, seizure and debt collection, the **Conveyancers Act 2006** in relation to the suspension of licences, the **Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995** in relation to certain agreements to vary domestic building contracts, the **Estate Agents Act 1980** in relation to the suspension of licences and the sale of residential properties, the **Owners Corporations Act 2006** in relation to payment plans, proceedings and proxy voting, the **Residential Tenancies Act 1997** in relation to persons subjected to family violence and personal violence, compensation, keys and security devices, bonds and Part 4A parks, the **Retirement Villages Act 1986** in relation to the release of entry payments, the **Sale of Land Act 1962** in relation to section 32 statements and deposit moneys and off-the-plan contracts, the **Subdivision Act 1988** in relation to applications to VCAT, the **Tobacco Act 1987** in relation to powers to close premises, powers and penalties for commercial landlords and the forfeiture and destruction of illicit tobacco, the **Motor Car Traders Act 1986** in relation to the administration of the Motor Car Traders' Guarantee Fund, warranty periods, licences, record keeping and the sale of used motor cars, the **Building Act 1993** in relation to developer bonds, the **Building Act 1993** in relation to prefabrication work and prefabrication builders, the **Building Act 1993** in relation to complex plumbing work, the **Building Act 1993** and the **Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Act 2026** in relation to minor matters, the **Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Act 2025** in relation to its commencement, certain other Acts and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

Motions

Mineral resources

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:32): I move:

> That this house:
>
> (1) notes:
>
> (a) that in relation to the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) (Extractive Industries) Amendment (Fees) Regulations 2026:
>
> (i) the notice of decision on the fees was gazetted on 14 August 2025;
>
> (ii) statutory rule no. 111 was made on 18 August 2026 and tabled in this house on 25 August 2026;
>
> (b) that in relation to the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) (Mineral Industries) Amendment (Fees) Regulations 2026:
>
> (i) the notice of decision on the fees was gazetted on 14 August 2025;
>
> (ii) statutory rule no. 112 was made on 18 August 2026 and tabled in this house on 25 August 2026;
>
> (c) the extraordinary increase to fees averaging 234 per cent; and
>
> (2) disallows statutory rule nos. 111 and 112, pursuant to section 124(4) of the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 and section 23 of the Subordinate Legislation Act 1994.

This is in one sense very simple but in another sense more complex. Essentially what has happened here is the government has introduced a massive, massive, massive increase in fees for the mining sector and for the quarrying sector and has done so in a way that I think gives the sector real cause for concern. These costs will be passed through to consumers. They will be passed through in two forms, really. There will be less mining, less opportunity for mining, and less available quarrying material because of the huge increase in costs. I think that this has a process behind it that I do not think people in this chamber, or more broadly in the community and certainly in the sector, could or should support. The idea that this is driven by pure cost recovery – and the now Minister for Energy and Resources, then Treasurer, pushed, I understand, as always and understandably, for new revenue and wants cost

recovery for the resources sector of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, in doing so putting massive new charges onto the sector.

To questions in the chamber this week the minister said that this had been going for some time and there had not been increases for a long period. Well, that may be true, but the decision to do this came as a bolt from the blue, and the sector was surprised and the scale of the decision did surprise the sector. There was a regulatory impact statement that was put out, again pushing heavily for the full cost recovery option. There have been some adjustments, I will indicate, to the particular fees, which followed the RIS, but the aggregate is still the same. What lowering the fees in one area has meant is that the fees have gone up for other items. It is worth putting these on record so that people understand what is required here.

I think if the situation was that this went up by CPI, people would have one view, but that is not what is going on here. This is a massive increase. This applies to application fees, fees for varying work authority, fees for transfer of work authority, fees for lodging work plans, fees for very varying work plans and the amendment of fees. The notices given in the gazette on these two occasions deal with 55 existing fees that were increased, the two new fees created, the 42 fees that increased by approximately 297 per cent and the 13 fees that increased by approximately 40 per cent. On average each fee increased by $22,240.80, and the two new fees impose an average cost of $137,139.

I am going to choose a number of these at random so that people can see the size of the increase. An application fee for an exploration licence goes from 145 fee units – and bear in mind the fee units are adjusted every year; the current 2026–27 fee amount is $2518 – and the adjusted fee units will be 204. That is $3524.80. This new fee begins on 1 January. That is a 40 per cent increase. An application for a mining licence goes from 262 fee units, which is $4529, to 1041 fee units, which is $17,983 – a 297 per cent increase. An application for a retention licence is similar. There is an additional fee for native title assessment. There is a tourist fossicking application fee going from 6.4 fee units, $110, to 25.4, which is $438. That is a very significant increase as well. The mining licence fee renewal is going from 76 to 304 fee units. That is a 297 per cent increase to $5258. Likewise, a lodgement of a work plan for a mining lease in respect of a mine that is not a declared mine with no blasting involved and has no sensitive locations within 200 metres goes from 1233 fee units to 4898 – $21,307 to $84,591.

These are truly massive increases. The clobbering is so remarkable, and the impact is so great that there is no doubt that these costs either must force some mines or some operations to close or they have got to be passed through in some way. That would not be easy for many newer mines or mines in an earlier stage of development. In the case of world prices, you cannot easily just increase prices; you are effectively a price taker on many of these matters. Even for the rehabilitation of a declared mine, it goes from zero at the moment to $142,330. The fee for the variation of a declared mine is going from zero at the moment to $131,948. These are huge fees. They are taxes by another name. Let us call them what they are: they are taxes imposed by the minister and by the Ben Carroll government. One of its first acts is to impose a new set of taxes on mines and a new set of taxes on quarries.

I want to say something here about the impact particularly on the quarrying sector. The quarrying sector has a hugely important role in providing rock and the inputs for much of our construction sector, whether you are building a new home or you are repairing a road. We know the situation of Victoria with its potholes at the moment. The opposition have indicated we will spend more money and set out a proper plan to deal with these massive pothole problems. But let us be clear: these new fees will make the rock more expensive. They will make the rock more expensive for pothole repair and road repair around the state. If you were building a big tunnel in the eastern suburbs – the Suburban Rail Loop, just to pick an example that is a bit prominent today – you would find that the cost of the rock that you need to make the concrete to build the tunnel will increase substantially because of the fees that have been imposed here. Massive new fees passed straight through – that is going to make large construction projects even more expensive.

We know the Suburban Rail Loop has already blown out massively and the government is imposing new taxes everywhere, including on public transport today – secret new taxes on public transport.

Michael Galea: It's not a tax, it's a fare.

David DAVIS: No, actually it is not a fare, it is a tax on the fare. You pay it as part of being able to go on the train or the tram or the bus. You have to pay that. They knew about it in 2021, but they did nothing about it. They did not announce it. When the new arrangements were actually introduced into operation on 1 January 2025, did they tell anyone? No, they did not tell anyone. They lifted them again in 2026. Did they tell anyone? No, they did not tell anyone. They kept it secret – a secret tax imposed on every public transport traveller – absolutely outrageous. The government knew. They kept it secret. Even in your area, Acting President Ermacora, if you were catching the train from Warrnambool you were clobbered with an additional tax by this government starting on –

Michael Galea: Sorry, didn't we reduce regional fares to the metro level?

David DAVIS: No, you are actually paying the additional amount, and in the metro area you will pay. Actually, we led the way on lower fares for the regional areas.

Michael Galea: No you didn't.

David DAVIS: Yes, we did. In the election we did.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Davis should direct his comments through the Chair.

David DAVIS: On the point of order, Acting President, I actually was directing it through the Chair. I was very clearly talking through the Chair; I was actually talking about her area.

Sonja Terpstra: Further to the point of order, Acting President, I sat here and very carefully observed Mr Davis's contribution, and there was pointing and gesticulating and direct commenting towards Mr Galea. So I ask that you remind Mr Davis that he should direct his comments through you.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora): I uphold the point of order. Please direct your comments through the Chair, but do not try and debate with the Chair.

David DAVIS: I am just informing you, Chair, making sure that you are fully aware of the new charges that have been imposed on your electorate. Let me just return to the key points that I want to make here. Cement Concrete & Aggregates Australia said to the *Herald Sun* a couple of days ago:

> … heavy construction materials already made up an average of 29 per cent of project costs.

The increase in quarrying fees:

> … comes as Victoria grapples with a housing affordability crisis, a multibillion-dollar infrastructure pipeline, and already soaring costs for road construction and maintenance works.
>
> Mr Kilgariff said the higher quarry charges would ultimately be felt well beyond the resources industry.
>
> "Costs imposed at the quarry gate will flow through to homebuyers, infrastructure budgets, renewable energy developers and taxpayers …
>
> "Victoria cannot improve housing affordability, deliver infrastructure efficiently or lower the cost of the energy transition while making essential construction materials more expensive."

I think this is a very basic point that he has made, and it is a very fair point. He also warned that:

> … increased costs could discourage investment in quarrying operations, potentially reducing local production capacity and increasing transport costs.
>
> "Capital is mobile. Continuing increases in energy, labour, transport, insurance, WorkCover, taxes and regulatory costs are making it harder to justify investment in Victoria," he said.
>
> "Adding another substantial government charge will push marginal expansion projects and investment towards jurisdictions with lower costs, faster approvals and more predictable regulatory settings.

> "Over time, that means less local production capacity, fewer regional jobs, longer transport distances and higher construction costs."

If you are trying to lower greenhouse impacts, you do not want to be dragging quarried rock huge distances from interstate; you actually want to mine it in a reasonably proximate place, and you want reasonable fees on the quarry so that they are viable and able to deliver the materials that are needed. Think about Victoria's critical infrastructure sector. We want to see critical infrastructure put in place, and that requires rock and other support. Then think of the minerals sector. If we want to see mining occur for the various critical minerals that are needed, that will actually require exploration and development, and all of these fees will come in like a cascade, compressing and depressing the ability of proponents to get their material and get their particular projects off the ground.

These are very bad outcomes for Victoria, and I notice a number of the industry associations have spoken strongly about this. I have written to a number of the unions and actually have had a conversation already with one member. People in the union movement will want to do something about this, because this will not help unionists. It will not help those who want real jobs with real pay in country Victoria to put new fees on the operation, on the quarry or on the mine; this will not in any way assist.

I see that the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies said, about the government's announcement today:

> Changes to the fees structure were first announced as part of a Regulatory Impact Statement … with the intention to introduce them in October that year. AMEC's submission to government as part of the RIS detailed the objections of our members and the impact to activity levels that would result from the proposed increases which at the time were levied at 234%.
>
> These new changes go beyond that and push Victoria into being the most expensive jurisdiction in Australia in which to explore and mine.

I think that should ring in people's ears. The fees and charges are now out of touch and out of kilter with other jurisdictions with which we compete. James Sorahan, the executive director of the Minerals Council of Australia, made a number of points as well:

> Now the government is planning to increase exploration licence fees by 40% and work plan fees by an extraordinary 400%.

These are just huge amounts. It is just ridiculous. It is absurd. He also said:

> Much of Victoria is underexplored for gold and critical minerals. Applying full cost recovery is harsh for exploration companies that work to find resources which are then subject to royalties.

Bear in mind you will make it less likely that the state will bring in royalties too. If you crush the exploration side of things, which means that mines cannot expand and cannot produce as much and cannot sell the stuff overseas, there will be less royalties for Victoria. So it is actually a self-defeating approach that the government has adopted here. I do not see anything in their figure work that suggests they have thought about the impact long-term on royalties. James Sorahan said:

> Instead of punishing our world-class explorers with high fees, fee increases should be linked to service improvements and delayed until 2027 when regulatory reforms under the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act* remove work plans and replace them with a less process intensive duties-based model.

There are some issues with that process, and many in the sector have pointed out that the resources section of the department is not yet ready for this, and many are very firmly of the view that the government has not done the background work with the sector to actually meet that timeline. That is another challenge, another burden, that is being laid upon the sector concurrent with this one. He said:

> The Victorian Government and Opposition should implement MCA Victoria's policy proposal to introduce co-funded exploration grants on offer in other states, given that Victoria is the only jurisdiction without a competitive grants program to encourage exploration spending.

They are talking about assistance for exploration. Actually, this government is doing the opposite: it is loading more and loading more and loading more onto the sector, making exploration harder and making decisions to proceed harder. The minerals council made the point:

> When combined with the Federal Government's damaging capital gains tax changes, Victoria's failure to provide exploration grants and the prospect of massive fee hikes will discourage mining exploration in Victoria.

I am just going to quote a little further from Cement Concrete & Aggregates Australia, who, in 'Victorian quarry fees put investment and building costs at risk', their statement of 18 August:

> … warned that higher minerals and extractive-industry fees will increase the cost of essential construction materials, adding to housing, infrastructure and renewable energy project costs while further weakening Victoria's competitiveness as a destination for investment.

It should be very clear now that the sector realises that this is a very large threat. It is not going to be easy, the way this is proceeding. What I have sought to do today is to bring to the chamber a disallowance motion. This will allow the government to go back, to rethink this and to come forward with a more moderate offer, a more moderate approach – an approach that might deal with some of the CPI issues. I understand that. But at the same time 300 per cent, 40 per cent and 250 per cent are gigantic increases in fees, and they will not help a sector that is important for Victoria's recovery. We already have the highest unemployment in the country at 5.1 per cent. We already have a deteriorating position relative to other states. We are already building a deficit that is causing huge risk for the state going forward. Yet this government's approach is to put more and more taxes onto the situation. There are 66 new taxes and one more today on public transport – a special public transport tax to pay for the Suburban Rail Loop. This is another new layer of taxes and charges that has been laid on the minerals and aggregates sector, the mining sector. This will not help the state's recovery. This will not help the state rebuild. It will not help the state's unemployment problem. It will not help the state's debt.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:52): I just have a few remarks in relation to the motion before the house today. Obviously I have returned to the resources portfolio as the Minister for Energy and Resources after some time since the last time I was in the portfolio as the Minister for Resources on its own. It is a fantastic portfolio. What I really liked about the first time – and indeed it is turning out to be true the second time – was that the people in this sector are incredible, and their contribution to industry, particularly in regional Victoria, is something that we as Victorians can be proud of. It is a great sector. They are great people, and it is a great place for young aspiring people to work in.

It is fair to say that there are some changes that are the topic of the motion today. This is about the government improving cost recovery for regulatory services provided to the exploration, mining and quarrying sectors from 1 January. The changes follow a comprehensive pricing review which found the current fees covered only one-third of the industry's regulatory costs to government. When I say 'regulatory costs to government', it is not just government; it is the people of Victoria. These are funds that we hope to replenish to be able to redirect to other areas of community priority. Before this, it is important to note, fees had not increased for 12 years. That is quite some time that an industry has been benefiting from not having an increase in their regulatory fee environment. Of course this has facilitated a lot of activity, but it is time to catch up to that.

The fees, as I said, have been subjected to an extended period of consultation, including via a regulatory impact statement in 2025 and a review that commenced in 2022. It is fundamentally good government policy to recover the costs of regulating the private sector to ensure regulatory services are efficient, effective and sustainable. This is consistent with previous governments in Victoria. Under the previous coalition government, in 2014, minister Russell Northe noted in his gazettal notice that an amendment to the fees was necessary to align the cost of regulation with cost recovery guidelines. What is not similar between that gazettal and the gazettal that this government has recently made is

the percentage increases. The fees brought in by Russell Northe, the former minister, were significantly higher than those that have been gazetted recently. On extractives our fee increase is 250 per cent compared to the minimum 1000 per cent brought in by the coalition.

The revenue that has been brought in allows Resources Victoria to respond faster to demand for quarrying materials through the Resources Victoria approvals coordination (RVAC) team. They act as a kind of concierge service for the extractive industry, if you like. This team actively case manage state-significant quarry approvals to bring materials to market sooner, which can apply to both new quarries and expansions. If you speak to anyone in the industry, certainty and time are what are important to them. Time is money when you make money by being able to start your work and work through the approvals.

There is one other thing to point out, too. I think, Mr Davis, you acknowledged the exploration stage of projects, recognising that you do not make revenue in the exploration stage. This was raised through the public consultation and accepted in the final regulations, with fee increases not being as high as what had originally been proposed, recognising the risks associated with exploration and that delayed revenue generation. The final fee increase, therefore, was a 40 per cent increase, which had come down significantly from a proposal that was sitting around the 200 per cent mark.

Mr Davis, you have made some good points. I do not agree with everything you have said. I do have to take issue with your reflection that this is a bolt from the blue. Even the stakeholder quote that you read out acknowledged that while they were not necessarily happy with where they ended up, people have been heavily engaged for a long time in relation to this matter. As I have just indicated, in consultation with industry there was a recognition of a proposal that was then measured down. So there has been a lot of consultation to get here. Not liking an outcome is not the same as saying it is a surprise.

Back to the RVAC team, as I said, they are concierge. They help bring projects on more quickly and deal with a range of issues. They case manage quarry development opportunities from the pre-application phase through to a final approval, including providing assistance in developing work plan applications, facilitating approvals from co-regulators and working through any barriers or issues that arise. Since 2022 RVAC has supported the approval of close to 480 million tonnes of raw quarry materials, which exceeds targeted approvals over the same period by 100 per cent. During the 2024–25 financial year quarry approval times improved by more than a third. This includes 300 million tonnes of hard rock and 170 million tonnes of sand, which are key inputs for building new homes, schools, hospitals and transport infrastructure – significant increases in time, money and benefit to the industry from those services. We want to make sure that those successes continue. That is why we announced in the *Economic Growth Statement* a continuation of the RVAC until at least 2027. RVAC also support new critical mineral projects, including developing maps and identifying areas that have the highest likelihood of developing successful operations and providing dedicated support to facilitate engagement with community and traditional owners. These changes that are occurring are not a money grab; they are ensuring that revenue brought in by the changes has tangible value to the state and value to industry.

I want to put on record that the government completely agrees that quarries are crucial to Victoria's continued growth. Quarry-based construction material such as crushed rock, sand and gravel are essential inputs for building the infrastructure I referenced earlier. Victoria's quarry sector makes vital contributions to the state economy and delivers gross product value of around $1.15 billion. Fifty-eight million tonnes of rock and sand were produced last year alone. This sustained high demand for extractive materials over the last five years has meant that government's focus has been on securing enough materials to deliver on our unprecedented housing and infrastructure commitments.

Just to touch on some of the housing figures, which I often do, we comfortably lead the nation in first home buyers, with almost 40,000 new home loan commitments in the last year, over 10,000 more than New South Wales and 16,000 more than Queensland. We continue to lead the nation not just in first

home buyers but in housing approvals, housing commencements and housing completions, and a lot of that is thanks to the ability to obtain those materials from the sector that we are talking about today. We have secured over 1.4 billion tonnes of extractive materials to support Victoria's continued growth. In 2024–25, 12 new quarries were approved and 17 work plans were amended to deliver an additional 93 million tonnes of resource, building on the 300 million tonnes added in the previous year. This is all thanks to the support of Resources Victoria. It is the kind of value that these guys deliver to industry and the Victorian economy. It is only fair and reasonable that they are sustainably funded by the industry that is the beneficiary.

We are committed to driving new investment in sustainable quarry resource development. Our plan is to prioritise quarry resource development focused on facilitating timely approvals, long-term future supply and building social licence to operate in partnership with the resources sector, communities and traditional owner groups. We need a fully funded Resources Victoria to do that.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (15:02): The Greens will not be supporting this motion today. From a purely practical point of view, the fee increase is essentially just keeping up with the cost of regulating mining and mine rehabilitation. The need for tight regulation of this industry really cannot be overstated. The risks associated with mining while the mines are operating and the potential long-term harm from inadequate rehabilitation are very real. In fact we would argue that they are not adequately regulated as it stands. We are still waiting for the government's response to the oil and gas decommissioning inquiry, for example. Given the widespread concern about the explosion of mining, particularly in rural Victoria, this motion might actually come as a bit of a surprise given that the Liberal and National parties do come out and say that they care about farmers and rural communities, and this seems to be putting the interests of the mining industry before those communities.

The Greens have long raised concerns about dangerous mining activities across Victoria. For example, right now there is an important community campaign that is currently fighting against another expansion of the local Boral quarry in Montrose. This expansion would destroy more than 8 hectares of native vegetation and habitat. It further pollutes the air and increases the health and environmental risks to the community. My colleague Aiv Puglielli has been supporting this community campaign and has sponsored a parliamentary petition calling on the government to oppose the expansion of this quarry. It is worth noting that the opposition have also sponsored a petition in the lower house on the topic of the expansion of the Montrose quarry, parading around their apparent support for the community's fight against the quarry. Rather incongruously, here we are debating this opposition motion to try and keep quarrying in this state as cheap and easy as possible.

While we are on the topic, I want to touch on a few disastrously bad extraction projects that I would be more than happy to see pay more for the damage that they do. In June 2025 a licence was granted to Falcon Metals to explore for gold in a 94-square kilometre area to the east of Bendigo, including an area that is under a new housing development. The mine's operations also sit just a kilometre away from the Campaspe River, a key water source for both irrigation and domestic use, and there is a very real risk of water being used in the mine tailings dam leaking into the Campaspe. Leaks from the tailings dam from the site have already led to arsenic and other pollutants being found in the local groundwater, and given the size of Falcon's mining exploration licence, many local residents are concerned that this could happen on a greater scale if gold is found at this new site. Tailings dams like these are banned in a number of other countries due to the risks posed to people, rivers and the environment should they fail. This includes Brazil, where the collapse of a tailings dam at an iron ore mine in 2019 caused over 250 fatalities and continues to have catastrophic impacts on the environment.

There is a long history of environmental damage and impacts to human health caused by historic and current goldmining. For example, the Bendigo & District Environment Council has for years been ringing alarm bells about plans to expand a toxic tailings dam at Fosterville Gold Mine, the same mine where arsenic dust pollution resulting from mining operations has meant that residents cannot drink their tank water. Community groups in Ballarat have also raised concerns about the Victory Minerals Ballarat Gold Mine after repeated infringement notices being issued from Resources Victoria for

environmental and safety breaches. Violations include the tailings dam discharge into the Yarrowee River, which I have previously raised; failing to report a mine fire within reasonable timeframes; and unauthorised vegetation removal. Then there is the zombie Fingerboards mineral sands project in East Gippsland, which communities thought was dead after an unsuccessful environment effects statement but now rises from the grave. The initial EES found the mine project would have unacceptable environmental effects and should not proceed. In fact it found that mining simply was not compatible with surrounding agricultural industries and the important horticultural fields of the Lindenow Valley. Last year the Greens tabled a petition on behalf of Mine-Free Glenaladale, which secured over 3000 signatures to stop the project. Jump forward a year, and Mine-Free Glenaladale says that the community are being treated like guinea pigs, with the Department of Transport and Planning piloting a new approach to ease processes. Back to the west, and there is Astron corporation's Donald rare earth mines and mineral sands project in the Wimmera town of Minyip. It is set to become the fourth largest rare earth mine outside of China, and the project has been given the go-ahead despite major community distress regarding its impacts, including concerns that it exposes a loophole in our laws in Victoria prohibiting uranium mining.

There are countless more developments like this, but what these examples highlight are the genuine concerns and costs of mining for rural and regional communities who have to live nearby – the health risks they bear, the impact on agriculture, the disruption and the long-term risk to the local ecology and environment. We know that mining companies do not have any financial incentive to mitigate risks to surrounding communities or the environment or to properly rehabilitate sites once they are done. Even where there are requirements to do so, the drive will always be towards doing the bare minimum they think they can get away with, because for them every extra bit they have to pay eats into their bottom line, which is why stringent regulation is so, so important.

The Greens have opposed watering-down and fast-tracking of mining approvals in Victoria over recent years. For example, three years ago, when the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment Bill 2023 was debated, we raised the alarm bell about scrapping of work plans for mining applications. This cut out a key step in ensuring proper planning to mitigate risks, as well as community engagement and transparency. We also railed against the backward step in that bill of allowing mining companies to self-assess environmental risks through a duty-of-care framework and called for environmental impact assessments to be mandatory for all new mines. But the major parties were not interested. Then last year, when the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025 was introduced, we fought to amend the legislation to expand the tailings liability scheme to all mining projects and offshore oil and gas in Victoria, not just the three big mines in the Latrobe Valley. This is critical to ensure that mining companies cannot just walk away from their liabilities to clean up once they are done extracting and leave taxpayers footing the bill. The major parties again rejected these amendments.

What this motion shows is that if the Liberals and Nationals were ever to be in power, they would be just as, if not more, beholden to the corporate interests of the mining lobby. They have made it clear they want to make mining cheaper and easier. The mining industry is who they will put first, not farmers, not communities who have to live with these mines and certainly not the planet on which everything we do depends.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (15:09): Well, the one thing you can be sure of in this place is that this government will apply taxes on anything they possibly can. I heard the minister say she loves this portfolio and she loves this sector. Then why kill it off? Let us not mince our words here – this government also hates the private sector. They have an ideological objection to those who take risks and grow the economy. The minister referred to cost recovery. This is not cost recovery; this is taxation on steroids, and all at a time when industry and the housing sector can least afford it. Let us not talk about the potholes that need to be fixed, which we need extractive product for. The minister mentioned certainty. The only thing certain in this government is exorbitant taxation and interference in markets with a complete aversion to wealth creation in the private sector.

I welcome this opportunity to speak in support of Mr Davis's motion to disallow statutory rules 111 and 112, which impose the government's new fee regime on Victoria's quarrying, mining and exploration industries. As we have heard, these are not modest adjustments. The government consulted on an average increase of 234 per cent. Under the final regulations some increases will be higher still. A mining application rises from $4529.90 to $17,983.30 – a 297 per cent increase – while quarrying and extractive industry fees also rise dramatically. The government says this is simply cost recovery. It is supposed to make it sound fair and reasonable – just a trivial accounting adjustment somewhere inside government, paid by an industry somewhere else. But there is no magic category of money called 'industry money'. That is what Labor never understands. Every cost imposed on a productive business has to land somewhere: in lower returns, lower investment, lower employment or higher prices. Someone pays, and in this case Victorians – every one of them – will pay.

That is clearest in roads. The government's own Resources Victoria website says:

> Victoria needs a steady supply of rock, sand and gravel to build homes, roads, rail lines and other infrastructure.

Mr Davis mentioned that hole in the ground, the Suburban Rail Link. Heaven help us, knowing how much rock and sand that needs. It forecasts that demand for extractive resources will exceed 90 million tonnes by 2034. It warns that if local supply is inadequate and materials must travel further, construction becomes even more expensive. So the government understands the principle; it has written it down. Yet, having acknowledged that reliable local quarry materials are essential to affordable infrastructure, it turns around and deliberately increases the cost of producing them. You cannot write this stuff.

This is extraordinary, given the state of Victoria's roads in particular. The government has announced a $1 billion road maintenance program and says it is attacking potholes. Yet its own budget papers provide for less regional patching and less resurfacing and rehabilitation than in the previous year. The RACV says around 7 to 8 per cent of roads should be resurfaced each year to prevent deterioration. The actual figure is around 2 per cent. Rock aggregate, crushed stone, concrete and asphalt inputs do not appear by magic on the side of a road. They are quarried, processed, transported and paid for. Increase costs at the quarry gate, and you increase the cost of road building and road repair. That means taxpayers either pay more for the same amount of road work or pay for the same and get less road work. Unsurprisingly, neither of these helps the motorist dodging our crater-like potholes.

The same applies to housing. Cement Concrete & Aggregates Australia says heavy construction materials represent around 29 per cent of project costs. The average new home uses around 110 tonnes of aggregate and more than 50 cubic metres of concrete. We are in a housing crisis. Young Victorians are struggling to buy their first home, builders are under pressure, construction costs have risen enormously, and Labor's response is to make the basic materials used to build a house more expensive. The CCAA says costs imposed at the quarry gate will flow through to homebuyers' infrastructure budgets, renewable energy developers and taxpayers. That should not be controversial. It is economics at its most basic, but this government has developed a habit of pretending indirect costs are somehow less real than direct ones.

We see it with payroll tax. The tax is paid by the employer, but the economic consequences do not stop at the employer's door. We see it with land tax, where costs imposed on investment do not disappear because the assessment is sent to a landlord. We see it particularly in electricity. The Australian Energy Regulator has approved $45.4 million in AusNet transmission easement land tax costs to be passed through to network users in 2026–27. The state collects the land tax. The permitted cost is passed through. Victorians ultimately pay through their energy bills.

Tom McIntosh interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: That tax did not magically disappear; it just took a longer route to get to the household, Mr McIntosh.

We see the same political instinct with the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. It is a state government levy, but councils are required to collect it through council rates notices. The bill bears the council's name. The money goes to the state. Local government sees the same phenomenon in cost shifting. State responsibilities and regulatory burdens are pushed downwards. Councils bear the cost, and eventually ratepayers or local services bear the consequence. There is a pattern here. Labor asks first, and who will get blamed? If a tax arrives directly from Spring Street, there may be a political cost. If it can be imposed on an employer, a landlord, a quarry or transmission company or collected through a council, the political trail is less obvious, but the economic cost is exactly as real.

That is the deeper problem with these regulations. They reflect a government more concerned with the appearance of a decision than with its consequences. Even the design is difficult to defend. CCAA says the allocation of regulatory costs relies on estimates of regulatory effort from 2013 and 2014 rather than current activity-based costing. The fees commence on 1 January 2027, yet only six months later the government moves to a new duty-based model which removes the existing work plan requirement and requires another review of the fee structure. Businesses are being hit with enormous increases under a regulatory architecture the government is already replacing.

The mining side is equally concerning. The minerals council says Victoria already has the highest exploration licence application fee and the second-highest renewal fee of any state or territory. It says every dollar in government fees, charges and taxes is a dollar less put into the ground of exploration. Capital is mobile. That is another thing our Labor friends do not seem to recognise. Companies can choose where to explore, expand and invest. CCAA warns marginal investment will move to jurisdictions with lower costs and more predictable regulation. This is not happening in an economic vacuum. The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has warned that Victoria is underperforming other states.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (15:20): I rise today to make a contribution in opposition to the motion moved by Mr Davis. This motion before us seeks to disallow statutory rule 111 and statutory rule 112, namely the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) (Extractive Industries) Amendment (Fees) Regulations 2026 and the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) (Mineral Industries) Amendment (Fees) Regulations 2026. Let me be completely clear about what we are debating here. On our side the Carroll Labor government is doing the responsible, methodical work of ensuring that industry pays for the regulation and oversight of its own commercial activities. We are executing a long-established, fair and transparent cost recovery framework.

On the other side we see an opposition indulging in really what I consider as some theatre, whipping up some manufactured outrage and displaying an extraordinary amount of selective memory about their own record when they sat on the government benches. Under Victorian government policy our departments and agencies regularly review fees and charges across all sectors. It is an essential principle of good governance that commercial industries generating significant profit must cover the actual cost of compliance, enforcement and approvals required to regulate them safely, sustainably and ethically. Victorians, indeed everyday taxpayers and families across the state, should not be the ones forced to foot the bill to subsidise the administrative and regulatory processes of private commercial enterprises.

When we look at the resources sector the simple reality is that those fees have not undergone a comprehensive review since 2014, and for more than a decade the fee schedule sat completely unchanged. Over that same decade the volume, complexity, environmental standards and technical requirements of regulatory oversight grew substantially. That is why the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action commissioned the independent review in 2022, which clearly identified a widening, unsustainable gap between the fees charged to exploration, mining and quarrying companies and the true cost incurred by the state in delivering those regulatory services.

Following that independent review, the department ran an extensive, transparent public consultation process through 2025, releasing the draft regulations and a comprehensive regulatory impact statement

through Engage Victoria. We received nearly 100 detailed submissions from operators, peak bodies, community groups and local stakeholders, and can I thank them for their contributions. Unlike those opposite, when we go about consultation we actually listen to the feedback we receive. The final regulations gazetted in August differ directly from the original proposals set out in the RIS because we listened to industry. Peak bodies and exploration companies made a clear evidence-based argument: exploration carries significant commercial risk, does not generate immediate revenue and forms the vital pipeline for future investment in our state. We accept that argument. We reduced the proposed fee increases for exploration activities from the 234 per cent originally modelled in the RIS down to just 40 per cent in the final rules. That is what collaborative government looks like.

I am going to spend some time looking at the record of the coalition, because I have heard the contributions of both Mrs McArthur and Mr Davis. It is worth reflecting on when Mr Russell Northe was the minister for resources. He amended these exact same fees in 2014 under the coalition government. They passed their regulations without a single change or compromise. What they did do to extractive industries back in 2014 was increase the application fee for an extractive industry work authority from a baseline of just over $100 to $1135, representing an increase of between 126 and 828 per cent. They created brand new annual fees, reaching up to nearly $11,000 every single year. They introduced new application fees for work plans, averaging over $6100, compared to the existing $379 fee, which was a massive, eye-watering increase of over 1500 per cent, and their variation fees jumped by nearly 1000 per cent. So when the coalition sat in government they slapped 1000 to 1500 per cent hikes onto quarries without batting an eyelid and without amending them based on what I assume was some strong advice from the sector. Yet today when our government brings in a new average adjustment, after 12 long years of frozen fees, what we have got before us is a motion to disallow the entire framework.

To my mind, it is hypocrisy or it is a covert plan to scrap regulations now so that they can conduct their own review and perhaps jack them up higher if they happen to get to this side of the chamber. Let me just say that the updated revenue does not disappear into general revenue; it directly funds faster, better regulatory services that the sector itself relies upon. I think that is an important point for everyone here. It absolutely powers the Resources Victoria approval coordination team, known as RVAC. RVAC was established to actively case manage state-significant quarry applications, from the very initial preapplication discussions right through to final statutory approval. They work side by side with proponents to prepare compliant work plans, break down interagency roadblocks and coordinate across the co-regulators to bring these projects online faster. In its first year alone RVAC facilitated the approval of 93 million tonnes of quarry materials, which is quite extraordinary, representing over $2 billion in gross production value for Victoria's economy. Through our *Economic Growth Statement* we have extended through to 2027 so that our builders and contractors have access to the materials they need without costly delays. We have also provided dedicated mapping and tailored support for critical minerals, helping projects engage respectfully with traditional owners and local communities from day one.

Victoria's resources sector is essential to our state's economic strength. Our quarry industry alone produced 58 million tonnes of rock, sand and gravel last year, delivering over $1 billion in production values. That is an extraordinary number. These materials are the literal foundation of our record build. They are building our suburban rail upgrades, our regional hospital expansions, our new schools and our homes. Victoria absolutely leads the nation in housing approvals, commencements and completions. We lead the nation in first home buyers, with nearly 40,000 new loan commitments over the last year alone. We outperform New South Wales and Queensland by significant margins, and we ensure that our home builders are not squeezed by material shortages. Our Labor government has secured over 1.4 billion tonnes of extractive resources and introduced strategic extractive resource areas across Oaklands Junction, Trafalgar and Lang Lang.

At the same time, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity in our critical mineral deposits, with over $200 billion in estimated in-ground value across north-west Victoria alone. Some of these

materials are new to me, so excuse my pronunciation. Antimony and zirconium – there we go; I did ask for approval beforehand, because these are not a regular feature of my day, I must confess – are crucial for renewable energy infrastructure, solar batteries, grid batteries and high-tech manufacturing. I love what they are after they come out of the ground, but I must confess they are new ones for me. They will be well known by Victorians right across the state in the years to come.

We have got before us a disallowance motion which would tear away the resources needed to keep our regulatory approvals running smoothly. It would harm the very sector that those opposite are claiming to defend. Can I just say that the Carroll Labor government is proud to support our workers, our regional communities and a well-regulated, sustainable and funded resource sector.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:28): I am also pleased to speak on this motion by Mr Davis regarding disallowance of the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) (Extractive Industries) Amendment (Fees) Regulations 2026. I am sick to death of hearing from businesses and different organisations that they do not want to do business in Victoria because we are uncompetitive. We have taxes, fees and regulations that are uncompetitive in many areas, and unfortunately, the fees put forward by the government here make extractive industries, at least for exploration and mining licences, uncompetitive in Victoria as well. Victoria has enormous potential for many new industries such as mineral sands et cetera but also, as has been mentioned, for many things that people consider not as exciting but are absolutely necessary from quarries for our construction sector.

David Davis interjected.

David LIMBRICK: Yes, sand and rock and these sorts of things that are absolutely essential. The government says that these fees are a cost recovery mechanism. I actually accept that that is the government's explanation, but the problem is that the costs are created by the government. I do not accept that, for some reason, the costs in Victoria are vastly more expensive than other states. Why can't the costs be less? I do not accept that the government is doing things as efficiently as possible. We have got to think about how much effect this has on Victoria. If some explorer decides to do business in another state, the potential impact and loss of potential revenue in the future for the long term are enormous for Victoria. These explorers do not produce revenue. They run on capital from investors who are taking large risks and they have already been slammed by some of the federal government's recent tax changes, and now we are going to make ourselves more unattractive in Victoria through these fees. I think that it is absolutely wrong, what the government is doing. If they want to force up these costs, rather than increasing cost recovery mechanisms and costs, maybe they should think about lowering the costs in the first place. The other states seem to be able to do it – why can't we?

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:31): I will make a brief contribution on this simply as Shadow Minister for Industry. I endorse all the previous speakers simply talking about cost and Victoria's competitiveness. It is clearly established empirically that Victoria is the least competitive state in Australia. Our productivity has also been lagging the nation for a decade. These things have not happened by accident. Anyone with a cursory knowledge of economics understands that the cost of doing business in Victoria is higher than any other state, and that has a direct impact on anyone's ability to do business in Victoria. It affects employment, it affects investment, it affects margins and it affects returns to working capital that can be reinvested into additional business. The part that seems to escape the government more than any other point is that if you need to grow state revenues – which the government does, because we are so deeply in debt – then the only sustainable economic way to do that is to grow economic growth and the output and the economic capacity of the state. If you do not do that, if you are trying to spend your way or tax your way into economic growth and into economic prosperity, what you end up doing is spending so much from state coffers that you exceed the actual economic capacity of the state – that is, you are trying to get the state to do more than it can actually do economically. And the immediate economic result of that is inflation, because you are prime pumping the state with demand that it cannot actually fulfil. You can see that in any

economic model where if there are more people demanding land than there is land, then the land will go up. That is exactly the same mechanism for inflation, when you are not growing the economic capacity of the state.

Growing the economic capacity of the state can happen in a number of different ways, but certainly productivity is a way, and certainly lowering the tax burden of the state is another way, because it frees up working capital that can be reallocated for productive purposes. In Victoria we seem to have completely lost our minds about these very fundamental economics 101 matters, and we seem to be obsessed with the idea that we can tax our way to prosperity – we cannot. We are at the end of that road. The credit card is used up. The tax is already at maximum. There is already a clear premium for doing business in Victoria across almost every single metric that we have. And until this state changes direction economically, it is only going to get worse. We already know that the single fastest growing line item in the state budget is interest expense. It is growing faster than the revenue line. That is clearly unsustainable.

If one dollar out of every 10 is being spent simply to service revenue and the only way we seem intent on generating additional revenue is to tax people, that is clearly a lose–lose endgame or zero-sum game economic solution. Putting these punitive taxes on an industry that has the temerity to want to invest in and expand operations in Victoria is extraordinarily wrongheaded. In Victoria I think universally the community might say 'Wouldn't it be great to have the car industry back?' or 'Wouldn't it be great to have manufacturing back in Victoria?' Yet, when economic conditions present themselves to say, 'This is an achievable thing. We've got an industry here that could expand and could generate wealth for the state,' the immediate, almost Pavlovian response from the government is, 'Let's tax it some more. Let's make it a little bit more difficult to get your licence. Let's make the regulatory burden more. Let's consume more of your productive effort in compliance. Let's do everything to make it harder rather than to make it easier.' There is a well-known engineering phrase that says the biggest mistake an engineer can make is optimising the thing that should not exist, and I think we are at that point in Victoria too. The government now, because it has no other approach, is actually outside its field of vision and cannot comprehend a different approach on building state competitiveness, so its reflex is, 'We'll tax.' But there is actually a world outside this. There is a world in the rest of Australia and in the rest of the globe where people understand fundamental economics – that if you want more of something, you tax it less. If you want productivity, companies have to have working capital and need to spend more time building their businesses than they do filling out compliance forms.

I commend the motion to the house. My prayer for Victoria is that we have a new government in November, that we have a completely fresh start, that we demonstrate to the rest of Australia that Victoria is open for business and that we demonstrate that not just in words but in simply how we construct the tax system, how we incentivise people to take risks and how we incentivise capital to come into Victoria. That is the only way we are going to grow our way out of $200 billion of debt.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (15:37): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion. As the minister outlined in her contribution earlier in the debate, the government opposes the motion. One of the things that strikes me in the context of the debate is how a regular and routine review of fees and charges to ensure cost recovery in a sector that has been subject to fees and charges for the operation of the resources that it extracts almost as long as the colony that preceded this state has existed has somehow turned, in the minds of the opposition and the Liberal Party speakers in this debate, to be the greatest assault on the Victorian economy that they have ever seen. I think they need to stop exaggerating absolutely everything all of the time, because it stretches credulity that anything that they say has any substance.

David Davis interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Just on a point of order, Acting President, Mr Davis used an unparliamentary expression, and I ask him to withdraw it.

David Davis interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: You know what you said, and you should withdraw it.

David Davis: In the spirit of moving forward, I withdraw the word 'goose'.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): Thank you. Mr Batchelor, please continue.

Ryan BATCHELOR: He is very sensitive to a critique of how absurd this disallowance motion is and the arguments that the opposition have when they are really clutching at straws. What we have got before us, very simply, as the minister outlined, is a government review of fees and charges to ensure that they cover the cost of compliance activities for the industries that they regulate, consistent with government policy. Almost one of the most routine things that you can think of that government should be doing is ensuring that the fees and charges that are used to oversee a regulated authority cover the costs of the compliance associated with the regulation of that authority. It is enough to send you to sleep sometimes, and yet what we see is the opposition trying to confect outrage about something that is so routine. These fees were last reviewed in 2014, and this review was commissioned by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Change in 2022 because they had identified the substantial gap that had grown between the fees charged to the exploration, mining and quarrying industries and the costs for delivering regulatory services.

There has been extensive feedback that the department has sought through releasing draft regulations and a regulatory impact statement and through public consultation. As the minister said in her contribution, of all the things that you could say, this review, these fees and these changes have been thoroughly consulted on with the industry. So yet again the sort of language that we hear from the opposition that tries to stretch everything routine and well consulted into the greatest threat to the Victorian economy in a generation that was sprung on people at the last minute makes them out for the Chicken Littles that they are. Almost 100 responses were received from industry stakeholders, representative bodies and community members, which helped shape the final regulations. As a result, the final regulations differ from the original proposal, which is the whole point of a consultative exercise, in my view. The opposition regularly critique the government for not engaging in genuine consultation, but if you go out with a draft process, with a draft proposal, and you put it through an extensive consultation process and that changes, then it demonstrates there actually has been a genuine consultative process. Maybe the Liberals just are not familiar with that, because the last time they sat on the government benches, which was the last time that these fees were reviewed, there was no consultation. The last set of regulations were made without amendment. They were made without the feedback that the sector had given them. Perhaps if the people in this state decide that the opposition is fit and proper to form government after the election, maybe this is a taste of what is to come if they ever get the chance to be in government in this state again.

I think that what we should see from the opposition is at least some degree of appreciation of the extensive work that has gone into the regulatory process and of the absolute hypocrisy of bringing forward a proposal to disallow these fees. All we can surmise is that they want to potentially jack them up even further if they are to win. Maybe the opposition simply does not want to have a new set of fees in place this side of the election. Maybe they have a plan to increase these fees without consultation even more after the election. That is a logical conclusion that one can draw from the disallowance motion that is before us today – that what the opposition want is no change so that they can jack them up even further after the election. That is their cunning plan.

Richard Welch: Yes, that's our cunning plan.

Ryan BATCHELOR: That is what Mr Welch just said. Mr Welch by interjection into this chamber said that that is their plan. That is their cunning plan. I heard it, and the government members heard it. What you have seen right now from Mr Welch, a shadow minister, is that they have got a plan to jack up resource fees after the election.

Members interjecting.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I was merely speculating that the genius of David Davis –

Renee Heath: On a point of order, Acting President, I believe that the current speaker is trying to mislead the house, and I just ask you to bring him back to the bill.

Michael Galea: Further to the point of order, Acting President, you cannot mislead by directly quoting someone.

David Davis: On the point of order, Acting President, actually you can, because it was said by Mr Welch in irony. It was dripping in irony. He was pointing to the fact that we would not be doing that. Indeed the opposite would be the case.

Richard Welch: On the point of order, Acting President, if it helps the house, I was really just saying with irony how incredibly ridiculous the proposition being made was, just for the clarity of the house.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): I will bring Mr Batchelor back to the debate.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I think it has been very clear through that whole exchange that Mr Davis has moved this disallowance motion to ensure there is no increase to these fees ahead of the election, because as Mr Welch said by way of interjection, they have got a cunning plan to jack them up after. That is why Mr Davis is moving this disallowance motion right here. That is what they are doing. They did not want to say it. Mr Welch let the cat out of the bag. Who knows what else they have got planned. All we know is that this government has spent the last four years since 2022 consulting with the sector through an extensive regulatory impact statement process about adjustments to fees to make sure that the fees charged cover the costs of the compliance activities, consistent with government policy that compliance and regulatory activities should have their costs covered by the fee structures. It is not complicated and it is not controversial; it is very straightforward. It has been the subject of extensive consultation. The motion should be opposed.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:47): I am very pleased to support Mr Davis's motion 1586 on the notice paper, a disallowance motion of statutory rules 111 and 112. You know that the government are getting desperate, and you know that they are reading the tea leaves and that they are looking at the polling and getting very nervous, because they have asked all of their members to hyperbole, to be dramatic, to be outrageous and to try and knit some prefabrication of a story out of absolutely nothing, which is what we heard from the former speaker. Let me give you some context. We heard from the former speaker about the threat to Victorian people and that there is going to be a threat to Victorian people. Well, let me say that we are living in that threat right now. The former Premier looked down the barrel in 2014 and said, 'There will be no new or increased taxes.' The Premier, coming into government, looked down the barrel of the camera and said, 'No new taxes.' Well, we are up to about our 67th new or increased tax, and let us just see, there are more on the table.

Let me also give some context around the $200 billion in debt that this state will have in a few short years. That is an existential threat to the Victorian people. Let me also give some other reality. If there is one thing that I know the Deputy President has spoken about in her contributions, as we all have over here, it is consultation. So many Victorians feel that they have been consultold by this government in many forays and many, many areas.

I will provide some other context around this. The government in 2017 brought in a thing called the coal royalties tax. They tripled the coal royalties tax. Apparently it was up for review and all of that, but they tripled it. What did that do? That pushed Hazelwood coalmine over the gangplank. It made it shut rapidly. It put thousands of people out of work in my electorate, and it ensured that there were power prices going up.

Going back to this particular motion, I want to talk about some of those regulations. They have risen by up to 297 per cent. What does that look like? The mining licence application has gone up from

$4500 to $17,900. The exploration licence renewal has gone up from $1300 to $5200. The tourist fossicking authority has gone up from $110 to $400. Mining licence rent per 10 hectares has gone up from $250 to almost $1000. These are not marginal. These are fundamental changes to how costs operate in this space in Victoria.

What it also shows is that the timing around this creates a serious problem for Labor and for Victoria. In terms of the increased fees, they commence on 1 January next year. Six months later, in July, Victoria moves to a new duty-based regulatory framework. Under that framework the statutory work plan approvals will no longer be required, and the government's own regulatory impact statement acknowledges that work plans will no longer be required under a duty-based model and that the fee structure will need to be reviewed again. So we have a review, we have got prices being pushed up –

David Davis: There will be more charging.

Melina BATH: Absolutely more charges. What does that mean for Victorians? We heard the former speaker speak about threats to Victorian people. That is what the former speaker said. Well, let us look at some of those threats. Cement Concrete & Aggregates Australia has warned that there will be a higher quarry price, and that will have to flow on. If you have input costs to business and industry – they are not a charity – they have to pass on those costs. They absorb and absorb and absorb, but they have to pass them on. That is going to flow on to construction materials, to housing, to roads and infrastructure and to other projects, including renewable energy projects. It is going to put pressure on local production. It is going to put pressure on regional jobs – something that I feel very passionately about, as do my colleagues. It is going to bump up prices across the board.

I worry very gravely about the state of our roads. Under this, with those increased prices, we are going to see less again. It is going to be more expensive. We know this government has cut road maintenance – the actual filling, the actual work done and the actual area covered – dramatically in the last few years. Simply put, you cannot fix a pothole without rock, and the Liberals and Nationals have a plan to solve that. We are going to increase the number of potholes that are not just filled but eliminated – 1 million. We are going to have over four years an uplift of 25 per cent in road funding to ensure that we get rid of 1 million potholes. We are also going to introduce Better Roads Victoria, which is about establishing the actual work that needs to be done to fix those potholes and to eliminate them entirely as well as reviewing construction standards to increase department and contractor accountability. We want to see actual action being done.

The other thing that I am quite concerned about – the minerals council has been very strong on this – is that Victoria already has some of the highest exploration licence fees and application fees. It has the second-highest exploration licence renewal fees among Australian jurisdictions. We know that it is just dearer and dearer not only to do business as a small business in this country but to generate the activity that is required to construct, to build and to make. I also want to point out that in terms of the prospectors and fossickers, it is not just the larger companies that are going to be hit with this, then a review next year and then potentially more of an increase; in actual fact it is those everyday people. The prospectors and fossickers will also be hit. The tourist fossicking authority is going to have an increase. We know that the miners rights are also having an increase. These are concerns because we want to ensure people are out enjoying that activity. It is a very traditional activity. In fact Victoria was built on the back of prospecting and goldmining – many of the fantastic towns that we know of like Bendigo, Ballarat, Maryborough and all of those – and this house has gold lining all through it because of that particular industry and pastime. We want to see that continue. We know that this government has actually been very keen to lock prospectors and fossickers out of public land. They have reduced access to 70,00 hectares of national park over a range of spaces out to the west near Wombat State Forest. We know that has curtailed the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria and their members of the opportunity to go prospecting, and we see that this also is a concern.

When the road washes out in East Gippsland, we need construction material in my electorate. When a road fails in Wellington, we need roads, road base and aggregate. When new homes are built in Baw

Baw and Cardinia, we need concrete, aggregate, drainage and roads. It is one of the fastest growing regions in the world – in the state, without a doubt. It might be in the world; I have not done that checking, but I know that it is one of the fastest growing municipalities, and a great one too. We do not want to see that curtailed, and we need this disallowance. I am very pleased that my colleague David Davis has brought this on, and I support him entirely.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:57): I am pleased to sum up on this motion, and I thank members for their contributions. I think this is actually a very important motion, because we do not necessarily, on every occasion, support full cost recovery. I think this is a set of statements that the member over there has made, that we are going to push things higher. No, we are not pushing them higher. Actually, if we are elected, we are going to get rid of these fees. We are open to CPI, but we are not open to 300 per cent. Nobody thinks that 300 per cent is even remotely reasonable. Nobody thinks that, if the aim is just cost recovery. This is what the former Treasurer, now Minister for Energy and Resources, is pushing for, but this is not what we agree with. We say the fees should be lower. This lot of changes should be removed. The government ought to go back to the drawing board, and they could if the motion is carried. But we are not going to increase these fees by the sorts of numbers that are proposed.

The reason we are bringing this motion is because we disagree with those fees and disagree with those massive increases, and we know what this will do. This will make mining less competitive. It will make our critical mining sector less competitive. It will mean that those who are out exploring are going to face higher charges to go and find the new resources, the new minerals that the state needs, and that has a consequence. There will be less new mines, there will be less new resources, and do you know what, there will be less royalties too. So this is a government cutting off its nose to spite its face. It puts a barrier in front of groups going out to try and create new development and new royalties. It is actually a counterproductive tax, a tax that leads to a negative outcome for the state, so we will scrap it. We will get rid of these fees and charges, make no mistake about it.

Beyond that, we also are aware of the importance of this sector for construction, for housing, for new roads and even for the Suburban Rail Loop, with all its costs and charges that are in there now – the Suburban Rail Loop, with its new taxes, its new charges and the new corrupt payments. I mean, we have got people in there, we have learned today, who knew what was going on and who are awarding consultancies corruptly. We know what is going on, and we know the way that that project is operating. But let us be clear: if you are going to build tunnels and roads, you need rock, you need sand – you need the input. If you are taxing it, if you are making the taxes higher on it, it is going to make the projects more expensive. But it also hits everyday families. An everyday family that wants a new home in Baw Baw Shire is going to have to pay more because of Jaclyn Symes and because of Ben Carroll's new taxes – Ben Carroll's new housing tax, Ben Carroll's new tax on roads, Ben Carroll's new tax on every piece of construction in the state.

It is a shocking new tax that makes it harder for families and makes it harder for explorers, harder for miners and harder for the state to get off its back, which it has fallen onto. Our state is in a terrible position and it needs help to get up, and a new tax like this will not make it easier. All of the industry associations understand the importance of this. All of them understand it makes Victoria less competitive and it is a mistake. This is a terrible mistake, this new nasty tax on housing, on roads and on mining and new development in the state. You want to get the state up, you want to get the state moving – well, do not put a dirty big new tax on it.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (15): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (19): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion negatived.

Bills

Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026

Council's amendments

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad) (16:08): I have a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) Bill 2026:

> The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Crimes Act 1958** in relation to recruitment of children to engage in criminal activity, to further amend that Act to establish a new process for requiring financial institutions to produce documents that are relevant to certain offences and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

Petitions

Mernda police station

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (16:08): I move:

> That the petition be taken into consideration.

I rise to speak on the petition that I tabled on 2 June this year, which calls on the government to ensure that the Mernda police station is fully staffed and returns to being open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The paper petition had 2257 signatures, qualifying for debate in Parliament, and there were also 1523 people who signed the petition on my website. That is a total of 3780 people who have put their name to this demand to return Mernda police station to being a 24/7 station that is accessible to local residents all day, every day.

Mernda police station originally opened in 2017 as a 24/7 station, with the promise of extra staff to serve the growing community. But earlier this year opening hours at Mernda station were cut for a second time. They were first cut in November last year and have been cut for a second time this year, and now the station is closed most of the week and only opens on a Tuesday and Thursday from 10 till 6 – a seven-day-a-week station that has gone to two days a week from just 10 till 6. Residents want a police station where officers are ready to assist at the exact time that help is needed. Let us be honest, residents in the Whittlesea police service area, which largely overlaps with the Yan Yean electorate, need more and more help from the police because under Labor there is more crime than ever in the area. Since 2022 the number of criminal offences in the Whittlesea municipality has jumped by 44 per cent, burglary and break-ins have gone up by even more – a massive increase of 88 per cent – and this crime wave has had a devastating impact on my constituents.

I have spoken to families in Donnybrook who are traumatised by home invasions and cannot sleep because they are so anxious. In one case, two women were terrified by attackers trying to smash through the front door while the women held the door shut. Motor vehicle theft has skyrocketed by 183 per cent. Residents now send alerts to each other on their WhatsApp groups when they see suspicious figures lurking at night, looking for easy opportunities to steal cars. Thieves prowl the streets of isolated new estates with torches, peering inside utes in search of tools to snatch. Stealing of goods from a motor vehicle has exploded by 114 per cent.

The residents in the areas of Donnybrook, Doreen and Mernda are sick and tired of Labor's crime crisis. They feel unsafe when they are at home, and they are scared when they go outside to shop or catch public transport. In June last year there were three machete attacks in one weekend. One of them

was at a petrol station in Doreen, where a teenager was brutally slashed. A few months later the Laurimar shops went into lockdown as youth gangs brawled along a shopping strip armed with machetes. Since 2022 offences on public transport in the City of Whittlesea, which includes the Mernda train station, went up by a staggering 162 per cent – the Mernda train station is only a few hundred metres from the police station.

Earlier this year there was the tragic death of Aidan Becker, who was murdered at the Mernda train station. Aidan bravely stepped in to help a young schoolboy who was being assaulted. The thugs followed Aidan and then stabbed him to death with a machete. It was a horrifying event that shocked the community, who are upset and angry at the lawlessness that has spread throughout Victoria. Soon after, I called on the Minister for Police to increase the hours for PSOs at Mernda train station so that they would start their patrols earlier, when students were travelling home from school. A month after I did that, the minister had not responded, but there had been another attack on a teenager at Mernda station. A 15-year-old girl was on her way home from school, and she was bashed and robbed at the same place where Aidan Becker lost his life. Jacinta Allan said she was sending her violence reduction unit, but it is clear that the unit has not made Mernda train station a safer place.

Crime has surged to an all-time high under Labor, and the government's response is totally inadequate. Labor has failed to fix the staffing crisis, and there are more than 1500 vacancies on police rosters across the state. Stations in Whittlesea police service area are operating with as little as 40 per cent of their designated staffing level. Instead of boosting staff levels, Labor has responded by closing police stations. Now Mernda station is only open two days a week, and there is not a single 24-hour station in the whole police service area. It is vital that at least one station in the area is open at all hours to help residents late at night when they have emergencies. I am thinking particularly of the many women who I have heard from who say that domestic violence typically occurs at night or on the weekend and that when they need to leave the house at a moment's notice, when they go to a police station, there is no-one there; there is nowhere for them to seek refuge. The minister must listen and open Mernda police station 24/7.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:14): I welcome the opportunity to speak to this petition today. Community safety is of vital importance to this government, and from the very many conversations that I have had with her, I know it is a particular priority for the member for Yan Yean in the other place, Lauren Kathage, who is out and speaking with her community and fighting for them on a daily basis. Policing hours is, of course, not a new discussion for this place, and I find myself again, for the benefit of Ms Lovell and others in the chamber, explaining how Victoria Police's proactive policing model works. Ask any police officer and they will tell you that they do not spend their shifts sitting at a station waiting for something to happen. Rather, they are out and about, in car patrols and on the street, and ready to respond where and when they are needed. This brings me to a point which is important to emphasise: Mernda and Doreen are protected by an active police presence 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In fact in large part as a result of this model, burglary rates in both Mernda and Doreen have reduced by 20 per cent in the last 12 months to March this year. So any attempts by those opposite to suggest that reduced counter hours means less or no police presence in the community is not just misleading but an outright falsehood.

Notwithstanding the results of the model, we do of course know that there is a legitimate community concern about the public operating hours of police stations. Indeed I know it is something that the member for Yan Yean herself has been advocating for on behalf of her community, and that is why this government is investing in deploying former and retired officers as reservists in police stations across the state to assist with administrative work, freeing up the resources for sworn officers to do what they do best. Although Victoria already has the largest police force in the nation, funding remains in place for more police officers to come on board. We do want more people to pursue a career in policing. I note the member for Yan Yean's excitement that two of her local CFA volunteers are currently involved in training at the academy, and they are joining the ranks along with a record number of recruits in recent years.

Whilst the member for Yan Yean remains a fierce advocate for expanded counter hours at the Mernda police station, it is also necessary for me to correct the record here on some of the opposition's claims. The government does not set the hours of police stations. These are, and have been for a long time, an operational decision for Victoria Police. We can perhaps forgive the Liberals for not understanding this, given that they are apparently averse to consulting with Victoria Police. After all, this is the party who completely failed to even talk to them when they were proposing a major change to police operations, and when asked if they had spoken to the Chief Commissioner of Police, the best they could say is that they had consulted Brad Battin. But sadly this has not stopped them from spreading the falsehood that the Mernda and Doreen communities are being underserviced by police. There is nothing honourable in taking a genuine community concern, misleading the community and using it for cynical political gain. I do welcome the genuine community concern and the opportunity to talk about this important issue, and I acknowledge everyone who has signed this petition. You deserve to have your voices heard. But the wording of this petition created a worry in the community that police were not operating in the area 24/7, which simply is not true. It gave the impression that the government sets police station counter hours, which also is not true. When cafe owners who had displayed this petition in their windows then took them down after asking a police officer about coverage gaps and finding out that they had been misled by Liberal staffers, I do question the motives of those opposite.

This government will always prioritise community safety. Whether it is the bail reforms that passed this Parliament, whether it is adult time for violent crime or whether it is the record investment we are putting into Victoria Police, giving them the resources they need, we will continue to do just that. The member for Yan Yean will be at the forefront of that, working tirelessly to listen to and fight for the community that she loves.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:19): I rise to speak in support of Ms Lovell's petition calling on the government to open up the Mernda police station so that it is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If elected, the Liberal government will open every one of the police stations that Labor has cut, shut down and reduced the hours of. Not only that, but we will increase the police force by 3000, because no matter what the government says –

Harriet Shing interjected.

Renee HEATH: Yes, you might not make these really operational decisions, but I tell you what, if the state has run out of money, you cannot pay for the receipts.

Harriet Shing interjected.

Renee HEATH: I actually should get out some details on that because once again Ms Shing is misleading the house. While I am looking for that, I will just say that we will replace every PSO at the 119 stations that this government has stripped them away from and we will add another 200, and we will do these things because community safety matters. Unlike Labor, we will not be a government that puts the rights of perpetrators above the rights of victims. There has been an inverted sense of justice under this government, and we are going to restore justice.

In 2017 this station was open as a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week police station, and the reason it was is because the first job of any government is to keep its people safe. There was a promise from the government of extra staffing that would keep up as this community began to flourish, but last year the government cut those hours. They shut it down on weekends.

Members interjecting.

Renee HEATH: They did. And if that was not bad enough, then they opened it from 10 am till 6 pm during weekdays, and then later they further restricted it to just 10 until 6 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Police are not a nice-to-have, they are a must-have, and people need a place that is consistent so that when they go there, there is going to be someone there. There was that story recently

about the lady that drove her car while she was being followed to a police station. No-one was there, and you know how that ended up.

Statistics estimate that there are roughly 6547 crimes committed per 100,000 people in the area of Mernda. Crime in Mernda is not rare. Communities in and around –

Harriet Shing interjected.

Renee HEATH: The minister – well, actually, Ms Shing, the former minister – should not be spruiking how good things are and what they have done. Let me tell you why this is important. Mernda has been through unspeakable tragedy. These communities have felt completely betrayed, because despite the fact that their communities have faced some of the most tragic circumstances, their police stations have been cut down. Following the death of Aidan Becker, who was stabbed to death – he was an off-duty security guard who stepped in to protect a 14-year-old kid who was being attacked; he stepped in to help him, and that good Samaritan got stabbed to death at Mernda station – a few days later Ms Lovell, Jess Wilson, Nick McGowan and a few other colleagues all gathered there, and we stood shoulder to shoulder with a community that was just in shock. That night a bunch of kids came up to me and showed me videos from just a year prior in exactly the same spot, where one of them had been chased with a machete.

I have got a minute left, so I am going to have to speed through these, but Ms Lovell spoke about the young kid who has been chased since then in the same spot. And please, I do not want you to forget about Celeste Manno, who in the year 2020 was murdered in her own bed in Mernda. These things happened in Mernda; we are not being abstract here. It is harrowing. I have spoken about it many times in here. These things deserve our attention.

In terms of drug offences in Mernda, crime data tracking for early this year recorded approximately 70 drug-related offences in Mernda, covering use, manufacturing, dealing and organised crime. Victoria Police say that there were connections in that region to larger crime networks, including motorbike gangs and industrial extortion, and from 2024–25 – *(Time expired)*

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:24): I rise to speak on this petition, and I think the community of Mernda – 5000 of them – would have been really, really disappointed to hear that their concerns were just so arbitrarily dismissed by those opposite: their concerns were not material, were not real; it is all in their heads, and these are operational matters. I will just remind the house that Victoria Police's operational decisions are made within the context of the resources they have got, so if they have only got so many resources they are limited in the range of operational decisions they can make. It is not an accident that 43 police stations have either been closed or had their hours reduced; it is because there are not enough police. Everybody acknowledges that we are 1500 short, with another 500 to 800 who are on long service leave or on sick leave or on stress leave. We need more police. That is why these police stations have been closed.

Harriet Shing: You never funded a single one.

Richard WELCH: And the crime statistics also reflect the fact that in the areas where police stations have been closed or had reduced hours, crime has –

Renee Heath: On a point of order, Acting President, Ms Shing is misleading the house by saying that we never funded a single one police officer, where – I have looked up the facts – there were an extra 2000, under us, delivered. So you need to stop misleading the house. She is telling porkies.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Thank you, Dr Heath. That is not a point of order.

Richard WELCH: I take up the interjection. Thank you, Dr Heath, for that important stat. The fact is of course that not only do we not have enough police but we continue to haemorrhage numbers of police. There are less police now than we had when Jacinta Allan became Premier, and there are probably less police now than when Ben Carroll became Premier because senior police are retiring or

quitting. They have had enough because of the weak bail laws, because of the lack of resources and because of the cumbersome compliance requirements and reporting. There have been no updates to their system, failed IT projects, a lack of legislative support for them in terms of Jack's law, where you can check people for knives, weak bail laws and a judicial system that creates a bail merry-go-round or revolving door.

The people of Mernda are perfectly right and entitled to raise these concerns, and they have used the democratic mechanism available to them – that is, raising a petition to Parliament – and good on them for doing it. I think it is absolutely shameful that, having done that, what they were met with on the other side was nothing more than contempt – 'Well, there, there, Mernda,' patting them on the head, 'we know better. All these silly concerns you have about the lack of police in your area. It is really just an operational issue.' What an insult to the people who have had their lives disrupted or harmed – or worse, who have lost their lives – that their concerns can be minimised and trivialised in this way.

Harriet Shing: How dare you.

Richard WELCH: Easily, because if you look across Victoria and look at the state of our state – 'how dare you'? How dare you, Ms Shing. How dare you to have the temerity to say that Victorians are safe when we have record crime across the state. How dare you. It is an absolute disgrace.

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, Acting President, it is deeply unparliamentary for Mr Welch to be suggesting that there is any minimising of tragedy and of loss in this community as a consequence of the discussion we are having here today. Mr Welch should hang his head in shame.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Mr Welch, I would ask that you direct your comments through the Chair.

Richard WELCH: Yes, you are quite right. I should direct them through the Chair, so I will direct them through you. It is absolutely shameful the way this government and their contributions, on this very worthy and correct petition, minimised it – that 'It's just operational matters that are a problem, just operational matters. Don't you worry about it.' Well, I think the people of Mernda deserve better. They completely deserve better. We have an excellent Liberal candidate in the seat of Yan Yean, Amanda Dow, who actually takes these matters seriously, like the Liberal Party takes these things seriously, and we will actually do something about it.

Harriet Shing interjected.

Richard WELCH: While others want to chirp, chirp, chirp away, it does not take anything away from the truth, because you cannot chirp away the truth. The truth is the evidence from people's eyes and ears and in the headlines that we see every day. So distract and deflect all you like and be worried about hurtful words. I think the bigger problem is people's lives – people's lives in Yan Yean and people's lives in Mernda – that have been affected. And do you know what, the sooner this government goes, the better for the whole of Victoria.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (16:29): This petition was started when the government reduced Mernda station from being open 24 hours to being closed on weekends and after 6:00 pm on weekdays. That was last November. After the petition started, the Labor government responded by reducing opening hours even further, closing the station every day of the week except Tuesday and Thursday. Those opposite claim that it is better to have officers out patrolling the street instead of being behind the counter. Why can't we have both? The answer to that is that Labor has failed to fix the staffing crisis and is forcing stations to choose between patrolling and keeping the station open.

There are fewer police on the beat under Labor, and crime continues to increase. Only the Liberals have a plan to hire 3000 more police, which will allow us to reopen police stations that have been closed or had their hours reduced. Even the local Labor MP Lauren Kathage supports our petition and has said that the police station counter hours must be increased, but this is too little, too late. The member has been missing in action while crime has exploded in the area. Her Labor colleagues are

ignoring the call for a 24/7 station because Premier Ben Carroll has written off the seat of Yan Yean and refuses to invest more police resources in the area. It is a disgrace what is going on for these people in the seat of Yan Yean. They were sold the Australian dream with housing estates in the outer urban suburbs, but what they are doing is living the Australian nightmare. The government has not invested in the infrastructure, the roads, the schools and the hospitals that they need, and the government is now putting their lives at risk because they do not have enough police officers to adequately service the growing area of the seat of Yan Yean.

Motion agreed to.

Prostate cancer

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:31): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

Every year in Victoria thousands of men hear the same three words: 'You have cancer.' Prostate cancer is the most common cancer among Victorian men – one in six will face it – and yet if you ask most people to name a colour, a ribbon, a symbol, the room goes silent. Ask the same question about breast cancer and the answer comes back before you have finished asking. That gap between what we know and what we notice is what brings this petition before our Parliament today.

Awareness is not a small thing dressed up as a big one. It is the difference between a symptom mentioned early and a symptom ignored too long, between a family with time to fight and a family caught flat-footed. Awareness costs nothing to give and everything to go without. The petitioners have put forward an idea that is simple, sound and, if I may say so, rather clever. They are asking our sporting codes, the AFL and Cricket Victoria, to hold blue matches in the same proud tradition as the pink matches that have rightly done so much for breast cancer awareness. Picture it: a stadium washed in blue, players wearing it on their sleeves, commentators weaving it through their broadcasts and somewhere in the crowd a child turning to a father, a grandfather, an uncle and asking, 'What's it all about?' One conversation sparked in a grandstand might outdo a decade of pamphlets gathering dust in a waiting room.

The petition asks something of us too, and it is not too much to ask: a line in a newsletter, a word at a community event, a conversation with a local football club – small tasks multiplied by every person in every electorate in this state. And they become something larger, a message reaching every corner of Victoria carried by the very people Victorians already trust to speak for them. Let me be plain about the size of this request, because it is modest by design. Nobody is asking for a new department, a new taskforce or a new line item buried in next year's budget. This is a request for something simpler and, in its own way, harder to legislate: a shift in culture, a willingness to say out loud what has for too long been said in whispers, if it was said at all.

Before I go on, though, I want to pause and thank an organisation that lives this culture and seeks this cultural shift every day – it does not just talk about it: the Ringwood Prostate Cancer Support Group. Led by Andrew Blackwell and Peter Stanley, serving as secretary, this group and its members, present in the chamber today, do the quiet, patient work this petition is really about. They sit with the men and the partners and the families of the newly diagnosed. They walk families through what comes next. They make certain nobody in their community faces this disease alone, in silence or in the dark. To Andrew, to Peter and to every member of the Ringwood Prostate Cancer Support Group, who have raised the bar so high, including my own awareness, and who give up their time so freely, that is advocacy at its most honest and Victoria and Victorians are better for it.

This petition asks for very little and offers a great deal in return – a conversation that might otherwise never have happened but that might just save a life. I commend this petition to the house, and I ask every member here to answer its call. Reach out to your sporting codes and speak with the people you represent plainly, warmly, intelligently, in an educated way and without a moment's hesitation about prostate cancer and men's health. I commend the petition to the house.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria) (16:36): I rise today to talk about the importance of raising awareness and having conversations about prostate health and about the way in which we can and should encourage people to understand how to have conversations about prostate health; how to identify any issues, abnormalities or concerns; how to listen to their bodies; and how to get access to information that may well end up saving their lives. As Mr McGowan has just put so well, education, information and awareness raising are at the heart of better health outcomes for anybody with a prostate – indeed for anybody who may need to be careful and attuned to changes in their bodies. We are getting better when it comes to colorectal cancer and when it comes to breast cancer.

In talking about anything from cardiac disease through to skin cancer we are becoming more aware. We are also becoming more aware of prostate cancer and of any changes and abnormalities that should in fact warrant a conversation with a health professional. Routine health checks are essential. Understanding any family history of prostate cancer or vulnerabilities is essential, as it is for any other cancer or chronic disease susceptibility. Talking to your GP about PSA testing is, again, absolutely essential, but it is this awareness raising and education that is often the catalyst for these conversations to happen. This is where the link between sport and health is absolutely essential.

I have spoken in this place many times and I have spoken publicly many times about my personal connection to prostate cancer and prostate cancer awareness and education. My late brother Patrick was diagnosed with prostate cancer at the age of 39. That is an incredibly rare diagnosis for somebody of his age, and he died at 42. He, as I have said many times, rewrote the medical books when it came to the aggressive nature of his cancer – the way that it took off and the way that it consumed him. As I have said to so many people over the years since 2017 when he passed away, nobody ever died from embarrassment. People need to get checks and need to have conversations so that testing can occur and so that treatment can be provided, because where treatment is provided the survival rates are really, really good. Where early detection occurs, the support can be provided not only for people to get the medical attention that they need but also to get the psychological and wraparound and whole-person support that make for better chances of recovery.

This is where it is a particularly difficult conversation for men to have. The idea of vulnerability is something which, again, can often be an inhibiting factor in being prepared to talk about something which is often an area of embarrassment and often shame. The very situation, the very place of the prostate, between the bladder and the rectum, is an area of physicality that we do not like to talk about. Again, this is about pushing back against that aversion, and providing that level of awareness is one way that we can actually dismantle some of that hesitation. If you are not going to do it for yourself, do it for the person who loves you most in the world, do it for your partner or for your kids, do it for your friends or your workmates, do it for your dog – do it so that you hang around.

This is where a petition that calls for community engagement, that calls for those connections to be made and sustained, including through sport and through community context, whether it is a men's shed, a community organisation, a school, a sporting club or a major event, is part of a succession of ways, a continuum of ways, that we can ensure that the next time somebody stops to think about why it is that their body does not feel quite right they may just extend that into a conversation with their doctor. So I would urge everybody to continue to talk with constituents, communities and community groups about the way in which we can better support awareness of prostate health and better support that next step that might be taken – to seek access to testing – and in the process, potentially, to ensure that lives are saved.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (16:41): I thank Mr McGowan for bringing this important issue to the Parliament today and the community members whose passion and advocacy have seen over 2000 signatures made on this petition. I know it takes a lot of work and particularly many voluntary hours to get this sort of thing to happen. As we have already heard, prostate cancer is a significant public health issue. In fact, as far as cancers go, it is the second-highest killer of Australian men, with 4000 dying annually each year and 29,000 being diagnosed. While prostate cancer is more common in older people, rates in young men are growing, and alarmingly, the risk of premature death

from early onset and late detection is higher for this group than for the older population. I want to acknowledge Ms Shing sharing that personal story, which I think highlights this growing and important issue.

Members of this chamber would be aware that I am a strong advocate for proper investment in preventative health measures and in early screening, including for cancer, and prostate cancer is no different. We know that timely screening for at-risk population groups increases the chance of cancers being discovered before any symptoms have appeared, leading to simpler treatments and better survival rates. So it is very welcome that earlier this month Australia's national clinical practice guidelines for the early detection of prostate cancer were actually updated. The new framework places Australia as a leader on the global stage for screening guidelines that balance the need for early detection and the importance of having the right people tested at the right time. With these updates, the need for timely screening for those with significant family history and genetic risk has been made clearer, and importantly, there is greater emphasis on shared decision-making between patients and their clinicians.

Unfortunately, despite the advances being made in early detection and treatment, men in regional and remote Australia remain 24 per cent more likely to die as a result of prostate cancer compared to those living in metro areas. In western Victoria, for example, diagnosis is significantly lower than the Australian average, and as a result mortality is also significantly higher. So, as this petition implores, along with early detection, community awareness is of increasing importance. In reality the two go hand in hand.

While I am strongly supportive of the petitioners' request for what is I think a very sensible measure – having sporting codes do more to normalise conversations about prostate cancer – there are actually so many people in our community who can and should be doing their part. For example, workplaces could encourage greater work–life balance and give employees time off to go to those appointments and get checked as often as is needed, pharmacies could distribute fact sheets and local media could celebrate the hard work of local support groups.

It would be remiss of me not to give a shout-out to some of those organisations, big and small, who are dedicated to supporting those impacted by this cancer, in particular the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia, the Cancer Council Victoria and, importantly, in my home patch, the Geelong Prostate Cancer Support Group. They are one of the most active support groups in the country, passionately supporting men and their families, and I have been lucky enough to see firsthand some of the brilliant work that they do. So thank you to them and thank you to all the petitioners. I commend this petition to the house.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (16:44): I also rise to speak in support of Mr McGowan's petition. Others have spoken very eloquently about why we should be doing this, and I am just delighted to see the contributions across the chamber in relation to support of this petition and what Mr McGowan is bringing forward or suggesting. Just like Ms Shing, in five days time it is the anniversary of my late brother, who died of prostate cancer. There is hardly a day goes by when I do not think of what he contributed, what he and his family have done and how it has been a huge loss in our lives, given he was too young also – not as young as Ms Shing's brother, but too young nevertheless. Our brothers are two of the 800 Victorian men who will die from prostate cancer every year. Seven thousand are diagnosed.

There is so much being done and there are many good things that are being done in many areas of health, and as Dr Mansfield just said, there is so much more that can be done in bringing awareness. I want to thank those friends and people that I know that, through Movember, often talk of Will. They talk about awareness. It is not just mental health, it is about men's health: make sure you do not ignore signs, and go and get your prostate checked. I also want to shout out Bill Guest. Bill Guest is a great Victorian, somebody who was diagnosed just after Will. He has been a great champion and ambassador for the Australian Prostate Centre. He is a Melbourne businessman – a very generous

Melbourne businessman – who is very passionate about this area. I want to lend my support to all of these Victorians who are doing this work. There is much more that can be done, and I again want to say thank you to Mr McGowan for bringing this important matter to the attention of the Parliament today.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:47): I would like to thank Mr McGowan and the petitioners for bringing this petition before Parliament, and I would like to give a shout-out to one organisation in particular. In just under a month thousands of people will participate in the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia's Long Run charity campaign. This is their annual fundraising event where participants run or walk 72 kilometres to raise money for prostate cancer research and support. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in Australian men, and despite one in five of these men developing anxiety or depression as a result of their diagnosis, 72 per cent of them will not seek any help for it. The Long Run charity event raises both awareness and money to help support the work of the over 100 support groups that exist around Victoria. Thank you to the people that participate in this event and to the volunteers that work with the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia to support men diagnosed with prostate cancer and their families.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:48): I also rise to speak in support of Mr McGowan's petition and also just thank Ms Shing and Ms Crozier for sharing those stories – I had no idea about what had gone on there – and also Dr Mansfield. It is a good one where everyone stands together on something. Like many people have said, prostate cancer is one of the biggest killers of men and one of the most commonly diagnosed cancers.

I clearly remember when I first started work as a chiropractor and I was fresh out of uni. A guy came in. He had a consistent, deep lower back pain – that is how he explained it to me. I went through the normal tests and checks and sent him out to get some radiology done. I remember it as clear as day. He brought it in in a huge envelope. I flicked on the big light board, tucked the films up, and straightaway I saw a spine that was covered in all of these bright white dots everywhere – sclerotic lesions over the whole lumbar spine. Straightaway I knew what had happened, because prostate cancer left unchecked and untreated, if you do not know it is there, can metastasise, and one of the common places it metastasises to is the lumbar spine and the pelvis. As I was staring at it, I thought, 'This guy has no idea what he's looking at,' and I did not really know how to approach it. I just said to him, 'How have you been feeling in general?' And more things opened up. Then I said, 'Have you been up to date with all your check-ups?' And he said, 'What sorts of check-ups?' I said, 'Have you had a prostate cancer check?' And he said no. He said, 'I'm here for lower back pain, none of that stuff.' I said, 'All right,' and I went through and I explained it. It turned out he had had this lower back pain for a very long time, but he was just, he said, in his words, being a typical male, not coming in and getting it checked. He just pushed through the pain, but when he decided to get something checked it was because the pain was getting worse at night and stopping him from sleeping. That is one of the biggest red flags that you can hear when somebody is coming in for an issue like this. This guy had a relative that had had prostate cancer and been diagnosed before the age of 60. He had all of these risk factors, but he had no idea that that could even be a possibility – absolutely no idea.

There is so much that needs to be done in terms of early screening with cancers in general, because like Dr Mansfield said, yes, they are more common after a certain age, but these cancers are becoming more and more prevalent at a younger age. We have to make sure that we are keeping up with these issues because, like Ms Shing said, if the issue is detected early and people can get treatment early, you have a much better outcome. I just think that this is such an important issue that needs to be raised.

My two best friends went through breast cancer one and two years ago, and it was just absolutely horrific what they went through. One has come through and recovered and is doing really well, and one passed away. It was just tragic, but it does also go to show that there are no questions around awareness with breast cancer. There is so much we still need to do around early detection, about getting the age of screening to be lowered because these cancers are coming in lower and lower. When you compare that, we do not have those days where everyone wears blue to the football or the netball and

these types of issues. I think that it is such an important topic and one that for everyone in the community, really, it would be great if they got on board and just supported it.

I also want to thank Andrew, Peter and the Ringwood Prostate Cancer Support Group. One thing when Neale Daniher passed away that everyone spoke about, including Emma Vulin in the other place, was the amazing support that he provided to people when they were first diagnosed. He would go to their house, he would sit with them and he would have conversations about what to expect and what supports were available. So many people have spoken about how that was such a life-changing conversation, where all of a sudden they knew that a burden shared is a burden halved. I believe that is exactly what this group are doing. I just want to absolutely extend our sincere thanks to the Ringwood Prostate Cancer Support Group and others that do things like it. I commend the motion to the house.

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:53): I will perhaps start with a thanks to the Ringwood Prostate Cancer Support Group, because without their work and without them none of us would be having this conversation today. If greater awareness was what we sought out to achieve, then I think today's contributions show that we are on the right path to success.

I particularly want to thank Ms Shing. I express my condolences but also heartfelt appreciation for your contribution and obviously your love for Patrick, who was taken way too soon, as you have already said to the chamber today. I am just sorry you are not Minister for Health anymore because I know how passionate you would have been in that space, but there is much more work to do in the years ahead, I know, in any case, in any position you ever hold.

Likewise to Dr Mansfield for your continued advocacy in the space of health, no matter what it is – men's, women's, children's – it was beautiful to hear your contribution, and I thank you for that today.

Likewise, Ms Crozier, my heartfelt thanks, love and appreciation for everything that you contributed and for the life of Will. I know that every day is a battle for all of us who lose a loved one when it is a brother or sister. It is particularly timely this week as I visited and attended the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha function today, which talked about the connection between brothers and sisters, so it was apt perhaps to hear those two contributions from you and Member Shing today.

Mr Limbrick, also, thank you for your contribution. That was appreciated because, having spent almost four years in this place, I am conscious that today not only do we have the prostate cancer support group from Ringwood, we also have students from Kew High and Methodist Ladies' College. For them to see in this place parties from right across Labor, Greens, Libertarian and Liberal come together with some commonality and with some passion to talk openly about prostate cancer and what we can and should do together has been a great way to finish our third-last sitting week in this place together.

Dr Heath, thank you too for your contribution and for the work you have done previously. But also you are perhaps the youngest of all of us, and so perhaps your contribution will be the greatest if success in this place is a matter of duration. I thank the house.

Motion agreed to.

Pakenham road maintenance

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:55): I move:

> That the petition be taken into consideration.

Roadworks started on Bald Hill Road, Pakenham, in early 2025 and were meant to be completed within months. However, it ended up taking over 18 months – 18 months that customers and suppliers were either not able to access businesses on Bald Hill Road or had to take a difficult route to get there. These businesses were pushed to the wall. Costs are going up everywhere across our state – supply

costs, electricity charges and of course the continual and unrelenting slug of taxes that come from the Labor state government. But this was another challenge on top of all of that. These businesses did what many of us would do: they tried to soldier on, did their best to communicate with their customers and looked for ways around the issues. But after a while they knew that the roadworks and the closures were having a very deep impact. After a slight decline in sales in March 2025, sales dropped by 23 per cent in April, 28 per cent in May and 41 per cent by June. The downfall and the trend continued through winter, and by November, revenue had collapsed by nearly 65 per cent compared to the February peak.

Rebekah Becsi from Pakenham Bulk Foods is here in the gallery with us today. Also, we have Zara here with us today, and we have David Farrelly, who I want to thank, along with Chris Noye and Colin, who went out and got so many signatures in order to fight to get this petition debated here today. Rebekah estimates that her business was losing 70 to 80 per cent of its revenue at its worst, but the bills did not stop coming in. At first Bek and her neighbours tried to speak with the local council about what they could do. They said they would raise it with the state government. I know some local MPs who are members of this Labor government who were contacted; however, they said the road would soon be completed and they should just wait.

Finally, after managing the situation for almost a year, Bek and some of her fellow traders reached out to me and my office for help. They were not looking for handouts, but they needed help. They needed somebody to recognise what they were going through and provide genuine assistance. Surely these businesses are not the first ones to go through something like this. They are not the first ones to be disadvantaged by the Allan Labor government's – and now Carroll Labor government's – delays and slow roadworks. However, even as someone who is a member of this place, I found it so frustrating. My first action was to contact the then Minister for Roads and Road Safety and the then Minister for Small Business and Employment. To the credit of the minister for small business, at least she did respond. However, her advice was that these businesses should subscribe to the Business Victoria newsletter and access some mental health support. That is actually the truth of what happened. The former Minister for Roads and Road Safety not only failed to respond in time, but when she did, she just passed the buck to the then Minister for Transport Infrastructure and the now Deputy Premier Gabrielle Williams. When I did raise the questions with the then Minister for Transport Infrastructure, her response was to refer to some flyer drops, extra signage and the offer of vouchers that could be redeemed if these businesses managed to get a customer in the door.

I wrote to the State Revenue Office to see if there were any options for these businesses to defer their land tax, and I was told to contact the then Treasurer Jaclyn Symes. Her response was nothing short of disgraceful. She did not respond until I raised it in this place, and then she finally wrote that the businesses should be grateful. She wrote:

> I understand that improvements to Victoria's infrastructure can cause uncertainty for businesses during construction. However, residents and businesses located in these areas will be the direct beneficiaries of these works.

I also questioned the former Premier and got a similarly dismissive response. The whole time that this government was buck-passing, dodging questions, avoiding answers and pretending that there was no problem, these businesses in Bald Hill Road were struggling. It has only been the opposition that has taken them seriously and put their concerns on the record here.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:00): I rise to address the petition presented by Dr Heath. This government will not oppose this petition, but it is important to place it in the broader context of Labor's investment in transport infrastructure in Pakenham. The south-east is booming, and it is only our government that will ensure that Pakenham and the communities all up and down Melbourne's south-east have the transport infrastructure they need to get to the city and to get around that wonderful part of our state and the place that they call home.

Residents in Pakenham know that they have a passionate advocate for their community in state Parliament with Emma Vulin. Emma has been a champion not only for the roads her community needs but also for broader public transport to connect her growing suburbs to the city, like the new East Pakenham station and the new Metro Tunnel. Emma and our government know that meeting the needs of a growing community means investing in every part of our transport network. Our government is actively building and improving the road infrastructure that Pakenham deserves. The Pakenham roads upgrade is complete. This includes the Bald Hill Road upgrade; in fact the final stage of that upgrade, the Racecourse Road upgrade, finished in July this year, nine months ahead of schedule. It is on top of the increased rail services across the Pakenham rail corridor, and we all know that these direct rail upgrades will continue to make a difference for residents of Pakenham.

But it is not just about investing in existing roads; it is also about giving commuters options when travelling, taking cars off the road and also easing congestion. The new Metro Tunnel has been an absolute revelation for both my home in the inner north and those in the south-east looking to travel into the city for uni, for work or for play. Critically, it has freed up capacity for new services across our rail network, including more than 12,000 new weekly services on the Sunbury, Cranbourne and indeed Pakenham lines. These new services mean less time waiting and faster commutes for those in the south-east. I must say that I have met a range of exceptional medical professionals working in our research precinct here in Parkville that now travel in on the train from right along the Cranbourne–Pakenham line, and it has made a really remarkable difference to their lives. These new services absolutely mean less time waiting and faster commutes.

We also know that by getting more people onto trains we are helping to reduce pressure on the roads throughout the growing suburbs of the south-east and taking cars off the road during peak hours. Also we are slashing commuting times to and from work. From Pakenham right to the city, Labor's investment in public transport is delivering the connections, capacity and opportunity that the folks of the south-east rightly deserve. It is not just these new train stations on the Pakenham line; as I said, there is so much love for the train upgrades. But we are not just about the new trains on the Pakenham line. I did talk about the exceptional medical research professionals in the medical precinct, but there are also a bunch of future health professionals and future scientists, teachers, lawyers and educators that find their home in the south-east who are now able to come to Melbourne University. In fact for some families it has opened up educational opportunities that, frankly, they may not otherwise have considered, but now, with the brand new station right in the heart of the University of Melbourne at the Parkville campus, there is that direct connection for students.

I just want to say that one of the students that I did chat to – I think it was perhaps two weeks ago now when I was at Parkville station talking to students about their experiences and what it means for them, and I do recognise that many of them do drive to the train station and then catch the train in – was from Officer and was recounting how it has literally been a real life-changer for them; it allows them to stop that really annoying transfer onto another train or a tram. It means that they can stay a little bit longer. There is also some comfort for their families, knowing that they are just on that singular transport route and knowing that there is lots of safety and security on that train. Students are taking on extra shifts in the city. They are taking on volunteering in the precinct there and also dreaming big about what their future could look like because of that train investment.

I just want to also acknowledge, perhaps in my final remarks, what was said in Dr Heath's remarks about the disruptions during the periods of construction. They can be – absolutely – really challenging, and for local traders, for residents or for commuters travelling via the car or the train, I really do want to acknowledge that and thank them for their patience and understanding during that time. We are investing, frankly, in the communities that are growing, as growing communities deserve. I might leave my remarks there but say thank you to Dr Heath for bringing this to us.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:05): I want to thank my colleague Dr Heath for bringing this petition forward, and she should be absolutely congratulated for the fight she has mounted for these businesses in Bald Hill Road. I do not think the Labor government have any idea what disruption

and what absolute chaos they have caused for the traders in Bald Hill Road. These people are on their knees. They are desperate, and the government wants to talk about making trains better or some road better or something. They do not understand the absolute cost that this incurs for the businesses that have no business while these roadworks go on forever.

Once Dr Heath raised the issue with me and with the Leader of the Opposition Jess Wilson, we met with these affected businesses as quickly as we could. We met with them because they needed support, there and then. They were not able to wait for an election. They need the government to help them now. Of course the government were nowhere to be found – they absolutely do not care. They have no interest. I also ask questions of this government and receive similarly dismissive responses. I was concerned that many businesses may not survive long enough to see the intersection reopen following months of disruption already causing severe financial harm and with no promised assistance delivered to date. These local traders could barely afford rent, with little money left for wages, stock or utilities.

As outlined by Dr Heath, Pakenham Bulk Foods, for example, suffered an 80 per cent collapse in sales compared to February last year. For the record, I support infrastructure, but I also support the people who fund it, particularly small business owners who are shouldering the burden of the taxes and charges that keep this government afloat. We know the government does not care, but we do. I genuinely believe that the government should have engaged directly with these affected businesses and guaranteed some form of financial support to ensure they survive these works. Their response was nothing short of disgraceful and revealed the government's dismissive attitude towards small businesses and those who pay the taxes that fund this government's promises.

While we are well aware of the blowout in timelines – this government cannot complete any project on time or on budget – we are still yet to discover the true cost of this project. I am certain it will have cost much more than it was originally meant to, meaning these taxpayers will have been stung twice – once with a loss in revenue and now with cost increases. It does not matter if this Labor government changed their leader, we know that they can never deliver for Victorians.

The same problem occurred in my western region electorate. My constituents in Albert Street, Sebastopol, had roadworks that went on for months and months, and the compensation that the government thought was appropriate was a coffee voucher. Spare me! A coffee voucher – what was that going to do? Now, many did go to the wall. They could not survive it; they had no business. Businesses came to me in tears, so desperate were they about what was happening. You cannot believe how long it takes to fix one road. It seemed like a simple project. You would think we were building the tunnel, but we were fixing one road in Ballarat – no different to Bald Hill Road. An absolute disgrace, this government is. They cannot do anything properly, and they cannot do it within a budget. They do not care how they disrupt people, how they wreck their lives or how they wreck their businesses. They have no empathy for them, and yet they will talk about rolling out their major projects – the Suburban Rail Loop or some other major freeway or byway that actually takes way too long to deliver. But these roadworks within business areas of a local town or community are so badly done and they so disrupt a community that they wreck businesses. Thank you to Dr Heath and thank you to the petitioners that signed the petition.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:11): I am pleased to rise to support the petitioners, each and every one of those people who signed this petition, and thank Dr Heath for raising this issue so very forcefully and compassionately and also for being on the ground. There is nothing like understanding the situation by standing in a shopfront with a small business owner as they are literally pulling their hair out and counting the loss of dollars that that impact has had. Certainly Pakenham is not a construction zone in a government construction project; it is a living community in a vital gateway between Melbourne and Gippsland. Indeed, Dr Heath and I share Eastern Victoria Region, and quite often we do a little bit of division of labour. Sometimes we will take various projects up, and I thank her very sincerely for taking this one on in terms of Eastern Victoria.

The construction commenced back in 2023, and there were prolonged closures. I, for my sins, have been a small business owner. I owned a health food store in Leongatha, Leongatha Health Foods. We took it on when it was most run down, and we spent hours, days and weeks in the front of the shop during the working day and in the back of the shop packing stock and doing bills et cetera and orders on the weekends and at night. Small business owners are the backbone of our communities. When the local netball club or the dance club eisteddfod comes round and says 'Look, could you sponsor us in some way?' or the charity comes to the door and says 'Could you sponsor us?' overwhelmingly small business owners put their hands into their pockets and say 'You're part of my community. I'll support my community'.

We have got these fabulous people, who, if you think about it, have rising input costs and have got rising taxes. In fact we spoke about taxes this afternoon. To date I think it is around 67 new or increased taxes over the last 11½ years under the Labor government. So you have got new taxes, you have got high energy prices and you have got the high cost of insurance – overwhelmingly. We need our employees. They are very important people in a small business, and we value them very greatly. But all of those are input costs. Then you have a major disruption with major roadworks. That reopened in February, but the last and final upgrades were completed in July. You have this impost. The shopfront is important. Yes, in a modern society people can go online and you can sell things online, but so often it is that personal interaction and that service that the shopfront owner, the retailer, provides to the customer. They need that one-on-one advice, they need that service and they need to be able to walk in the front door, but they cannot when it is a construction zone outside the front door. I know that they survived COVID as well.

Labor celebrates the concrete poured and the lanes opened but refuses to count the businesses, the jobs and the family incomes that have been damaged along the way. The cutting of the ribbon is fine, but what has the whole community had to endure? Upgrades are important – there is no doubt about that – but you have to recognise the impost on local businesses. That is what this petition does. It certainly supports that. If we look at this, the community is asking for recognition of that impost and that pain that has occurred during this construction time. If you look at other construction areas, the Big Build comes to mind and indeed the government's Big Build projects and the estimated $15 billion not in construction but in rorted money going to bikies and criminals and all sorts on those Big Build sites.

These community people have got their ABN, they have bought their stock and they are creating a throughput, a supply chain for good-quality stock or services, as the case may be. They are not asking for an overall handout; they are asking for recognition of pain and suffering during the course. That is not too much for a reasonable government to come to the party on. I thank the petitioners, and I thank Dr Heath for her work.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:16): I am pleased to rise to speak on this petition and fully endorse Ms Bath's comments on the work Dr Heath has done around this and for that community. It has been exceptional, and I am sure the community are appreciative. There is nothing like feeling you have been heard or that you have got a democratic avenue to be heard, so well done.

The petition revolves around the circus surrounding the upgrade of the Bald Hill Road and the extensive delays, with little or no concern for the traders and people affected, and it is just one more reason why we need a royal commission into the Big Build. These businesses could not get any assistance from the government. They were lucky to get even a response at all. Meanwhile, it is reasonable to assume that for every delay in the works on Bald Hill Road the costs have kept going up and up and up. These are the sorts of examples that we need to get to the bottom of.

The estimated $15 billion that has been lost to corruption in this state is not just going to be in one place; it is going to be a bit here and a bit there, which all adds up. We know that there are multiple projects where corruption and organised crime have seeped their way into building sites. This is undoubtedly the worst corruption scandal in Victoria's history, and the state and the citizens of Victoria are absolutely entitled to know and have confidence that we are going to get to the bottom of

it. We need to know where every single cent of taxpayer money has gone. There is no doubt that the Labor government knew about the Big Build corruption – I think that is pretty self-evident at this point – and it is equally clear that the Labor government knew but did nothing about it. Fifteen billion dollars in taxpayer funds has flowed to bikies and to organised crime figures and invited a systemic problem in the state. This equates to more than $5000 per Victorian household. How much of that money came from the Bald Hill Road project? Presumably at least some of it did.

A Wilson Liberal–National government will have a genuine royal commission into the Big Build, including all the unions that should be included, including all the people who should be called and named within the commission, because Victorians deserve to know what really happened, including those businesses in Bald Hill Road, who could not get any assistance at all from this Labor government.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:18): As you have heard tonight, this has been managed so badly from the very start. This government's attitude has been appalling – consistent but appalling. There is never any appreciation of what business is going through, and their responses reveal how little they understand about what businesses in Victoria need. That could be part of the reason that 350 small businesses in Victoria have to close their doors every single day. This is a total disregard for people. Local businesses are the backbone of our communities, and they deserve better than stonewalling while their livelihoods are being stripped away. Businesses pay the taxes that keep the state going, that pay everybody in here. Surely they deserve a little bit of respect.

Mrs McArthur referred to the blowouts and how we still do not know the real costs. That is just symptomatic of a government that is not working. This is the last chance for the Labor government to treat these people with respect. We stand with the Victorian businesses – we stand with every single one of them – and we want to know if Labor does too.

In closing, I want to sincerely thank Rebekah and Zara from Pakenham Bulk Foods for being here tonight. There were so many other businesses that would have been here, but it did have to get done so quickly. I want to thank my colleagues Mrs McArthur, Ms Bath, Mr Welch and Ms Watt. I did think it was an interesting opportunity, though, for Labor to pat themselves on the back. It is a very, very strange opportunity to pat themselves on the back. I really want to sincerely thank David Farrelly, Stuart Eaton, Colin Moore and Chris Noye for getting out there and making sure that we had enough signatures to get this across the line. Your dedication to the business community in Pakenham is amazing. I commend this motion to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:21): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Statements on tabled papers and petitions

Transport Accident Commission

Report 2024–25

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:21): I rise today to speak on the TAC 2024–25 annual report. It is a critical report and something that all of us need to be cognisant of, especially when we talk about the human cost of road trauma across Victoria. In particular I want to

talk about some of the aspects of road safety particularly highlighted by the Victoria Police road safety strategy.

On a point of order, President, I am getting some distraction from advisers behind Mrs Hermans. I am just not sure why –

Renee Heath interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Okay. Well, I am just getting some distractions.

The PRESIDENT: Up there, or there?

Sonja TERPSTRA: Just there, behind Mrs Hermans.

Renee Heath: Those are the business owners that have been affected by the Big Build projects.

The PRESIDENT: Which ones? Behind where? Just there?

Sonja TERPSTRA: Yes.

The PRESIDENT: That is not part of the public gallery.

Sonja TERPSTRA: No. They need to go to the public gallery.

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

Renee Heath: On a point of order, President, we are happy to do that. But I feel a bit embarrassed that you are treating them like they have done something wrong.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Further to the point of order, President –

Renee Heath: I'm not having an argument, Ms Terpstra.

The PRESIDENT: No, I do not think we need to go to a further point of order.

Renee Heath: They're not with me. They are business owners that have been impacted by you guys, so –

The PRESIDENT: I am very big on the public gallery being open for people to come in, but that is just weird, and I will find out why that happened.

Sonja TERPSTRA: I just want to respond to Dr Heath's comment. I do not make the rules of this place; I am just asking that they be upheld. Thank you, President, for supporting that point.

Again, what I want to talk about tonight is extreme driver behaviour. Often it is this extreme driver behaviour that is captured in the media headlines. This report makes one stark truth abundantly clear: it is the persistence of everyday single acts of noncompliance that drives the majority of our fatal road collisions. The Victoria Police road safety strategy identifies seven key contributing factors that persistently undermine road safety, and they are speeding, distraction, impaired driving, seatbelt noncompliance, rural road risks, high-risk driving and unauthorised driving.

Let us look first at speed, the most prominent contributing factor in serious road trauma. Inappropriate or excessive speed destroys lives, yet across Victoria we have cultivated an alarming and unacceptable cultural tolerance towards low-level speeding. According to recent data, a staggering 64 per cent of surveyed drivers admit to intentionally speeding at 3 kilometres per hour or more over the limit. Furthermore, drivers are increasingly focusing blindly on posted speed limits rather than driving to the conditions of the road. We must remember that a posted limit is the absolute maximum speed permitted in perfect conditions, not a mandatory target in the rain, fog or heavy traffic.

Driver distraction is another escalating crisis on our roads, particularly through mobile phone usage. Drivers using a mobile phone to text, browse or email are 10 times more at risk of crashing. Despite this terrifying statistic, the Road Safety Monitor indicates that 51 per cent of drivers admit to using a

mobile phone while driving. Between July and December 2023 alone our automated driver distraction and seatbelt cameras caught a staggering 30,321 drivers illegally using mobile devices. This is not just a minor infraction; it is a lethal gamble. Impaired driving, whether by alcohol, illicit or prescription drugs, medical incapacity or even fatigue, remains a persistent killer. It is deeply concerning that nearly half of Victorians – 48 per cent – will consider driving after consuming two or more alcoholic drinks. One in five drivers killed on our roads have a blood alcohol concentration of .05 or higher. Over the last five years 41 per cent of drivers and motorcyclists killed had drugs in their system. Compounding this, fatigue claims around 30 lives and leaves up to 200 people seriously injured every single year in Victoria.

Perhaps nothing is more tragic or entirely avoidable than death resulting from failure to wear a seatbelt. In 2023 Victoria Police recorded fatal collisions where unbelted occupants perished while others in the exact same vehicle who wore their seatbelts survived. Over the last five years 130 lives were lost simply because an occupant failed to buckle up. Despite this, the TAC Road Safety Monitor shows that over 2 per cent of drivers and 4 per cent of passengers still travel unbelted, and the perceived risk of police detection is sitting below 31 per cent. In just six months cameras detected nearly 16,000 drivers and over 6000 passengers failing to wear a seatbelt. This casual disregard for basic safety is costing lives.

We must also confront the acute dangers on our rural roads. Rural roads account for over half of all annual Victorian road deaths, yet only 24 per cent of our population live in rural areas. Approximately half of these rural deaths involve single-vehicle crashes, often magnified by vehicle age, with nearly a quarter of vehicles involved in fatal rural collisions in 2023 being over 20 years old, and compounded by speed, fatigue and distraction. I commend the report to the house.

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Delivering the Suburban Rail Loop

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (17:27): I am pleased to be able to speak about the Victorian Auditor-General's report that has been tabled in the Parliament today, *Delivering the Suburban Rail Loop*. Reading it, they are just extraordinary, some of the revelations in this report. Some may not surprise us. They have said the project is more likely than not to exceed its publicly disclosed cost of up to $34.5 billion, and going on the government's track record, we certainly should not be surprised there – cost blowouts seem to be part of Labor's nature. But also the report notes that the Commonwealth has not given enough – $6 billion. The state wants them to put in $11.5 billion. Really, I think it is like a high five to Albo and there is just no response. To read from the report, it says:

> The government's strategy to fund the project is not transparent and some funding sources are uncertain.
>
> The state does not yet have enough funding approved to sign the contract for the second stations package. The Australian Government has publicly committed $6 billion of the expected $11.5 billion …

Another extraordinary element in this report is certainly the secret tax that has been put on regional fares and regional commuters. The secret 1 per cent fare levy on metropolitan and regional fares was decided back in 2021. It was brought in by the Allan Labor government – still the same team that is there now – but Victorians have not been told about it until now, until this this report. Again, to read from the report:

> These measures include a levy on all public transport fares in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. It has been using this levy to raise revenue since January 2025.

That does frustrate me greatly, because I think the people that have been paying for this Suburban Rail Loop are the people that have been sitting on the floors of V/Line trains and have been travelling , as I have, on replacement bus services because V/Line has not been in operation. As I speak with other passengers, they say it is just a regular part of the system. Like our roads, V/Line has been left to crumble. But guess what, they have put a nice little levy, another little tax. This government absolutely love taxes because they have got a debt that is out of control.

Another element that was found in this report, which I think we have been aware of – and I know as I speak to people in the housing industry – is that the government talks very big about the SRL being a housing project and all these extra houses that are going to be built. But the report says:

> However, these benefits depend on private investors, who already face challenging market conditions to buy and develop property. This puts both the project's expected benefits and revenue from new value capture measures at risk.

This value capture has been spruiked by the government quite a lot, saying that is how they are going to pay for this project, but this report shows there is a real question mark over that.

Another element in this report I think it is important for the public to be aware of is that the government made the decision to slow down spending on the project to manage the state's debt levels. To quote the report:

> In April 2024, the government directed SRLA to delay spending around $1.4 billion on the project until after the state Budget's forward estimates period of 2023–28. The government made this decision to manage challenges to the state's finances …

and so it goes on. Treasurer Colin Brooks has today acknowledged that the government could have been more transparent about the secret levy built into public transport fares. Premier Ben Carroll was the Minister for Public Transport when the hidden tax was first approved, and his deputy Gabrielle Williams introduced the levy last year when she was public transport minister. Labor may have changed the Premier, but it is certainly the same team. A future Liberal and Nationals government will stop the waste, end the corruption, pause and review the SRL project and make decisions in the best interests of taxpayers.

Cardinia roads

Petition

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:31): I would like to speak in support of the 2000 people who signed the petition to seal the dirt roads of Cardinia shire. Cardinia shire maintains 800 kilometre of dirt road. This is at least three times the length of Melbourne's tram network. Yet Cardinia shire is not out in Woop Woop; it is just 45 kilometres from the CBD. It is home to a rapidly growing population of 130,000 people, and many of them commute to the city. But this is not just a roads issue; it is also a public health issue. After light showers these roads become slippery slopes, but after larger downpours they turn into streams that flood buildings and cause septic tanks to overflow. Several residents have woken up to find sewage on their properties. Some fear that dust and mould may have already contributed to serious health issues. They also worry it is a matter of time before emergency vehicles get stuck in the mud.

For those who think this is just a local issue, I would point out that this is symptomatic of the discontent I see across my electorate. While the government tries to sell a vision for its megaprojects, all the people in Upper Beaconsfield are seeing is mud. I am a libertarian and believe in small government, but I also believe that providing basic infrastructure is a legitimate function of the state. Making roads safe is surely the bare minimum. Fixing them will cost money, but it is a rounding error compared to the budget for the Suburban Rail Loop. The fact that 2000 people have physically signed this petition should prick up the government's ears. This is a lot for a local issue and will be top of mind come November.

I understand Cardinia council has launched a campaign about this and will keep it on the agenda. I thank them, and I also thank Cr Trudi Paton for bringing it to my attention. I thank Paul Keen and the Cockatoo roads action group for their work with the petition. Lastly, I would like to thank all of those who signed the petition. These people deserve to have their roads fixed. The community is united, and I encourage everyone to support this campaign.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into the 2026 Summer Fires across Victoria

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:33): I rise to speak on the Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into the 2026 summer fires. It was an honour to take on the role of chair of this committee and this inquiry in its latter stages. I have spoken previously in this place of the immense weight and value of the transcribed evidence of the hearings, especially those from the fire-affected communities and from the firefighters who shared their experiences.

More recently I had the privilege of attending the annual dinner of one of the many terrific local CFA brigades in my electorate, that being the Scoresby fire brigade. Scoresby is a mighty local brigade. With a catchment covering central Knox, it is one of the busiest CFA brigades in the whole state, with more than 520 reported call-outs in the last financial year alone. I would like to acknowledge the entire brigade for graciously welcoming me to their dinner, in particular, first lieutenant Dean Walker and his partner Shaye. It was wonderful to see so many members of the brigade acknowledged for their service and for the everyday acts of heroism that mark that service. Once again the brigade has published a very impressive annual report. Contained within the report are details of many of the significant jobs that they attended, such as a hazmat spill in Knoxfield and the Monash Freeway grassfire of January this year. On the latter I enjoyed the remarks of brigade member Sophie Veitch when she described how she and her fellow firey Lachy raced up a very steep grass embankment to chase the fire after a wind change. She noted:

> I'd like the record to show that the Scoresby tanker crew were the first brigade to reach the top of the hill. Take that Noble Park.

As with so many other brigades across the state, though, of course, one of the most significant jobs for Scoresby in the past year was their work on the strike teams fighting the 2026 summer fires, including strike teams 1313 and 1341 fighting the Longwood fire. Throughout this report you will find emotive and enlightening firsthand accounts from brigade members about their experiences in battling these intense fires. Lachlan Schulz's strike team supported farmers in and around Yarck by filling their water troughs and assisting them where they needed. He spoke of the work they did in Terip Terip, a community devastated by the fires. He said:

> The journey into Terip Terip was a confronting experience. The landscape had been devastated, with extensive destruction to homes, vegetation and surrounding farmland.

For Lisa Loo, Longwood was her first strike team. She wrote how the experience gave her a strong sense of pride in how far she has come as a firefighter. She said:

> Beyond the firefighting itself, what impacted me was the resilience of the community. Speaking with farmers who had lost so much yet expressed gratitude for our presence was humbling and eye opening.

These are just some of the powerful stories contained within this report. I understand that back in the day there was a convention whereby a member could seek to place a document and lay it on the library table for the benefit of fellow members to be able to read. At the risk of offending all manner of ancient conventions and standing orders, I will not seek to do that, but with the blessing of the brigade, I am pleased to place this excellent report at the library desk. May it serve as a record of the everyday heroism of the members of the Scoresby fire brigade here in our Parliament.

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Delivering the Suburban Rail Loop

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:36): I rise to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) report into the Suburban Rail Loop. It will be the first but definitely not the last time that this gets raised in this house. This is a bombshell report, but it is not just a bomb; it is a series of bombshells. In fact you can barely turn a page without a shocking revelation, particularly pages 8 to 23 in this document. It is absolutely extraordinary reading. I will not get through everything

that this document reveals today, but we will start with the point that a tax was added to the Victorian people on public transport, was never disclosed and was designed to pay for a significant part of the project. In fact, out of the value capture component of the project, it is the single largest contributor. This is a tax added by Ben Carroll, who was the minister for transport who approved this and did not disclose it. The Premier says that integrity is no longer optional. Well, he had an opportunity to disclose this and he did not disclose this. This is an absolute scandal on that front.

The other thing that VAGO revealed today – and they confirmed it in the briefing we had this afternoon – is that VAGO, in their two-year study of the SRL, became aware that the project was neither on time nor on budget in January this year. When asked about this, they confirmed that the government had exactly the same information as they did at that point in time. So there are serious questions to be asked about the repeated statements since January this year that the project is on time and on budget. On time and on budget – how many times did we hear that? Well, VAGO say otherwise, and VAGO say the government had the exact same information they did, and that means that it was not on time or on budget from January; in fact it got progressively worse.

One of the things they did as it got progressively worse was that in March they made an instruction to slow the project down and look at ways to close it down because they wanted to move some of the cost into a future financial year to move it out of the forwards of the budget. They were advised that it would be expensive to do this, but they said, 'No, this will save us $800 million if we do it.' Well, guess what, by doing that, by moving those works into a future year, VAGO has revealed it has cost over $1.4 billion – that has been added to the project by doing that – in order to have the vanity of the forwards reflect that we could get to our budget surplus. The vanity is they have cost us $1.4 billion just for that vanity exercise. That is extraordinary.

The report has also revealed that the government did not have enough money to sign the contracts to build the stations, so it has delayed, it has deferred signing the contracts for the stations. VAGO said that if it is not signed by caretaker, again, it is going to cost us more money. As Mrs Broad said, the idea that this is a $34 billion project has been exploded forever, because not only are there these cost overlays but there is actually a systemic methodology for misleading and misconfiguring the figures. What they do is, first of all – at all costs – keep the $34 billion headline figure unchanged, but then they do not update the package budgets for known procurement increases. So when they have got the increases, they do not announce them; they say, 'All the contracts aren't signed, so we can't announce them – to be confirmed.' They move any early overruns by transferring the contingency from other areas or deleting them, shifting the scope. Then they characterise approved but unfunded functionality or scope as an 'optional', 'complementary' or 'future' government decision, without any disclosure. Then they exclude development, operating and property acquisition costs from the headline figure altogether. Recently, this week, we learned the other way they do it is by saying they are saving money by descoping things that were never funded in the first place out of it.

If this is not systematic deception of the Parliament, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and the Victorian people, I do not know what is. It is a complete financial scandal, and I have gone through like 5 per cent of it. There is a scandal on every page and in every paragraph of this report, and there will have to be consequences, or I will really worry for the soul of the state.

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Delivering the Suburban Rail Loop

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:41): I also rise to speak on this disgraceful report that has been handed down today. When I say 'disgraceful report', I do not mean that the report itself, written by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO), is disgraceful but that the content of it shows the disgraceful behaviour of this government in delivering the Suburban Rail Loop. It is just an absolute scandal. First of all, let us talk about Ben Carroll's sneaky, mean and deceptive tax. This is a tax that Labor have been charging Victorians for nearly two years, but they never told Victorians that they had actually imposed this tax. They just added it in when they did the CPI increases to public

transport fares. But it is not just on metropolitan people who may use this tunnel. They extended that out to every bus service in regional Victoria and every train ticket on a V/Line carriage. Regional Victorians are actually being taxed to pay for Labor's vanity project in the south-eastern suburbs – a rail loop that they will never use.

Yet we go without infrastructure in our area. With most trains, people are being turfed off onto buses because the train services are not good enough. The north-east line is an absolute disgrace. The buses in regional Victoria are a disgrace. In Shepparton you cannot get a bus to work if you work in the industrial estate. You cannot get a bus from Mooroopna to Shepparton in time for work. You cannot even get a bus on a Saturday afternoon or a Sunday from Mooroopna to Shepparton. God help you if you live in Tatura. There are only two buses a day to Shepparton, and only one of those is a return service. We have disgraceful public transport in regional Victoria, and yet the Labor government – Ben Carroll, Jacinta Allan and all of those people who sat around the cabinet table – think it is appropriate to tax regional Victorians to pay for Melbourne infrastructure.

The VAGO report exposes that this is going to cost about $8 billion by 2062. That is another point. It is not just for the past two years that they have been charging this; this goes on until 2062. That is almost 40 years of taxing regional Victorians to pay for Melbourne infrastructure. In the VAGO briefing the Auditor-General confirmed that the government actually knew that this project was over budget and behind its delivery time in January this year. Yet the former Treasurer and the former Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, who have sat in this place and told us constantly that this project was on time and on budget, have been misleading this house for most of this year, because they knew that this project was not on time and was not on budget.

The tax in this actually starts 10 years before people can even use the infrastructure, which is just disgraceful. As it is, Labor have put a secret tax on all regional and metropolitan rail users – but particularly I am offended by the tax on regional rail users – in order to fund this loop in metropolitan Melbourne. The tax means regional Victorians will be paying higher prices for almost 40 years to fund a rail tunnel that most of them will never use. Labor once again has proved its disdain for regional Victorians by hitting them with a sneaky tax to pay for city projects while regional roads are left to rot and regional commuters are left to transfer onto buses most of the time because the rail services do not work. It is just a disgrace what this government has done, and the Auditor-General has done a very good job of exposing just what a dog of a project, to quote Stephen Conroy, the Suburban Rail Loop is.

Petitions

Kingswood golf course

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:47): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

Right at the start I would like to acknowledge Cr Caroline White from the local area, who has come to represent her constituents, and I thank her for her tremendous advocacy. I also want to acknowledge Kevin Poulter, president of Save Kingswood, and all those who are watching online and here today, because this is about their home, their castle and where they live and about a completely inappropriate development that is taking place on a golf course that is ruining lives and will continue to ruin the lives of 10,000 people in the Dingley Village area.

It is an absolute disgrace, an appalling situation that we find ourselves in that here in this state a planning minister can actually go ahead and decide that they are going to build not 100, not 200 but now I think it is up to 932-plus homes on a golf course that floods. It is known for its flooding and it is known for its protected species, and yet here we find ourselves in a situation where they want to develop a huge amount of houses, with one road in, one road out, no public transport or limited public transport and no ability for an emergency services vehicle to even get to some of the roads in this particular development. Not only would we not have emergency services vehicles in the area, but we

would not be able to get rubbish trucks to pick up the rubbish on some of the roads. I have seen the development plans. I have seen the whole map of it. It is appalling; it is atrocious.

Let me start with how this all started, because this is a petition that has been done by the people – and I thank them – of Dingley Village and the local area, who are fighting so hard and have continued to fight to have an appropriate development, if any development at all, on this particular golf course. In fact they would have preferred that there was no development. This government made promises about building houses, and it decided that it was going to build something like 80,000 houses. Well, we know it has fallen short of that. But this particular area is not suitable for this additional housing that they want to build.

Let me take you through some of the issues on this particular petition, because we know that the government decided that they were going to have a standing advisory committee, which made about a hundred recommendations. And which one did the government decide to seize on? They seized on just one recommendation: that you could build something on the golf course, not nearly a thousand homes with nearly 3000 residents – no schools, no train station, no businesses, nowhere for these people to go, just houses. It is outrageous. And why? It is all about greed. This government is all about greed, it is all about taking other people's money and just using it and allowing people to have whatever they want. One has to ask questions.

Let us look at concern number one: floods. It is a well-known flood-prone area. There are no flood control measures that have been implemented, with billions of litres of water that have not been accounted for by the hydrology and regular large floods that take place in the wet season. When Melbourne Water was asked for engineering information to confirm its approval of flood controls, a senior person from Melbourne Water said, 'It's not up to us, it's up to the government.' That does not sound like an analysis of data.

Concern number two: lack of infrastructure. As I have mentioned, there are no services, not even a secondary school, to support an additional 3000 residents – not a primary school. Not enough services or shops for today's residents exist as it is, yet we are going to build nearly a thousand more homes and have another 3000 residents. The lanes of the proposed development are very, very narrow, so what is going to happen when there is a fire or someone needs an ambulance? How are they going to get down some of those lanes? Rubbish trucks will not be able to pick up rubbish. This is just a disgrace. It is a poor planning decision. We are going to find that the Satterley people, who have actually purchased this – and this is all about big dollars here – made a development in Perth that has such poor water pressure that it takes 40 minutes to fill a bath. This could be an issue for residents that buy in this area.

Concern number three: wildlife. The golf course is home to many endangered and protected species of wildlife, including the grey-headed flying fox colony. I have only got 10 seconds left, but there is a planning process that was not followed, and I will take it up in my summary. The minister's response is absolutely pathetic.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:52): I rise to make a contribution on behalf of the government in regard to the petition brought by Mrs Hermans in regard to the Kingswood golf course redevelopment. I want to start my remarks by saying I thank Mrs Hermans for bringing this important petition to the Council today. At the outset I just want to say the government does not oppose this petition, but I do want to take the opportunity to go through, I guess, some of the timelines that I have been advised exist around this petition. As I said, I do want to begin by acknowledging the petition tabled today and the continuing campaign about the future of the site. I recognise that this community has lived alongside the Kingswood golf course for many, many decades and I understand that any change of this nature would generate real concern. Any change can be disconcerting, and so I do not dismiss it at all, and it is important to acknowledge it. But I do want to take my time today to talk through the history of this site. It has been a long history, and the process has also been long. It is a thorough and detailed process at every stage.

The redevelopment of the site has been underway for over a decade, including years of assessment, consultation and revisions. Decisions have been made carefully and not overnight. In August 2019 the government established the golf course redevelopment standing advisory committee specifically so that proposals like this one could be tested by independent experts, and that committee did not rubber-stamp anything. In March 2022 the report to the then minister recommended that further work be undertaken on the water-sensitive urban design aspects of the plan. Those recommendations then shaped what came next. When that amendment was approved in August 2023, it came with a development plan overlay, meaning the developer still had to come back with a detailed plan that met those requirements before a single permit could be granted. The draft development plan then went to public consultation from March to April 2025, and 1287 submissions were received, which included a detailed submission from Kingston City Council. Community input has been invited throughout the process and has informed the final development plan. The department required real changes in response to this, and that resulted in the updated ecological assessments, the revised lot interfaces with existing homes, more detail on housing types, updated stormwater and drainage design and design guidelines that lock in a title restriction on future lots as well.

The revised plan incorporating that feedback was then approved in October 2025 under department delegation after further assessment. Then, in regard to the VCAT matter, Kingston council lodged its application outside the 28-day statutory window set by the Planning and Environment Act 1987, and VCAT, an independent tribunal, found the application was lodged late and dismissed it on that basis. This is a matter in regard to the council meeting a statutory deadline. It is not anyone denying their rights. The law sets a clear timeframe so that projects and the people waiting on them are not left in indefinite limbo. Those timeframes apply equally to anyone.

The site will deliver approximately 941 homes, a mix of detached dwellings and townhouses, across 15 stages, with 20 per cent of the site set aside as open space and 10 per cent affordable housing. This is exactly the kind of underutilised, well-located land Victoria needs to unlock if we are serious about giving young Victorians and growing families a realistic path to homes and home ownership. The planning system has to balance genuine community concern against the reality that Victoria needs more homes to ensure individuals and families can continue to afford to rent and buy in the places they want to live. The subdivision permit, which is now before the department, is being assessed with the same rigour: stormwater management, open space, lot layout and vegetation in consultation with Melbourne Water, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, South East Water, Transport Victoria, United Energy and Kingston council.

I recognise this community would have preferred a different outcome, and I do not begrudge anyone who has participated in this and who has fought hard for this either. That is exactly what bringing a petition to be tabled in this place is for. But after years of independent advisory review, two rounds of public consultation, a revised plan responding directly to community and council feedback, the process has been designed for this step.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:57): I would like to start by thanking Mrs Hermans for sponsoring this petition and the petitioners who signed it, and I would also like to recognise Cr White, who is here today in the gallery. This has been a longstanding concern for the citizens in this area. I have spoken to many constituents who are concerned about this development. As was pointed out by Ms Terpstra, there was a standing advisory committee set up, but unfortunately it appears that many of the recommendations that were put forward by the standing advisory committee were not adhered to in the eventual announcement. Before consulting with the community the government already announced how many lots they would have on this site.

One of the main concerns which residents have – I have actually spoken to a hydrology expert about some of the concerns around flooding – is that this site is well known to be a flooding hazard. I think residents would be right to be concerned about this, considering that we have seen other disasters. Many would be familiar with the disaster that happened in Flemington when concerns by hydrology engineers were not adhered to. We saw what happened then, and I think citizens in the area are very

right to be concerned that we might have flooding issues considering the history of this site, notwithstanding there are other issues around wildlife, flora and fauna, in the area.

The fact of the matter is this: in setting up this standing advisory committee, having thousands of submissions by residents and then going ahead and effectively ignoring many of these, you can see why people who live nearby are upset about this. The government needs to go back to the community and look at the recommendations of the standing advisory committee and take their concerns into account, because what is being proposed by the government has been rejected by at least 2000 people who have signed this petition. They are concerned about this.

Some of the issues around the dates of submissions – Ms Terpstra mentioned that the deadline was missed by the council. I have got concerns about what went on with that as well. Suffice to say the community is not happy with what is going on here and what has been put forward by the government. The government needs to go back to the community and look at these standing advisory committee recommendations, because there are serious concerns about the number of people that may be housed on this area, the local infrastructure and, most of all, the potential flooding concerns, which I and many people do not feel have been adequately addressed.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:00): I rise to speak on this petition, which strongly opposes Labor's policy of rezoning the beautiful open space of a suburban golf course and allowing developers to pave over the green fairway to build an inappropriate housing development. The petition under debate is about the proposal for Kingswood golf course, which is well along the path of redevelopment. The course has already been rezoned, and the Minister for Planning said on 19 August that a planning permit application to subdivide the land was under consideration. The petitioners are deeply concerned that the outcome of the planning permit is a foregone conclusion and that Labor decided to allow at least 800 lots on the site before they ever consulted with the affected locals. Residents of Dingley Village have been working hard to prevent this inappropriate redevelopment from going ahead and hold the government accountable to the findings of the Golf Course Redevelopment Standing Advisory Committee. However, Victorians have lost all faith in Labor's planning process. The government has a track record of ignoring communities, bypassing councils and giving preferential fast-track treatment to big developers.

Kingswood is not the only golf course Labor has in its sights. The Carroll government is planning to do the same thing in Wodonga, and another notorious attempt to rezone a golf course and convert it into housing exists in that community. In June I tabled two batches of a petition totalling 8314 signatures of Wodonga locals and Victorian golfers who told the Labor government loud and clear: 'Keep your hands off Wodonga golf course.' These local families, junior golfers, walkers, retirees and club members are adamant that they do not want to see the travesty of the Kingswood golf course redevelopment repeated in Wodonga. Wodonga golf course is a valued sporting asset that provides recreational, social and health benefits to a wide cross-section of the community. Nearly 45,000 rounds were played in the last 12 months, which convincingly demonstrates that this is not underutilised land. This is simply not an appropriate site for the unlocking strategic sites program. It is not vacant land, and it has not been sitting empty for years. It is not unused; it is very much used, with 45,000 rounds of golf being played there a year. It is busy every single weekend with golfers enjoying the outdoors, improving their handicap and socialising with friends. This vital outdoor space is unique in Wodonga. Once it is rezoned and paved over it will be gone forever and it cannot be replaced.

The PRESIDENT: Ms Lovell, I believe you should be relevant to this petition –

Wendy LOVELL: It is an agreement we had.

The PRESIDENT: I do not know if there is any, but in fact 2000 people signed this petition and it was listed for a debate.

Wendy LOVELL: I spoke about this petition first, President. I am talking about a comparable petition in Wodonga.

The PRESIDENT: You put your point around a comparison with a similar situation, but I urge you to get back to talking about this particular area of land.

Wendy LOVELL: What we are seeing in both Kingswood and Wodonga is this government just paving over public open green space to put up housing. These golf courses are not underutilised. They are not vacant land. They are vital outdoor green spaces that communities value and want. This is not a campaign against new housing. Victoria needs more homes and, fortunately, the Wodonga council has identified a 30-year pipeline of land supply for future housing. While there are substantial alternative land sites to build new houses on, there is nowhere else for a new golf course in Wodonga. This is a campaign to protect and save a vital community recreational space that cannot be replaced in the Kingswood community, and likewise in the Wodonga community.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (18:05): I rise to speak on this petition, and I just want to take the opportunity to put a number of concerns about this development on the record that have been raised with our Greens candidates in that area, including our candidate for Clarinda Conor Boyd-Eedle, our Mordialloc candidate Alex Breskin and South-Eastern Metropolitan Region candidate Matthew Kirwan. These concerns relate to the impact on local ecology and preservation of green space, the lack of genuinely affordable housing in this development and the lack of supporting critical infrastructure.

With respect to the impact on ecology and green space, the final plans for the development of the Kingswood golf club in Dingley Village do little to preserve the trees and biodiversity of the site, nor do they respond to resident and council concerns regarding flood controls. By not considering canopy cover loss and flooding risk, this is not a climate-resilient development. Further, despite the golf club being adjacent to the south-east green wedge, the opportunity to reclaim land for the south-east green wedge lost as part of the Suburban Rail Loop stabling yards, known as the Delta site, has not been taken advantage of by the state government. After initial improvements to the development plan done after listening to residents, the new development plan has reversed those changes and created a development that has insufficient and often quite impractical narrow strips of open space with too many canopy trees lost.

Regarding affordable housing, there are arguments that this is desperately needed housing in a housing crisis, and we hear that a lot from this government. However, up-market townhouses will not help the housing affordability crisis. Only 10 per cent of the development is planned to be affordable housing, with the nature of that affordable housing to be resolved at the planning permit stage – that is, left to the never-never. This is unacceptable. It is an unacceptable percentage of affordable housing in a suburb where only 11 per cent of housing stock is currently being sold as affordable. It is one of the least affordable suburbs in the City of Kingston, and that is before we consider – and I will not get into this now – the definition of 'affordable housing' in the Planning and Environment Act 1987, which too often is not actually affordable for anyone on a regular income at all. What is actually needed is more public housing. According to the latest census, the City of Kingston had less than the Melbourne average of social housing, including public housing. The suburb of Dingley Village has zero. So unless there is a plan to ensure a meaningful proportion of public and genuinely affordable housing, the argument that this will help with the housing crisis rings completely hollow.

Then we look at supporting infrastructure, and what becomes obvious is that Dingley Primary School is in desperate need of investment to provide the facilities needed for an influx of students. Further consideration needs to be given to traffic management along Centre Dandenong Road to deal with the impact of the development of traffic flow through Dingley Village to and from both Dingley and Kingswood primary schools.

This petition should really be seen as a prompt to the state government to actually listen to residents and to create medium-density development that makes a genuine impact to the affordable housing

crisis, that preserves biodiversity and that provides adequate and usable open space, as well as being climate-resilient, particularly in relation to flood impacts and canopy cover.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:08): I rise to speak in support of Mrs Hermans' petition today. The fact is we live in a democracy, and what really irritates people is when the government who are put there to serve the people ride roughshod over their rights and completely ignore their wishes. I will actually just start with a quote from the *Herald Sun* from 2014, and I would be interested to see if Mrs Hermans actually read this one. It was just sent to me. It says:

> THE Labor party has weighed into the row over the future of Kingswood Golf Course.
>
> Shadow Planning Minister Brian Tee said he will "rigorously scrutinise" any future decision Kingston Council makes about the Dingley site.

It goes on:

> Mr Tee accused the council of having a "very troubling" attitude to green wedge and public open space issues …

He said:

> This golf course has been at the heart of Dingley Village for decades …
>
> I'm putting Council on notice – any application to rezone it as residential will want to be absolutely compelling because, if Labor is elected, I will be running an independent process and a very sceptical eye over it.

Isn't that interesting? That is what Labor said in 2014. They said, 'Not under our watch. Under a Labor government, there is absolutely no way that this golf course will be rezoned and houses will be put on it.' Well, fast-forward a little way and here we are with almost 900 houses to be built on this area, against the wishes of the community. That is just staggering to me.

I also want to point out that there has been a very troubling pattern when it comes to planning decisions under this Labor state government. I will give you a few. In Wonthaggi a couple of years ago there was a retrospective audit overlay put on hundreds of houses, where with the stroke of a pen from the Minister for Planning, those people, the individual property owners, lost essentially all of their property rights. All of a sudden they went from building their dream homes to being in a situation where, because of a decision made by this government, they were not even allowed to dig a hole in their own yard without having soil testing that could cost upwards of $10,000. Well, we said that was not acceptable. The government kept saying, 'Nothing to do with us – we've got no control over it.' It turned out once we clicked over 2000 signatures, which allowed that exact issue to be debated in this place, that that day the government got rid of that decision. It was not because the individual property owners were losing their right – that did not actually upset Labor at all – it was because all of a sudden it was going to be highlighted that they were completely working against the will of the people that put them there.

There is a similar thing happening at the moment in Lang Lang, where essentially overnight some residents realised that the government had made a change, all of a sudden, that any house within Lang Lang was not allowed to object if quarries were going to be extended. They were not even allowed to object. That is the problem that people are having here. I am going to read some quotes from the Kingston council about what they think about this process. This is from one of their media releases:

> The City of Kingston and the Dingley Village community are angered and deeply disappointed by the State Government's decision – quietly announced late on Friday afternoon –

that is what they said –

> to approve the controversial development of the former Kingswood Golf Course.

Then this bit, I believe, is important:

> This decision has been made despite overwhelming community opposition, clear environmental risks, and warnings from the Government's own advisory processes that the site is highly constrained by flood risk and critical environmental values.

There are some other things that are interesting about this:

> Cr White said the announcement being made late on a Friday only added to community outrage.

Sneaking out a decision of this magnitude is completely disregarding the community's wishes. I commend Mrs Hermans's motion to the house.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:13): From the outset I would like to thank everyone who has made contributions today, my colleagues Renee Heath and Wendy Lovell, David Limbrick from the Libertarians, Sarah Mansfield from the Greens and also Sonja Terpstra from the Labor Party.

I have to take issue, though, on the consultation. An original plan for Kingston had 8000 objections, and that was a much smaller planning thing. I have to say too that Kingston council has not been given the opportunity, as was one of the recommendations by the advisory council, to be the ones that oversee and make the final decisions. They have 100 objections, and Cr White has been fighting very hard standing with her community. With 8000 signatures once, and over 2000 for this petition alone, I am telling you these people have been fighting very, very hard. The council and the councillors have had monitors put on them while they are trying to fight this particular issue. They are being silenced and are having heavy-handed treatment from this Labor government. Do not have the Labor government saying that they are going to be standing with the people, listening to the people and consulting the people and that they have done this properly. They simply have not.

They have let everybody down, and why? Well, once upon a time, a developer called AustralianSuper, a $400 billion company, gave up this site after 13 years of objections and sold it, sadly, for $200 million. And now I find out today it is not 936 dwellings, it is 942. That is an increase in dwellings. That is simply not going to work. It was not going to work with 800; it is certainly not going to work with 942. What is this Labor government doing to local people, to the environment and to the livability of our suburbs? It is failing the Victorian people. It does not deserve to be in government. Only a Liberal–National government will be able to save this development and have the right and proper infrastructure put in place to allow the people to be able to continue their lives. We need to get rid of this government, and we need to get rid of it in November.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:16): I move:

> That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 1583, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Workplace Protection Orders Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ingrid Stitt:

> That the bill be now read a second time.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:17): I rise tonight to speak on the Workplace Protection Orders Bill 2026, a bill that has been a very long time coming and which addresses protections that Victorian workers should already have available to them. The history here matters. It was nearly 300 days ago that the Liberals and Nationals sought to establish workplace protection orders through amendments to similar legislation, with the member for Caulfield in the other place doing an enormous amount of work to develop those amendments. More recently we again sought to establish a workplace protection regime through a private members bill. Now, after all that opposition and delay, the government has finally arrived at a position that we advocated for almost a year ago. We welcome the fact that they eventually recognised the need for workplace protection orders, and we will not be opposing this bill, but the delay has mattered because there have been real consequences for Victorian workers because of it.

When a problem exists, particularly one involving violence and threats against people doing their jobs, government has an obligation to respond with urgency. Over the past year there have been around 5000 incidents involving crime against people in Victorian workplaces, including assaults and other serious offences. That means that thousands of Victorians have potentially gone without a form of protection that could have been available to them had the government supported our proposed plan nearly 300 days ago. We cannot know precisely how many incidents could have been prevented, but it is reasonable to say that workplace protection orders would have provided another tool to at least some of those thousands of workers.

The government will no doubt say that they have been consulting, considering and working through the detail, but when workers are being assaulted, threatened, stalked and intimidated, taking almost a year to decide something needs to be done is simply too long. We have seen how quickly this government can act when there is something that is important to them, and they have not done so in this instance. It is also difficult to understand what has changed. Previously the government, under the former Premier, rejected these measures. Yet almost immediately after the change of Premier, we suddenly have this legislation before us here in the Parliament. Perhaps there was an internal disagreement within Labor about whether workplace protection orders should proceed. Perhaps the arrival of the Premier from a different faction finally broke that deadlock. Whatever happened internally, Victorian workers should not have to wait for Labor to sort out their own issues and to work out their position. Perhaps it was the new Premier's inspirational reading. We have heard that his favourite book is *Where the Light Gets In*, with its promise of 'simple, playful and profound perspective shifts to change your life'. Well, we certainly have seen a profound change in perspective, a huge shift from this Labor government. After twice voting against workplace protection orders, they have now decided to lead them and support them.

Unfortunately, while the government's position has shifted, the bill before us still does not get that detail right. The Liberals and Nationals will not oppose this legislation because we have been calling for workplace protection orders for a long time, but we will seek to amend it because there are significant weaknesses that should be addressed if this regime is going to provide workers with the protections that they deserve and the protections that they need. Nobody working behind a counter, in a supermarket, on public transport or anywhere should have to accept violence and intimidation as part of their job. This is why major employers have been calling for action. Coles chief executive Leah Weckert warned that 'retail crime is escalating', and other senior figures across the sector have argued for similar stronger protections and that they need the laws strengthened so they can have the help that they need.

There was a clear problem and there was a clear need to act, yet despite finally accepting the principle of workplace protection orders, the government has produced legislation containing four significant flaws that the Liberals and Nationals will seek to address through our amendments. The first is the extraordinary delay before the regime actually begins. After taking 265 days to come around to the idea, the government now proposes a regime that will not commence until July next year. In other words, after workers have already waited almost a year since we first proposed these protections, the

government wants them to wait almost another year before they can actually use them. I believe that is indefensible, because we are talking about around 5000 crimes against people in workplace settings over the course of just one year. An 11-month delay potentially means thousands more incidents occurring before workplace protection orders become available to them. The government might argue that July is merely the default commencement date, but during the briefing on this legislation it was confirmed that July next year is its intended commencement. Why should retail workers facing threats today have to wait another 11 months? Why should a transport worker being repeatedly harassed have to wait? Why, after the government has already delayed these reforms for so long, is another year required? Governments are perfectly capable of acting quickly when they want to. We have seen legislation rushed through this Parliament on countless occasions when it has suited the government and their political agenda. When the issue is protecting somebody from violence or threats in their workplace, an 11-month delay cannot simply be waved away as an administrative necessity.

Our first amendment will therefore seek to bring the commencement of the regime forward. I hope members of the crossbench and in the other place will look closely at the proposal, because workers should not be forced to wait any longer than necessary for protections that should already exist. Now would be a good time to circulate them. The second major issue is around victim consent. Under the government's bill the person supposedly being protected does not have a general right to consent to an application being made.

An employer or union can potentially seek an order based on information involving a victim without the victim agreeing to it. This raises some fairly serious concerns. Imagine an employee confides in a colleague about something deeply personal. It might involve family violence, stalking or another traumatic situation occurring outside of the workplace. That information could potentially become the basis for a workplace protection order application without the victim controlling whether the application proceeds. That could expose information the victim never intended to become known more broadly and potentially alert the other party to the fact that the information has been disclosed. This is something that I think, from what we know from the statistics about when things are disclosed, could really place somebody in danger. A workplace protection order is supposedly about protecting the victim, so surely the victim should have some autonomy over that process. Victim consent should therefore be an important part of this regime, subject of course to appropriately drafted exceptions where the circumstances genuinely require them. Victims should have autonomy over their circumstances and their story, particularly where deeply personal information may be involved. Yet this bill does not properly recognise that principle. Our second amendment therefore seeks to address victim consent.

The third problem is the government's unnecessarily narrow definition of the workers who can access these protections. This bill covers certain retail and transport workers, but the definition applying to retail creates an absurd distinction between workers selling goods and workers providing services. Here is one example that my colleague Mr Mulholland spoke to me about when we were chatting about this legislation. He said, 'Take Broadmeadows Central, just down the road from my Meadow Heights electorate office. There are retail workers serving food and selling goods who will be covered by this regime, yet somebody working at the Hoyts cinema in the same centre may not receive the same protections because they are providing a service rather than selling a good.' It is very interesting, and it could be something that, through our amendments, can be resolved so workers have equality around what protections are offered to them. It is amazing that you could literally have two workers metres apart in the same shopping complex, both dealing with customers, both exposed to the same aggressive behaviour, both performing what any Victorian would understand to be retail work, yet one is protected by this legislation and one is not. That does not make sense, and that is a loophole that we hope will be closed.

This government's response is that it may consider expanding the definition after the legislation has been operating and when it is reviewed after three years. Three years is quite frankly just not acceptable. Why should a worker selling a service wait three years for a government to consider

whether they deserve the same protections as somebody working next door to them selling a product? Violence does not distinguish between goods and services. Threatening behaviour does not become less serious because an employee on the receiving end happens to work in a cinema, a service business or another workplace outside the government's narrow definition. This distinction is arbitrary and should be fixed now, rather than leaving workers outside of the scheme and promising to reconsider their situation three years down the track. That is simply not okay. Our third amendment therefore seeks to expand the definition of workers covered by this legislation.

The fourth amendment relates to Victoria Police. As drafted, this legislation does not allow police to apply for a workplace protection order. We are certainly not suggesting that police should become the primary applicant in every case. In most circumstances it might be entirely appropriate for an employee or another authorised party to lead the application. But police should at least have the power to apply where the circumstances justify it. We are dealing with situations involving threats, violence, stalking and criminal behaviour. Police will frequently already be involved with the people and incidents concerned. There are many circumstances where police have dealt repeatedly with particular offenders and believe that the risk is so serious that a workplace protection order may be necessary. It makes little sense to deliberately deny them the capacity to therefore seek one. Our amendment would therefore empower police to apply for an order where appropriate. It would not require them to lead every application or impose an unnecessary burden on police, but it would ensure that the power exists when it is needed.

These are our four amendments: (1) to bring the regime into operation sooner, (2) to give victims the appropriate right of consent, (3) to ensure workers providing services are not arbitrarily excluded from protection and (4) to allow police to seek an order where circumstances warrant it. The Liberals and Nationals have consistently supported the establishment of workplace protection orders, which is why we will not be opposing this bill. But supporting the principle of the bill does not mean ignoring the obvious weaknesses in its drafting. Victorian workers deserve a regime that actually works that will actually protect them.

The question of consent is particularly important, I believe. Across our justice system we recognise the importance of treating victims with dignity while allowing them to have appropriate control over deeply personal information and experiences. A workplace protection order could involve extraordinarily sensitive circumstances. It could arise from family violence. It could arise from stalking. It could arise from threats or behaviour that somebody has disclosed privately to a colleague or an employer. The system is designed to protect victims, and it should not inadvertently strip them of control over the information about their own lives and their own experience. That is why we believe that the government really needs to reconsider its position before this legislation completes its passage through this Parliament.

The same applies to the definition of 'workers'. It is difficult to explain to any Victorian why two people working a few metres apart should have different rights simply because one sells goods and the other is providing a service. Both face the same risk. They should have access to the same protections. It is that simple. There is equally no compelling reason to prevent police from applying for an order if it is appropriate in that case. Police deal directly with criminal offending and dangerous individuals every single day. Giving them the capacity to seek an order where they believe it is necessary not only is sensible but protects the people who protect us.

Most importantly, however, this regime needs to begin sooner. Victorians have already waited long enough. In my own region in Pakenham young people have been told to wear body cams to work in supermarkets and cafes and places like this. How on earth has it got to this in Victoria? Imagine sending your 15-year-old to work and saying, 'Have you got your body cam on, sweetheart?' These things are becoming so common in the state of Victoria. We cannot afford, in my opinion, to wait until July next year when in the past year there have been around 5000 incidents. Workers in this state have waited long enough. The government had the opportunity to support workplace protection orders, and it chose not to. It had another opportunity when we introduced a private member's bill, and again

Labor voted against it. Labor voted against protecting workers in Victoria. Now that the government has finally accepted that these protections are needed, there is no justification for forcing workers to wait another 11 months before this law is enacted. The delays have already had real-world consequences. Around 5000 people in Victorian workplace settings have experienced crime against the person over the past year. Behind every statistic is a worker who went to work expecting just to do their job, and instead they experienced violence, threats or intimidation. Some will have been retail workers, some will have been transport workers and some will have been people like my constituent, trying to navigate an intervention order system while somebody continued to stalk and to threaten them.

We cannot undo what happened during the period when Labor refused to act. What we can do is make sure that, having finally established workplace protection orders, we establish the strongest and the most effective regime possible. The Liberals and Nationals have a long record of calling for workplace protection orders in the state of Victoria. We welcome the fact that the government has finally come around to supporting that principle, but after waiting this long Victorian workers should not have to settle for legislation that is unnecessarily delayed and unnecessarily limited. I really hope that the crossbench will examine our amendments carefully and support the changes necessary to make this legislation work and achieve the goals that it is intended to. Victorians deserve a workplace protection rights regime that puts the safety of workers first, respects victims and provides authorities with the tools they need to deal with dangerous behaviour. We have been waiting for it for far too long, and I hope that you will consider our amendments. I will leave it there.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:36): I rise today to speak on behalf of my Greens colleagues and myself on the Workplace Protection Orders Bill 2026. As a starting point I want to be really clear that my Greens colleagues and I want people to be safe in their workplaces. It is entirely unacceptable to continue to hear stories of people being attacked, being abused, being threatened or being stalked while at work. These are reprehensible behaviours. In fact there are laws against these types of behaviours because they are so reprehensible, and they should be condemned in the strongest of terms. In saying that from the outset, while I appreciate the government and others' intentions with regard to this bill, the bill itself, in the manner in which it will be applied, is not the right intervention to solve the cause of these problems. In fact it has been raised with me that this bill in its current form will have a series of negative consequences, particularly affecting some of the most vulnerable people in this state, and as such the Greens will not be supporting this bill.

The bill will introduce the ability for retail, hospitality and public transport operators to ban people from their premises for up to a year based on unacceptable conduct at some point over the previous 12 months. Again, to state what should be obvious, in our view, to all of us, we want workers to be safe in their workplaces. Physical and sexual violence, abuse and stalking are already crimes, and when people are committing these serious offences against workers or against anyone these matters should be dealt with through the appropriate processes. This bill is doing nothing to address the cause of the reprehensible behaviour that is directed towards workers and instead is risking the criminalisation of many people who are already marginalised right across our community.

We need to be investing more in community and support services to make sure that everyone has access to mental health support and to support with addiction with relevant treatment so that everyone has a safe and secure home to live in. The government needs to be investing in funding for social and health services, and it needs to be building more public homes. The risk of this bill is that it will drag more vulnerable people through the criminal justice system. We already know that First Nations people are overpoliced and overincarcerated across this nation. This bill will have a disproportionate impact on First Nations people as well as on people of colour, on disabled people and on people experiencing mental illness and experiencing addiction.

In fact I would like to read from the government's own statement of treaty compatibility. This is an important statement. Thanks to treaty, this is now a statement wherein the government have to tell on

themselves when they are introducing bad legislation with respect to how it engages with First Nations people. The statement says:

> Limiting First Peoples' access to retail premises or public transport risks significant disruption to social and economic opportunities, particularly in regional and rural settings where alternatives are limited. This may present barriers to key aspects of First Peoples' lives including access to cultural connections and Country, employment, education, healthcare and housing and risk particular impacts on vulnerable groups such as elders, women, young people, and persons with a disability. Rights to culture and Country (articles 11, 12, 25 and 26, UNDRIP) may also be impacted; limiting First Peoples' practical access to places of spiritual significance, cultural practices and cultural connections.

It is laid out really clearly. This bill risks significant disruption and harm to First Nations people in this state. To go on, the statement of treaty compatibility that goes along with this legislation goes on to say that:

> The creation of a new civil order containing conditions that will restrict where a person may go and how they can travel may compound the unacceptable disadvantage inflicted on First Peoples by the historic wrongs and ongoing injustices of colonisation.

'Compound the unacceptable disadvantage' – like, what are we doing here? A lot of the points that are raised across both of these documents will also apply to young people. They will apply to disabled people. They will apply to people right across our community who are doing it incredibly tough right across this state. The risks in this bill are just too significant to ignore.

I also have significant concerns about how unacceptable conduct, as it is referred to, will be considered as part of these orders. This term 'unacceptable' is, to my knowledge, not a known standard when categorising conduct in Victorian law, so there is too much potential for the subjective definition of this term, which could invite applications for these bans well beyond genuinely threatening behaviour. This is of particular concern when coupled with the final element of the definition of 'unacceptable conduct' being:

> … conduct that causes a person to experience a reasonable fear of harm.

It is unclear from whose perspective a fear is to be judged in the reasonable fear of harm, and again this creates too much ambiguity, which could lead to difficulty in actually applying the orders consistently, as well as uncertainty in the community as to when and why the bans could and would be enforced. There is a risk that these exclusion orders and potential criminal records could be applied to people who have raised their voice or to someone who is having a single bad day or is at a crisis point in their life. This is not me trying to be dramatic or flippant in any way here, but this is the ambiguity presented by this bill in its current form. These orders will restrict people's access to essential services. They can restrict people's freedom of movement. It is important that the definition and the threshold for use is clearly defined and set proportionately high at a high threshold, given the impact of these bans, and the bill as drafted does not do this.

I would particularly like to cover the fact that this bill permits people to be banned from public transport – from stations, trains and buses. Banning people from access to transport could have catastrophic consequences on people's lives. As was mentioned in the statement of compatibility, rural and regional people will be most keenly impacted, along with First Nations people, people of colour and young people. People living in poverty or experiencing marginalisation in the community across the board rely more heavily on public transport to travel and to connect, and banning them not only represents risk of disproportionate impact but spells disaster. When you live in rural Victoria and when there is only one bus route or train line to get from your house to the nearby town to work, to visit friends or family, to see a doctor or to pay a bill, being banned could seriously mess up your life.

These exclusion orders will particularly impact young people. Teenagers from 14 up do not have the option to drive. They rely really heavily on public transport, and banning them from accessing their way to get around town can also have huge ripple effects. Kids need to be able to take public transport

to get to school and to get to work and again to connect with family and community, play sports and see their friends. If you cut this off, you are driving people towards criminal behaviour and reoffending.

Again, to speak to the impact of these public transport bans on First Nations people, Aunty Tanya Day, a proud Yorta Yorta woman, died in custody following a V/Line conductor's decision to report her, a decision which the coroner found was influenced by her Aboriginality. History tells us of the real-world impacts of racism across the criminal legal system and in the way that our laws are applied. We should be reflecting on the way that this state failed Aunty Tanya Day before any member of this place dares vote for this legislation. While the Greens will be opposing this bill, I should state we will also be moving amendments that remove this potential to ban people from public transport locations and services in the way the bill is currently presented. We are carving this out altogether. It is a step too far. Nowhere else in Australia have similar workplace orders gone this far to cover these essential transport settings. I ask that these amendments be circulated now.

To conclude, banning someone from a shop after they have been violent has not prevented the harm that their violence has caused. You cannot ban someone in the midst of experiencing a mental health crisis from a train station. That does nothing to support them. It does nothing to support the people around them. This bill, despite any genuinely good intentions that anyone might have, has not been properly thought through, so the Greens will be opposing it.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:46): I rise to make a contribution on the Workplace Protection Orders Bill 2026, an important piece of legislation which will ensure that Victorians can stay safe at work. I would like to thank the Attorney-General for her work on this issue and her commitment to keeping workers safe. I would also like to thank the Premier for his personal championing of this issue and his deep conviction that the workplace should be a place which is free from harassment and violent and threatening behaviour.

Workplace protection orders (WPOs) are a fairly simple concept: when a person is likely to repeatedly behave in an unacceptable manner that puts workers at risk, they can be excluded from that place through a court order. Some jobs are more dangerous than others and different jobs carry different sorts of dangers. In public-facing jobs such as retail and passenger transport, workers face unique dangers from a very small minority of the public, who might behave in ways which are violent and threatening. No-one deserves to be treated like that, and nobody deserves to have to deal with harassment and stalking at work or anywhere for that matter.

In May 2024 our government convened the worker protection consultation group, bringing together representatives from the retail industry, unions and Victoria Police. This group met to discuss a potential legislative agenda that would aim to keep workplaces safe. This is a matter of mutual interest between businesses and unions. Businesses have an obligation to keep their employees safe on the job, and unions naturally see keeping workplaces safe for their members as one of their most important duties.

Last year we passed the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025 into law. This bill, which emerged following consultation with the worker protection consultation group, created new offences relating to assaults, threats and abuse directed towards workers in customer-facing industries. Then on 29 July, the Premier, one day after being sworn in and alongside members of the WPCG, announced that we would be introducing this bill. The Premier spoke at the time about his own career history, having gotten his first job at Kmart at the age of 14.

Many of my colleagues in this place may already know that before entering politics I was the branch secretary of the Transport Workers' Union of Victoria and Tasmania and also the union's national president. At the TWU we represented bus drivers working in Victoria's public transport system. As you can probably imagine, it is tough to do any job while facing behaviour from a member of the public which is violent, threatening or abusive. I understand the Greens are proposing amendments that carve out transport workers from these essential protections. I could recite countless examples of bus drivers being subjected to threatening behaviour while on the job and performing their duties, such

as hot coffee being thrown at drivers, cups filled with urine or faeces being thrown, syringes filled with blood being hurled and other vile actions. It is disgraceful that the Greens would even consider leaving out transport workers and leaving them in the cold. It goes to show how out of touch the Greens really are.

Abuse is a serious problem for bus drivers in Victoria, with a TWU survey finding nine out of 10 drivers had experienced passenger abuse. We have seen horrifying cases of bus drivers facing shocking abuse while on the job. Last year a bus driver was repeatedly beaten by a passenger in a rage, and we also saw a sickening case of someone climbing over the cab cage – while it is designed to protect the bus driver – and stomping on the driver's head, injuring them and sending many passengers flying. I can recall a horrifying case of a bus driver being beaten mercilessly on the 902 route near Eltham and having to sound the horn after enduring the abuse to catch the attention of PSOs.

When we see these sorts of violent cases emerging, I find it astounding that the Greens would put forward an amendment like this. In light of that I would like to thank the Transport Workers' Union for their ongoing support and advocacy for these drivers, in particular the director of transport Sam Lynch from the TWU for all his hard work. The Carroll Labor government will always have the back of transport workers across Victoria, and this bill is another critical part of delivering on that promise. I would also like to thank my friends from the SDA, including secretary Michael Donovan, as well as the Rail, Tram and Bus Union secretary Vikrant Sharma for their advocacy in this space.

It is important to remember that if a workplace protection order has been taken out, it will be ensuring the safety not only of workers but also of customers and innocent passengers. In retail, having specific protection and prohibitions implemented against individuals entering a specific workplace can also be important. When a worker has faced repeated harassment or stalking from an individual, they will often be in a position where they are working regular hours at one publicly accessible location and will have no choice but to be there because they need to pay the bills. This could leave a person feeling vulnerable and unsafe in their own workplace.

To explain how WPOs will function according to this bill, retail and transport operators or unions covering the workplace will be able to apply for a court order handing down the WPO. This can be done when a person at least 14 years of age who has a history of unacceptable conduct is judged as likely to continue to engage in unacceptable behaviour. If for some reason the employer is unwilling to apply for a WPO, the relevant union will be able to do so, provided that they notify the employer of their intention. The sorts of behaviour which are covered under WPOs include physical and sexual violence or abuse, stalking or any conduct which causes a worker to have reasonable fear of harm. This can only be done based on the behaviour which has occurred at a specific publicly accessible workplace which the application has been made for.

While the workplace protection orders are critical for keeping workers safe, there are provisions in this bill which ensure that proportionality is maintained and that someone who has a WPO against them is still able to access essential goods and services. For example, in the case of a person living in an area where there is only one supermarket, the court may take that into consideration and impose conditions on when and how the individual can access the store. Other circumstances in which the court may take account could include if the individual is a child or if they suffer from a cognitive impairment which might impact their ability to understand the order. In these cases the safety of the worker must come first, but it is also important that other considerations are taken into account.

Finally, workplace protection orders will be civil matters. Breaching them will be criminal matters. Individuals who breach a WPO can be imprisoned for up to two years or fined up to $50,000. These punishments are important because we need to ensure that the WPOs are respected. We need to ensure that those who find themselves with a WPO being taken out against them understand the seriousness with which the law is treating this situation. We cannot have these be toothless and symbolic, because the sort of person who would treat retail and transport workers in an abusive, threatening or violent manner would not be likely to respect a purely symbolic order. Ideally these punishments would

function as purely as a deterrent, ensuring those with a WPO against them do not approach the workplace from which they are banned. However, in the event that they do re-enter the place without authorisation, it is important that our legal system is able to take action against them and punish that behaviour.

By changing the law in this way, implementing workplace protection orders, we are giving businesses and unions the access to legal protections to which they need to keep workers safe on the job. When people feel unsafe at work and when they are denied the dignity that comes with being treated respectfully, they may be, quite understandably, far less focused on their work. At the same time, they may be far more inclined to quit and to find another job. In some cases they may feel inclined to quit and withdraw from the workplace altogether. This is bad for them personally, and it is bad for the economy generally. Having a strong economy requires workers to believe that work is worth it. To achieve that they need to believe that they have been paid a fair wage, that they will be treated with the respect they deserve in the workplace and that the work itself carries with it a certain level of dignity. This bill helps to protect that dignity through ensuring that workers who face unacceptable behaviour can have the confidence to know that the powerful legal mechanisms in place can protect them.

Another reason why workplace protection orders matter relates not just to purely pragmatic concerns but to our core principles of social justice. It is unfortunately the case that it is often those who are on the lower end of the income spectrum who are faced with the worst behaviour from customers in the workplace. This bill sends a clear message that it does not matter how much a person makes in a year, it does not matter how young they are, and in fact it does not matter who they are at all, if they are working in a customer-facing job, they are entitled to be treated with respect. They are entitled to the protection of the law in their workplace. The introduction of workplace protection orders, along with the new offences which we introduced last year to protect workers, shows what we can achieve when the government listens to workers about the problems they are facing. It shows what can be achieved when governments work together with unions and businesses to create better workplaces, which benefits everyone.

These are, however, not the only measures which we have taken to keep workers in retail settings and customer-facing industries safe. Take, for instance, Operation Pulse, the initiative to put PSOs in major shopping centres, helping to keep these environments safe for workers and shoppers alike. This initiative has been a success, with over 1700 arrests made and 3500 charges laid since the operation began. The success of Operation Pulse is the reason why the Premier recently announced that it would be extended and expanded. From Operation Pulse workplace protection orders to the new offences protecting customer-facing workers, the Carroll Labor government is ensuring that public retail spaces are safe for workers and safe for everybody.

This has included introducing the toughest bail test of any jurisdiction in Australia to ensure those who commit violent crimes are not given the chance to reoffend while on bail. This has included placing community safety as the single most important consideration in any bail decision. This has included introducing adult time for violent crime, which will see young people charged with serious violent crimes tried in adult courts, where they are most likely to face incarceration and more likely to face longer sentences. This has included a bail test uplift, making the bail test even more difficult for crimes which are committed while already on bail for another crime. This has included new laws to ban post-and-boast crimes, creating new offences for people who post videos online of themselves committing crimes. This has included introducing life sentences for those who recruit children into committing serious offences on behalf of gangs and organised crime groups. This has included getting dangerous weapons off the streets with Australia's first machete ban, with 18,000 knives surrendered by the public and 17,000 seized by the police.

This has included providing our justice system and our corrections system with the additional funding that they need to accommodate these changes to law. It has also included early intervention measures to ensure that we can stop crime before it starts, that we can help at-risk young people to make better decisions and set themselves on a better path in life. The violence reduction unit is coordinating crime

prevention across government, connecting at-risk youth with mentors who have experience in the justice system and putting early intervention officers in schools. The VRU is based off a successful model which has worked in Scotland and in London, and it will keep young people safe and keep people from going down the wrong path.

With a wide range of measures, the Carroll Labor government is taking the steps necessary to keep Victorians safe at work, at home and in the community. We are doing this because upholding public safety is the key to maintaining the high quality of life which we enjoy here in Victoria. That quality of life will be put at risk if violent crime is allowed to run rampant and nobody has the peace of mind of knowing that they can feel safe when leaving their house, going to work and going about their business.

Reaching the end of my remarks, I would like to take the chance of paying tribute to Victoria Police for the work that they do. There is no community safety agenda which the government can roll out that does not involve police. Without police, any bill which passed through this chamber to address violent crime would be meaningless. The work they do, often potentially dangerous, means that our communities can be safe places for people to live. Ultimately, we are taking these measures to keep people safe because it is what the Victorian public expect and deserve from their government. The Carroll Labor government's public safety agenda did not begin with this bill, and neither will it end with this bill, but delivering a workplace protection order is an important step forward in ensuring that all Victorian workers can be safe and protected on the job. I commend the bill to the chamber.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:00): I rise to make a contribution on this very important bill, the Workplace Protection Orders Bill 2026. This bill is important because what it will do is it will help to protect retail and transport workers. The government committed to introducing this scheme as a next step in our response to violence against retail and transport workers, and unfortunately what we are seeing is a rise in violence against retail and transport workers. We often see these things either splashed across the 6 o'clock news or on social media, and it is sad to say that these things seem to be increasing. It was important that the government committed to this, and this bill is making good on that commitment.

The bill will create a new workplace protection order scheme to protect, as I said, retail and transport workers. The orders are flexible and can be used to ban people from a workplace or impose any other condition the court considers appropriate to protect the worker. These additional conditions could, for example, include a requirement that a person not contact the worker, not access a particular shopping centre or parking lot, not come within a specific distance of a workplace and not engage in threatening behaviour at a particular location. The breach of an order will be a criminal offence and will attract up to two years imprisonment or a fine of up to $50,000. The scheme offers real protection for these workers. It offers real penalties as well, because violence is never acceptable to workers who are just doing their jobs.

Applications can be made by employers and unions to the Magistrates' Court, or to the Children's Court where a respondent is aged between 14 and 17 years old, on behalf of impacted workers. The orders will apply for up to 12 months, but they cannot be obtained against people younger than 14 years old and cannot be obtained against another staff member at that workplace. The threshold for courts to make an order is that (1) unacceptable conduct has occurred against the worker at their workplace in the last 12 months and (2) unacceptable conduct is likely to occur again, and an order is appropriate in all of the circumstances. 'Unacceptable conduct' means physical violence or abuse, sexual violence or abuse, stalking or anything that causes a reasonable fear of harm. Importantly, when deciding whether to make an order and any conditions that might apply to that order, the court must consider a range of matters. These things include hardship and whether conditions would limit someone's ability to obtain essential goods or services. There will also be a statutory review of the scheme three years after it has commenced to make sure it is working well and it is working as intended.

The stakeholder positions in regard to this are that both the industry and unions strongly advocated for this bill. It is good to see industry and unions on the same page. It does not often happen in industrial relations, but it is good to see that it happened in this case. They lobbied the government on this policy through the development process to expand the scope of the scheme, and this bill reflects their requirements.

Conversely, social services and legal groups have significant concerns about the likely disproportionate impacts of the scheme on already marginalised and disadvantaged community members. The First Peoples' Assembly has significant concerns about the impact on Aboriginal people in particular, and there are adjacent industries and workforces that may be critical of not being included under the scheme. These things are apparent, and I know Mr Berger went to this in some of his comments about how if you are living in a location where there is only one supermarket, for example, where else do you go to get your essential goods? I would like to think that perhaps if you are going to the supermarket, you are going there to pick up your groceries, not assault a retail worker. It is pretty simple in one regard, that going to a shop should not include violence. So it is sort of a self-fulfilling prophecy, really – if someone is going to commit an act of violence, then there are going to be consequences for them. So it is probably a good idea just to go to the shops to get your groceries, not commit acts of violence against workers.

It is a scheme that, sadly, we need, because as I said earlier, there are increasing acts of violence that we see. I note also Mr Berger, having represented the Transport Workers' Union in another life, talked about the impacts that bus drivers or tram drivers face when they are out on the road. Some of the unspeakable acts of violence and the aggression that gets committed against bus drivers are just unfathomable – it is terrible. At least this scheme will give real teeth and real protection for workers who work in those industries. Nobody wants to go to work to be attacked, to be hit, to be spat on, to be assaulted or to be humiliated. Nobody wants to do that. You are just going to work to do a job, and that is what it should involve. Every family of a worker should be able to expect that their partner, husband, mother, son or daughter comes home from work in the same way that they left, which is fit and healthy. This is a tool, and the government agrees with the retail workers and transport workers that this is necessary.

Under the scheme, a person who engages in unacceptable conduct against a retail or transport worker at the workplace can now be banned from that workplace, and because the safety of workers is non-negotiable, breaching any condition of a workplace protection order, as I said earlier, carries penalties of two years imprisonment and a fine of over $50,000. I like this aspect; I like it a lot. Not only can employers make an application for these orders, but so can unions. Unions can make the applications on behalf of impacted workers. I think that is really important, because unions are a really strong voice and advocate for their members. It also gives some control to unions on behalf of their members. Sometimes, for example, an employer may not believe their claims or whatever, and this gives the worker another avenue to be able to advance their requests for a workplace protection order. So I like that a lot. One of the things about this is that the burden of protecting workers at their workplace should not fall on individual workers who have been subjected to unacceptable conduct. Unacceptable conduct, as I spoke about earlier, means physical violence or abuse, sexual violence or abuse, stalking or anything that causes a reasonable fear.

There are safeguards as well in regard to the scheme. At the same time we are making sure that these orders are accessible and effective to protect workers from unacceptable conduct, we have also carefully designed them to make sure that the courts take into account the specific context and circumstances of each situation. I like that too. It gives the courts the ability to weigh and consider things in an appropriate manner and then make the appropriate order in all of the circumstances. As I said earlier, this does allow the courts to take into account hardship and whether conditions would limit someone's ability to obtain essential goods or services. For example, if you have only got one bus in and out of your town where you live and you have got to go and access medical treatment, that might cause hardship to you, and the courts can take into account all those circumstances, weigh and

consider them carefully and decide whether a workplace protection order is necessary. There is latitude there for them to take it further or not so far depending on the individual circumstances. The courts cannot impose a condition that would limit someone's ability to obtain goods and services unless satisfied the person has another way to obtain those things. The court would have to go into a lot of detail about an individual's circumstances, and I think that is appropriate in the circumstances. The scheme is about protecting workers, but we have also got to weigh and consider the impact on the individual that the order is being sought against as well, so it allows a really good balancing process to take place there. It is appropriate for the courts to do that. Courts are interested in facts, not stories, and so it is important that those facts can be weighed and applied to the circumstances.

The scheme covers workers at retail and transport workplaces. Retail workers include all workers in workplaces that are primarily retail businesses – for example, their business is primarily selling things. I love a very simple definition, and 'selling things' is really clear and easy to understand. This would include retail in the traditional sense, but it may also include something like a restaurant, which is primarily selling food and/or drink to customers. If you are working at a servo and you are selling chocolate bars, whatnot and everything else, that is a point of retail. I know some supermarkets also double as petrol stations. For example, if you go to your local servo, there could be a Coles shop there as well. There are lots of ways in which things can be retailed these days, so this is a very simple definition but a very effective one.

Then transport workers include workers on passenger trains, trams or buses, those who work in valid ticket areas and those who work where tickets are sold. Again, if you are a transport worker, your workplace can include your vehicle. If you are driving a bus, that is your workplace. You have got passengers on your bus. That is really important as well. Of course, a train – that is obvious: you are a train driver; you have got a train full of people that is part of your workplace. Again, we have worked really closely with stakeholders to ensure that the scheme can commence soon, and this is necessary to provide the minimum amount of time for agencies to be ready to operationalise this novel new scheme. This is going to take time to happen, and that is okay. We want to get it right. We want to make sure that the agencies involved, who will be responsible for administering the scheme, are ready to do so. This will include Victoria Police, and they will be ready to assist with enforcement of orders once they are made. Also the courts will be ready to hear applications, to make these new orders, to ensure that criminal processes which might be running alongside are not jeopardised and to ensure that the justice system is ready to make full use of the scheme and to work their way through it.

Importantly, these reforms follow the Victorian Labor government's introduction of new offences for abusing, threatening, intimidating or assaulting workers in November 2025. These reforms made it clear that if you abuse a shop assistant, if you punch a fast-food worker, if you threaten your rideshare driver or Uber Eats delivery driver, if you throw a coffee over your waiter, you will face serious consequences. I do not know what is wrong with people these days that that is something they think they would do, but it clearly is something that people do, sadly. We have introduced a new indictable offence of assaulting or threatening to assault one of these workers, with a penalty of up to five years in jail. Separate summary offences for lower level assaults and for conduct that threatens and intimidates the worker, such as with profane or obscene or insulting language, carry a penalty of up to six months in jail. The summary offences have a substantially lower threshold and are easy to prove, giving police a range of options to protect workers depending on the circumstances. Sadly, it is a scheme that is necessary, but on the plus side, this is an important commitment that the Labor government has given to retail and transport workers. It is an important scheme that we are standing up through this bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:13): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned until the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until next day of meeting.

Adjournment

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (19:13): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Kennett River

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria) (19:13): (2732) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Rural and Regional Development, and the action I seek is an update on the benefits for the Kennett River community and the Great Ocean Road visitor economy of the improvements to tourism infrastructure at the Kennett River project. The $3.8 million works at Kennett River are largely funded through the Geelong City Deal. The Geelong City Deal is revitalising Geelong and unlocking the potential of the Great Ocean Road visitor economy, with substantial funding from the Victorian and Commonwealth governments. Kennett River is a small coastal community on the Great Ocean Road. It is in a stunning location. It is also a popular stop for visitors travelling between Lorne and Apollo Bay. That brings economic opportunity but puts pressure on local roads, parking, pedestrian safety and public amenities. The improvements to tourism infrastructure at the Kennett River project have been shaped by extensive community engagement and include new and improved public open spaces and landscaping; car park, road and pedestrian path upgrades to improve traffic flow, boost safety and effectively prevent multiple large coaches from parking in the precinct; and a new public toilet building and upgraded wastewater treatment plant as well. Construction is now underway, and I cannot wait to see the difference it will make to Kennett River and the local community.

Health system

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (19:14): (2733) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Premier. The action I seek is for the Premier to act with integrity and instruct his Minister for Health to immediately release the now long-overdue Victorian Agency for Health Information data for the March to June quarter. The Premier came to office just four weeks ago, promising Victorians a new direction. 'I will do things differently,' he trumpeted. 'In my government, integrity will not be optional,' he declared. Yesterday, talking about the Suburban Rail Loop, he went further. He told Victorians: 'I respect your money.' Today the Auditor-General has given Victorians a very different picture of how this government operates. A secret 1 per cent levy was built into public transport fares to help fund the Suburban Rail Loop. Victorians were not told. The $8 billion levy was hidden from public scrutiny. And who was the public transport minister when this secret levy was approved in August 2021? The man who now promises Victorians transparency and integrity and says, 'I respect your money,' Premier Ben Carroll. This government has made an art form of delay, deception and deliberate concealment when the truth is politically inconvenient. I honestly do not know how those in government can justify their deceit and their shameless disregard for the people they are supposed to serve. This is another test of your new Premier's commitment to transparency.

The June quarter hospital performance data from the Victorian Agency for Health Information, VAHI, exists to provide Victorians with information about the quality, safety and performance of their public health system. It says its performance results are updated quarterly. The June quarter ended 57 days ago, yet Victorians are still waiting. The latest data has 68,116 Victorians waiting for planned surgery, 4000 more than three months earlier and 8000 more than the same time the previous year. So where are the June quarter figures? What has happened to that waiting list? How many more Victorians are now waiting in pain for the surgery they need? After today's extraordinary revelations from the Auditor-General, Victorians are entitled to ask an even more troubling question: what is in these figures that the government does not want them to see? You cannot have a Premier preaching transparency on Monday, promising to respect taxpayers money on Tuesday and then expect Victorians to simply trust you when important government data disappears from view. You cannot promise a new government while practising the same old politics of secrecy, and you certainly cannot

claim that integrity is not optional while treating transparency as though it is – no more delay, no more excuses, no more hiding behind weasel words.

Homeschooling

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:17): (2734) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Education. The inquiry into the recruitment methods and impacts of cults and organised fringe groups has recently tabled its report. This is a challenging area to examine, with competing rights, questions of freedom of belief and association and the very real experiences that people have of harmful behaviour, especially those that impact children. I would like to thank the committee members and staff for their work on this inquiry and the many people who wrote submissions or appeared as witnesses. While I do not want to reflect on all of the recommendations of this inquiry tonight, there is one recommendation that I want to raise. Recommendation 4 urges the government to:

> … consider opportunities to increase and diversify children and young people's contact and connections with multiple reporting channels … a review of home schooling arrangements in Victoria to consider opportunities for greater contact and connections between home schooling students and Victorian Government schools.

While I understand the intention here, clearly there is a concern that vulnerable children could be harmed in an environment that is largely hidden from view. I am not sure that this recommendation really understands the homeschooling community. The whole reason that many families choose homeschooling is because they are not happy with the government's school curriculum policies or approach to education. Trying to nudge them back towards government schools could easily be seen as a strategy to undermine homeschooling. As the committee themselves noted, the vast majority of homeschoolers are well supported and flourishing. Any approach to a review should really focus on achieving the objectives of this recommendation through increasing flexibility and options for homeschooling families rather than adding additional requirements or red tape. My request to the minister is to ensure that any work done by the department in responding to recommendation 4 of the inquiry focuses on ensuring flexibility and autonomy for homeschooling families is maintained or enhanced without introducing unnecessary requirements for families that are happy and successful in their homeschooling journey.

Education system

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:19): (2735) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Education. The use of screens in schools has been an integral part of the Victorian curriculum for well over 10 years now, and from the days of designated computer rooms through to personalised laptops, the use of screens has increased, giving students the opportunity to learn digital skills which will assist them throughout their lives and throughout their careers. Despite the benefits, it is essential that our students do not become too reliant on the use of digital devices. We must make sure that other skills are not diminishing and that digital devices are not being used to the detriment of students. In 2020 the use of mobile phones by students was banned in schools, and as of term 1 2027 primary schools will also begin limiting the use of digital devices to 90 minutes for years 3 to 6 students, with minimal use for prep to year 2 students. Additionally, all secondary schools will be asked to include planned digital device free time in learning. My question to the minister, and the action I seek, is: with screen time being limited in schools, what other opportunities exist and what alternatives may be used to substitute activities that rely on the use of digital technology in learning?

Woodend Racecourse Reserve

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (19:21): (2736) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport. The action that I seek is for the minister to support female and junior participation in soccer and other sports by funding an upgrade of the change rooms and the construction of a dedicated soccer pitch at the Woodend Racecourse Reserve. Woodend Racecourse Reserve is a local sports precinct that includes an oval, outdoor netball courts, equestrian fields and a sports stadium with an indoor basketball court. Woodend Eagles Soccer Club is a popular and growing club that shares

the use of the oval and is bursting with new players, including many young girls. I recently joined the excellent Liberal candidate for Macedon Kate Kendall and Liberal leader Jess Wilson to visit the club and see how popular soccer is becoming. Young girls are also turned off from joining in because there are no female-friendly rooms at the racecourse reserve. There is no privacy, as the shower block has no doors or curtains, so no-one uses it. There are also no locks on toilet doors and no dedicated female change rooms or bathrooms. The club told us that one young girl wet herself because she was afraid to use the facilities. Young girls do not want to get undressed in gross change rooms that offer no privacy. Women and girls deserve clean and safe facilities that will encourage wider participation in sport, which we know has so many benefits. This is about more than just playing games. It is about healthier children, better mental health and lifelong friendship as players and communities stay connected. However, the soccer club also struggles to compete with footy teams in Woodend to get training time on the oval, and the Eagles have been allocated just 1 hour a week at the reserve for their six teams to train all at once. That is clearly not sustainable long term.

While participation rises infrastructure lags behind, and that is hampering the growth of soccer in the town, which is very popular with both boys and girls. Macedon Ranges Shire Council this year completed a master plan for the future development of Woodend Racecourse Reserve, which anticipates that soccer could eventually have higher participation among under-15s than Australian Rules Football. Providing facilities that cater to the projected demand is essential, and accordingly the master plan includes a rectangular soccer pitch for training and games as well as a pavilion for parents and spectators. There is ample space for a soccer pitch at Woodend Racecourse Reserve, where one of the equestrian fields lies unused. But it is Crown land, so the Victorian government's involvement is crucial in moving development forward. Regional clubs are not asking for luxury, they just want modern change rooms and sports fields where everyone can get a chance to train and play. I ask the minister to support female participation in soccer and other sports at Woodend Racecourse Reserve by funding an upgrade to the changing rooms and expanding the playing fields – *(Time expired)*

Waste and recycling management

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:24): (2737) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, Minister Symes. I call on the minister to ensure the EPA amends the environment reference standard to explicitly include plastics, including microplastics. Plastic pollution is not just a problem in far-off oceans, it is happening in our waterways. From the deepest parts of our ocean to local rivers, creeks and bays, plastic waste and microplastics are accumulating at alarming rates. They are entering marine ecosystems, harming wildlife and threatening the health of environments we all depend on. Plastic pollution is a global problem, and it starts with what we allow to enter our waterways. For more than a decade the Port Phillip EcoCentre and Tangaroa Blue Foundation have been documenting plastic pollution across Melbourne, including plastic resin pellets, or nurdles, escaping from industrial sites and entering our waterways. They can escape industrial sites, wash into stormwater drains and eventually make their way into our waterways and the ocean. Once there, they can be mistaken for food by marine animals and become part of the wider plastic pollution problem. The fact that thousands of nurdles can be found trapped in our stormwater systems should be a wake-up call. Therefore the action I seek is for the minister to progress amendments from this report to better protect Victoria's waterways from plastic pollution.

Economic policy

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (19:26): (2738) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Economic Development in the other place. Since coming to government nearly a decade ago now, the Victorian government has overseen an economy that has grown by 41 per cent. This is a higher rate of economic growth than in any other state in the Commonwealth. This has happened because of this Labor government's commitment to ensuring an environment that is open to and ready for economic development. This is more than just a number on a spreadsheet; it is real lives that have changed and gotten better since the end of 2014, and it is testament to the ongoing positive economic record that this government has. This level of economic development means that Victoria remains the

engine room of the Australian economy. The action that I seek is for the minister to report back to me on how the Victorian government is continuing to promote more economic development in Victoria.

Community health services

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (19:26): (2739) My matter is for the Minister for Health regarding the need for increased investment in community health services across Victoria, especially in my electorate of Western Metropolitan Region, with a rapid population growth. The action I seek is for minister to allocate an additional 2 per cent of the Victorian health budget to community health services, enabling providers such as IPC Health to support more Victorians while reducing pressure on our overstretched hospital system.

Community health is one of the most important investments a government can make. IPC Health is one of Victoria's largest community health providers. It supports almost 50,000 clients annually through medical, dental, mental health, allied health, aged care and prevention services across Melbourne's west. Last year alone it delivered almost 490,000 services through a workforce of just more than 500 staff. Importantly, IPC Health seeks to build on prevention and early intervention. These services help people manage chronic disease, improve mental health, access housing support, remain independent as they age and avoid unnecessary hospital visits.

Research cited in the IPC Health *Annual Impact Report* shows that every dollar invested in preventive health can generate more than $14 in health system savings. The IPC Health Diabetes Connect program delivered significant outcomes for 431 clients with complex health needs, achieving a 93 per cent reduction in emergency department and hospital attendances over the course of their care. Similarly, IPC Health supports families, older Victorians, people experiencing homelessness, refugees, Aboriginal communities and those facing mental health challenges through integral care delivered close to home.

These programs do not just improve health outcomes, they reduce strain on our hospitals, ambulance services and other crisis-driven interventions. Yet despite these proven outcomes, community health remains underfunded relative to the value it delivers. Melbourne's west in my area is one of the fastest growing regions in Victoria, experiencing increasing levels of chronic disease, disadvantage and demand for health services. I ask the minister: will the Carroll government commit to allocating 2 per cent of the Victorian health budget to community health services so that organisations like IPC Health can expand their reach and support everyday Victorians?

Murray Valley Highway

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (19:29): (2740) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the badly damaged section of Murray Valley Highway between Swan Hill and Kerang to be completely repaired. Here we go again: another week, another badly damaged section of road in northern Victoria. A few weeks ago we heard Ms Terpstra say people actually like potholes. Well, not in northern Victoria they do not. In fact they are sick of them. They are sick of dodging them, sick of having to repair their vehicles and sick of risking their lives just to get from A to B. This section of the Murray Valley Highway, 45 kilometres south of Swan Hill and 12 kilometres north of Kerang, has been shoddily repaired time and time again. The repairs last just a few short weeks – sometimes days – before the dangerous craters open up again. This is a busy highway, the main road along the border. This highway has been raised so many times in this place, and it is still in a state of disrepair. The minister's answers always include a statement for constituents to report the road damage to Snap Send Solve. Well, they have, numerous times, and still the road is not fixed. The repairs are abysmal and a bandaid solution at best, and we all know bandaids do not work on bitumen. This section of road needs a permanent fix. It needs to be taken back to the base and properly constructed. Surely that would be a far better use of taxpayers money than repairing the same section of road over and over again. Minister, the action I seek is for the badly damaged section of the Murray Valley Highway between Swan Hill and Kerang to be completely repaired.

Construction industry

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (19:31): (2741) My adjournment this evening is for Minister Stitt, Special Minister of State. There is now a royal commission into the construction sector, a special prosecutor and stronger powers for IBAC. The action I seek is an update on how these measures will strengthen integrity, uncover wrongdoing and ensure those responsible are held to account.

Kyneton Primary School site

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (19:32): (2742) My adjournment is to the Minister for Creative Industries. In March 2018 the Victorian government announced a $12 million commitment to redeveloping the old Kyneton Primary School site into a creative community precinct. It was due to be completed in 2024. Two years later it remains empty. Despite being promoted as a community arts space, a recent media release by Mary-Anne Thomas indicates that stage 1 under the newly appointed consortium will establish a new coworking hub for local small businesses and sole traders. Twelve million dollars has already been spent and the site remains closed.

I find it extraordinary that a local community group, the Kyneton Art Group, of 50 years is now facing a seven-fold increase to their rent by the local council to continue meeting at the Red Brick Hall. It would be a shame to see such a vibrant and valuable community group disbanded due to this huge and unaffordable rental increase. The Kyneton Art Group has around 30 members who meet weekly, and they support the daffodil festival, the RSL and the Kyneton Agricultural Show. Together they build community connection and make a valuable contribution to the cultural vibrancy of the region. The former mayor of Macedon Ranges Kate Kendall recommended that the community group utilise the space at the old Kyneton Primary School, and the Kyneton Art Group are keen to see that happen. I would appreciate the minister's support to ensure that they can find an affordable space to call home.

The community, indeed all Victorians, also deserve transparency around the ongoing delays and total costs of the project, and I look forward to an update from the minister. It is worth noting that the precinct, which has remained closed for the last eight years, will conveniently reopen ahead of the November state election, just in time for the Kyneton Daffodil & Arts Festival in September, and then host activations for the remainder of this year. The current Labor member Mary-Anne Thomas, the member for Macedon, issued a media release just last month that states:

> The former library has been transformed into a flexible, creative and community space …

Given $12 million of public money has already been spent on this site, it is my hope that local groups like the Kyneton Art Group will also be able to use it.

Greyhound racing

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (19:34): (2743) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Racing, and the action that I seek is for a commitment that not one single greyhound exported to Australia from New Zealand will be raced here in Victoria. On 1 August New Zealand's ban on commercial greyhound racing came into effect following years of animal welfare concerns, including horrific track deaths and injuries. Part of New Zealand's plan included a transition plan for workers and a rehoming program which had capacity to rehome 1400 dogs. But instead of letting these dogs retire safely to the couch, where they belong, Greyhound Racing New Zealand organised and paid for charter flights for up to 150 dogs, or about 10 per cent of the country's total racing dogs, to Australia, where they will continue to be exploited and raced at breakneck speed. There is no other reason to do this than pure greed, and as soon as these dogs enter the country, they then become Australia's responsibility to rehome at a time when we are already facing a rehoming crisis. Just last week harrowing footage emerged from Animals Australia which showed some of these dogs in crates waiting to be put on a plane and flown here. The sound of their cries and wails in that video is haunting, and it has stuck with me and everyone else who has watched it.

The majority of these dogs will be raced in Queensland, where a recent investigation by AnimalKIND Australia and the Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds exposed the story of 3½-year-old greyhound Tarawi Minnie. Twelve days after her final race, undercover footage showed a seemingly healthy and mobile dog being dragged into the Rosewood vet clinic by her trainer. The trainer was seen leaving the vet clinic with her muzzle but not her. Investigators later found her body in a freezer. Tarawi Minnie deserved to live a long life post racing, and so do these 150 dogs from New Zealand.

New Zealand recognised that greyhound racing no longer has a social licence. Rather than becoming their industry's escape route, it is time Australian state and territory governments conceded there is no such thing as ethical dog racing. Yet the Victorian government continues to throw taxpayer money at this industry to keep it alive, despite our state carrying the mantle of the deadliest state in the nation. There are already enough dogs being raced to death and injury in our state. The minister must provide an assurance that Victoria will be off limits for any dog that is exported out of New Zealand.

Ballarat Base Hospital

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (19:37): (2744) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is that the minister publicly apologise for this government's continual failure at the Ballarat Base Hospital. Days ago the Premier toured the Ballarat Base Hospital on his redemption tour. He swapped his suit and cufflinks for a high-vis vest and a hard hat. For a full minute I thought it was Daniel Andrews returning to the political scene. Poor old Mr Carroll was joined by his beleaguered members for Wendouree and Ripon, both of whom are looking for their next gig, and the occasion was an announcement that the project is at long last nearing an end. But there is a catch. The final stage will only be finalised next year – late next year. So we have waited eight years, spent hundreds of millions of dollars – all down the gurgler – and it will only be finished months after the election. The project was budgeted at nearly $462 million in 2018, then revised to $655 million in 2024. The total bill has remained unchanged, so we are told. But who could believe that farcical figure when nearly every other project has blown out? It could be closer to $900 million for all I know. Remember the CFMEU flags that flew atop the hospital's three cranes some weeks ago? Before the Premier's visit those flags magically disappeared, but the union is still around, milking the system with ghost shifts and underworld activities, no doubt.

As for the surgeons, doctors and nurses, did they get an opportunity to ask the Premier questions? Did he have an explanation for the atrocious ED wait times, which are nearly double the statewide average, with patients waiting more than 40 hours for a bed, or perhaps the ambulance ramping reaching crisis levels with crews waiting 4½ hours just yesterday and even up to 12 hours in some cases? The bikies, gangsters and pimps prosper while the sick, vulnerable and elderly are abandoned on stretchers and in corridors. Our doctors, nurses and paramedics are working shift after shift, but they are burning out and walking away. Yes, we have a new Premier, but this is the same old government with no plan to fix the workforce shortages in the health sector and no credible plan to stop union corruption. Frankly, there are not enough gimmicky freebies and photo opportunities to save this lot. This November, vote Ben Carroll and Labor out.

Data centres

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:40): (2745) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy, and it is about the AI data centre planning failure of the Carroll Labor government. We know that data centres are a 24/7 industrial process, and they should never be built in residential areas, they should never be built in green wedge areas and they should not be in the urban growth corridor. This is just logical, and obviously a Liberal–National government would believe that local amenities and impact must be considered and that communities must have a say. We also believe that we need to have data centres that are operating on a closed system or using recycled water cooling, unlike this particular government. And unlike this particular government, in New South Wales, for instance, they put processes in five years ago. But no,

not this Victorian Labor government. They have a data strategy that has only just arrived, and it is an absolute mess.

The secretive state Labor government has shown its incompetence by failing to intelligently plan the placement of AI data centres. It has ignored community concerns about the noise, the heat they generate, the strain on electricity and water resources and the fact that it wants to put them right next to homes. So the action I seek is for the minister for artificial intelligence to clearly outline the following steps that this government will take to (1) review its failed approach to the planning and placement of AI data centres and their impact on the community and the environment; (2) show a strategy that considers the long-term infrastructure, environment and residential energy needs; and (3) demonstrate transparent consultation with communities to ensure their voices are heard and their concerns are properly addressed.

A massive $1.1 billion has been proposed for a data centre that is on 53 hectares in Clyde North, which is in that green wedge area and in the urban growth corridor. I know that mayor Michelle Crowther has worked very, very hard to make sure that the people in the City of Casey are looked after. But here we see a Labor government that are just putting anything anywhere, and they do not have a long-term vision or plan. Local objections include the potential strain on local electricity, on infrastructure, on water resources and on the underground springs and the noise pollution. These are all being ignored by the Carroll Labor government. Labor's disastrous handling of data centres has resulted in them being built in residential areas, and this is frustrating locals. They are complaining, and they will continue to complain as they get built and noise pollution becomes a major issue.

Responses

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (19:43): There were 14 adjournments to 12 different ministers, and written responses will be sought in accordance with the standing orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (19:43): Ms Crozier asked me during question time to review answers from Minister Stitt on a particular question. Minister Stitt definitely answered the supplementary question. While she was relevant to the substantive, she may not have completely answered the question, so I will request that she give a written answer. Given the lateness of the day, we will make it two days.

The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7:44 pm.