Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Tuesday 22 September 2026

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

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

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

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

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

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

Party abbreviations

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

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Tuesday 22 September 2026

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 12:03 pm, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Condolences

Dr Tim Read MP

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:04): I move:

> That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death on 19 September 2026 of Dr Tim Read MP and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as a member of the Legislative Assembly for the electorate of Brunswick from 2018 to 2026.

I know there will be several speakers today, and it is a hard day for many. Tim Read was a remarkable person who brought to public life a rare combination of scientific expertise, professional experience, political conviction and, above all, a genuine concern for people. Kindness was his superpower. Before entering Parliament Tim was a GP and then a doctor specialising in sexual health. He undertook extensive research, including into HIV, completed a doctorate and contributed to more than 60 published articles in medical literature. His career in medicine and research was a significant contribution to the community, but he was motivated to do more and was elected as the member for Brunswick in 2018 and served for eight years.

Tim came to Parliament with strong ideas. He was passionate about climate change, public health, housing, active transport, the prison system and the protection of vulnerable people. But what distinguished Tim was not just the causes he pursued but the way in which he pursued them. As a minister I found he was just someone you tried to help wherever you could. I know this is a sentiment shared by many and reflected on by my staff. He was prepared to challenge the status quo on issues important to him, and he was willing to put forward suggestions to government for practical reforms, sometimes based on his personal experience. He advocated for pill testing, reforms to public drunkenness laws and tobacco licensing, measures to address preventable chronic disease and changes to blood donation restrictions. Several of the ideas he advocated for became government policy. His advocacy extended well beyond health, however. He was also a persistent advocate for safer walking and cycling infrastructure, more green space and trees, better public schools and more housing for people experiencing insecure housing and homelessness – all areas where this government has attempted to honour his values and has made significant investments.

I also need to make mention of Tim's work on integrity and accountability and his belief that public trust in institutions really matters. As chair of the Integrity and Oversight Committee from 2023, Tim became the first non-government member to chair that committee. In that role he presided over inquiries into the powers of Victoria's integrity agencies as well as freedom-of-information laws. It is certainly not lost on us that this work aligns with the parliamentary business that will be debated in this place this week. In going through some of the text messages that I exchanged with Tim over the years, they were all about integrity, FOI – things in my responsibility as Attorney-General. But I did laugh at the amount of times he said, 'Sorry for the delay in responding. I was on the bike.'

Tim showed deep respect for the institution of Parliament and for the people who served within it. He always displayed a warmth and generosity towards his colleagues as well as an aspirational view of politics. This was on display in his final speech in the other place. Although, as we know, he had been diagnosed with an untreatable cancer, he did not use his final speech to talk about himself; instead he spoke about the future. He spoke about housing and people facing inequality. He spoke about strengthening integrity institutions. He spoke about climate change and the need to decarbonise. He

spoke about active transport and the importance of making it easier for people to walk and ride, and he spoke about the kind of future we could create for the next generation. He said:

> … politics is the work you do to improve people's circumstances, not just now but in the future. Politics is hope in motion.

Those words provide an insight into Tim Read's approach to public life: that politics could be a means of making people's lives better and that governments could make choices that would benefit people not only today but decades into the future.

I congratulate Tim on the difference and contribution he made to Victorian politics over eight years, advocating for the issues in which he believed. He listened. He engaged. He worked constructively with people across the political divide. His passing is a loss to the Parliament of Victoria, to the Brunswick community and to the many people whose lives he touched through his medical, scientific and public service. On behalf of the government, I extend my deepest condolences to his partner and children, to his family and friends and to his many colleagues and former colleagues who had the privilege of working with him. Tim Read devoted his life to public service in medicine, in science and in politics. He leaves the Parliament with a legacy of advocacy, integrity, compassion and hope. May he rest in peace.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:10): I rise in support of Minister Symes's motion, and on behalf of the Liberals and Nationals I pay tribute to Dr Tim Read, the late member for Brunswick, who died on Saturday at the age of 64. Tim and I came into this Parliament in the same election, in November 2018, he in the other place and I in this one. We did not share a great deal politically, but you do not have to agree with someone's political views to recognise that they are here for the right reasons. Tim plainly was. Before politics he was a doctor, caring for others. He worked as a GP in community health centres across Melbourne, then trained as a sexual health physician and ran the HIV clinic at the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre. He completed a PhD and published more than 60 peer-reviewed papers. That is a serious body of work, much of it done out of the public eye.

Tim and I shared a passion for restoring the Royal Children's Hospital colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service. He was a member of the Parliamentary Friends of the CPRS, which is ably co-chaired by his colleague and my fellow member for Western Victoria Region Dr Sarah Mansfield. I will be forever grateful for his and Sarah's gracious support of this cause. We also briefly served together on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee at the start of this Parliament. His time on the committee was short before he moved to the Integrity and Oversight Committee, but it was long enough to see how he operated. He was informed, considered and thoroughly decent. He was an honourable MP in the best sense. When the government agreed that the Integrity and Oversight Committee should have a non-government chair, Tim took the job and served with distinction. On the principle that those who hold power must answer to this Parliament, he and I were in furious agreement.

Last November he was diagnosed with metastatic melanoma. He could have stepped back quietly. Instead he spent his final months in this place advocating for causes close to his heart and for his local community. He was only very recently in this place, in the gallery, as he listened to a speech delivered by Dr Mansfield. In his valedictory speech in July, Tim said:

> We politicians might want our opponents to lose their seats, but we cannot help but feel some warmth towards those we work with.

Tim made that very easy. I extend our deepest sympathy to his partner Angela, to his children Louisa and Martin and all his family, to his Greens colleagues, to those in this chamber, to his staff and to the people of Brunswick he so ably served. Vale, Dr Tim Read.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:13): It is the greatest of honours to rise to pay tribute to the life of Dr Tim Read, member for Brunswick, colleague, mentor and friend. Tim had a knack in moments like this, when the tension and the emotions are so big you do not even know how you are going to move forward, of being able to just say the right thing. He would find some warm thing to

say or some funny quip that just broke that tension without ever diminishing the significance of the moment. It is hard to explain, but he was so special. We are really going to miss that. I could do with him here right now.

Tim passed away surrounded by his beautiful, loving family on Saturday. Tim cherished his family more than anything else, and their grief at his loss is immeasurable. My heart goes out to Angela, his children Louisa and Martin and all his family and friends. I learned of his passing while in Bendigo for an event, and I was dreading that long, lonely drive home. But the journey was punctuated every few minutes by a lovely message from someone who knew Tim: 'decent', 'one of the good guys', 'the best of us'. Each message, many from MPs across the political spectrum, including in here, brought fresh tears but also warmth to my heart, knowing how widely loved and respected he was. He earned that love and respect from a lifelong commitment to public health, social justice and environmental action.

Growing up in Melbourne Tim had a reputation for being brilliant. He loved science and learning but also had a deep interest in how that could be applied to improving the lives of others. He studied medicine at the University of Melbourne and developed a passion for public and preventative health. It was during that time that he became very politically active, most famously for getting arrested in the 1980s for spray painting tobacco signs as part of the BUGA UP – or Billboard Utilising Graffitists Against Unhealthy Promotions – movement, taking on big corporate interests harming health.

He worked as a GP in community health, later specialising in sexual health and coordinating the HIV clinic at the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre. He championed HIV prevention and treatment during a time when it was highly stigmatised and misunderstood, and his work was pivotal in helping to reshape the clinical and policy response to HIV. His innate love of learning continued, and he completed further studies in epidemiology and a PhD in HIV and contributed to dozens of peer-reviewed papers. But Tim was never one to accumulate knowledge for its own sake. He saw the transformative power of information and evidence and the need for more of it in our politics.

Tim understood that the climate crisis was the ultimate threat to our collective health and wellbeing yet saw the science being ignored by governments, so he did what any rational and evidence-respecting person would do: he joined the Greens. A key figure in building the Greens movement in the north for many years, Tim was first elected as the member for Brunswick in 2018. It was a historic moment – the first time the seat had ever been won by anyone other than Labor. He loved Brunswick, everything about it and everyone in it, and was committed to its service. Whether it was advocating for more accessible tram stops or safer cycling, providing air filters for community groups during COVID, more funding for the local public schools or saving the Sydney Road street party, no problem was too big or too small for Tim, and the bike-riding doctor developed a reputation for being a great local member.

But he was also a champion for causes that would improve the lives of everyone in Victoria. From pill testing and decriminalisation of public drunkenness to raising the age of criminal responsibility and allowing gay men to donate blood, from making our renewable energy targets more ambitious and abolishing group voting tickets to strengthening IBAC, Tim was a persistent advocate for changes that would make Victoria a safer and more just place, and he was remarkably effective, succeeding in every one of these causes. Tim was also a key voice of reason during the COVID pandemic. As the only doctor in the Parliament at the time, he worked constructively with the government to ensure that the lives of Victorians were protected and health workers were supported while also calling out disproportionate police force and measures that were not justified based on the evidence.

While he never wavered from his advocacy about public health issues and climate change, Tim is perhaps most widely credited for his role in shining a light on the need for strengthened integrity in Victoria. Tim believed that those in positions of power held a profound responsibility to serve the people who put them there honestly. He also recognised the immense harm that comes from corruption and a lack of trust in democratic institutions. In 2023 Tim became the first non-government chair of

Victoria's Integrity and Oversight Committee, leading landmark inquiries to strengthen the state's anti-corruption watchdog IBAC, a mission that we have the opportunity to complete this week.

Yet he did all of this with little fanfare. He never sought accolades. In fact some of his most important work happened behind the scenes. Few people would know, for example, that the state sexual and reproductive health strategy largely came about because of Tim. Politely but persistently, he knocked on the doors of Minister Mikakos, then Minister Foley, then Minister Thomas, armed with stats and charts and graphs about how syphilis, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections were evolving in Victoria and the need to take action. He knew that eradicating congenital syphilis, for example, or the transmission of HIV was possible but we needed evidence-based policies and ambitious targets. His quiet commitment to the cause, his refusal to give up and his faith in being able to bring others to the table using logic and reason, as well as a bit of kindness, paid off.

One of the things I loved most about Tim and that I think made him so well liked was that he assumed the best in others. While grounded in firm moral convictions and values, he was never quick to judge and was remarkably free of cynicism, especially for someone in politics. He was willing to engage with everyone, no matter what their perspective, and even change his own mind, because his motivation was never about his own self-advancement; it was to get outcomes that meaningfully improved people's lives. Tim knew that to do that you have to collaborate with others. Whether it was in his work as a GP or researcher, out in the community or in the Parliament, he recognised the power of the collective to bring about change, and he was a great connector of people, bringing them together with his kindness, pragmatism, humility, generosity and especially his humour. We will really miss that sense of humour, everything from the dad jokes and terrible puns to his piercing wit. He had a talent for bringing smiles to the faces of everyone he met.

This was an approach he brought to every part of his work, including in his office with his incredible staff, who he cared about so much – so much so that when he learned of his diagnosis, his first concern was for them. While he was the public face, he always valued and acknowledged the work of his staff, demonstrated by their unwavering loyalty. If you need any further proof points about his generosity of mind and heart, go and ask his staff. Just this morning they were reflecting that Parliament was his happy place. He could not believe that we got paid to be here and to do this work. He got such joy from being able to serve the community and try and make things better. It is why he kept on coming here even after his diagnosis, always with a smile, for as long as he could.

I know that for all of his staff who worked for him over the years, it was an absolute privilege, and they are really aching at his loss, as are all of us in the Greens party room. It is hard to describe how important Tim has been to us as a collective but also individually. Tim was our family. He was intelligent, wise, thoughtful, a calm presence, a confidant and a cheerleader, and he helped to guide us as a group but also supported each and every one of us. He was never too busy to answer a call or have a cup of tea, and he always left you feeling a bit better about things. I am really going to miss never having another one of those calls or cups of tea.

Throughout his life Tim always sought to make the most of his opportunities and positions to effect as much change as he could. It was the mark of his character that upon learning that he had metastatic melanoma last year he made it his mission to save VicHealth. Having served on its board, he used his personal journey to shine a spotlight on the critical role of Victoria's world-leading health promotion agency. He went about it as he did with every other cause: he argued the case rationally, engaged the media, mobilised the community and knocked on the door of some ministers for a constructive chat. While he did not get to see that one over the line, just as he always did with every cause he championed, he built a movement of people ready to continue his work. I am quietly hopeful we will get there. Heads up to the Minister for Health: expect some knocks on the door and ready yourself for some stats, charts and graphs.

Decent. One of the good guys. The best of us. Vale, my beautiful friend Tim Read.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:23): Tim Read's death was devastating news, mostly to his family whom he loved so dearly. To Angela and the rest of his family, our thoughts and our sympathies are with you. There are many who are grieving for this thoroughly decent man who so many of us had as a colleague and many more regarded as a friend. I would like to thank Dr Mansfield for that incredible speech that I think showed just how deeply his loss will be felt by his colleagues and his comrades in the Greens and by those in the Brunswick community who he loved so much and who endorsed him so resoundingly but also by the Parliament and the people of Victoria who have lost – too soon – a leader and a representative who made a difference to many people's lives. Tim's faith in the possibilities of a better democracy was like a beacon, and it inspired so many. You only have to read the outpouring of grief in the words that have been written in the last couple of days since his death and since his announcement of his cancer diagnosis. People realised, once it was clear that melanoma was going to take his life too soon, that we were all going to lose something that was clearly very special.

Dr Mansfield spoke about his health advocacy, obviously as a general practitioner, a medical researcher, a legislator and a policymaker. His interest in the wonders of medicine even got to the point of him – when we were supposed to be in a meeting talking about significant matters of policy – wanting to show the scans of how his immunotherapy was going, because he marvelled at what both medical science and universal health care could deliver in a country like Australia to someone like him, who had contracted a cancer that was going to take his life, and how medical science and the public health system were giving him a treatment that was truly remarkable. I am very privileged to have been able to share some of those conversations about that with him.

He was clearly a passionate campaigner for public health. Dr Mansfield spoke about his advocacy and activism on tobacco control, and one of the first conversations I had with him in this place in early 2023 was about vaping, an issue that I was concerned about. I was concerned for many reasons at the time, particularly because there were some moves in other parts of the country from some of his colleagues to take a different approach to dealing with vaping issues. He understood what was at risk and understood the importance of maintaining a line on public health advocacy and keeping the gains that had been made over a generation against the interests of big tobacco, and he kept that until the end.

Of course I worked most closely with Tim for the last four years on the Integrity and Oversight Committee. He became the chair in 2023, and alongside the deputy chair Kim Wells we worked closely together to deal with some particularly confronting and challenging issues. Every Monday of a parliamentary sitting week we would go into those IOC meetings, and I always made the point of sitting next to him and not opposite or on another side of the table, because you could always have conversations and you could always thrash something out in that context in that room. That spoke to the person that he was. I think developing a mutual respect and trust to work through some of the issues that confronted that committee is something I will value for a very long time. The report we released on the adequacy of IBAC's legislative framework in December 2025 I think is a great testament to the work that he had done for a very long time but also his capacity to work with us on a committee where no-one had a majority to come up with a legislative framework and on a series of policy recommendations that were about advancing the public interest. Those discussions were always robust, and I was grateful that we were able to hold each other's feet to the fire on occasion and that there was a robustness in the conversation that enabled me to challenge him and for him to challenge me but for the respect and trust to endure, for us both to always know that we were both trying to seek better policy outcomes and for him to have the confidence in someone from a different party whose political interests were not necessarily always aligned with his to come and find mutual benefit.

Everyone has said Tim was a decent human being, and he absolutely was, but you were wise to never mistake his decency for a lack of political nous. Tim's political mind was sharp and focused, and he was a damn good politician. I say that not in the pejorative, because too many deride politics and deride politicians, but I think Tim saw a nobility in the pursuit of politics, which I think is why he chose it, and I think it serves as an inspiration to many. He envisaged a better political system, and I think his

contribution is making us all better representatives. He is going to be missed, but he leaves a legacy that will endure. Vale, Tim.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:31): I rise to add the Nationals' voice to this condolence motion and extend our deepest sympathies today to his partner Angela, children Martin and Louisa, family and friends, staff and dear colleagues, who are in great distress. Thinking of this place and the cut and thrust of Parliament and debate, being an old mathematician I had a vision when thinking about Dr Tim Read last night of a Venn diagram. Often we focus on the parts of the Venn diagram that we do not agree with and that are the opposites or the issues, the ideas and the ideals that are outside. The other day after Tim's valedictory, which I missed because I was in here on duty, I saw him up in Sessions Cafe and went over and said that all my team, all our team, the Nationals, said that it was one of the most amazing valedictory speeches that they had heard. When I was having a quiet chat to him it just reflected how much in all of us there is the part of the Venn diagram that we all can connect with, which is recognising someone of huge dignity and integrity and commitment and passion and humour, and humour is a really good part of that Venn diagram. When we all walk away from this place – and Tim did not get the opportunity to – there are those people that you meet and have sometimes fleeting experiences with, but you still take a little bit and put them in your heart.

As I said, there were issues and ideals where we maybe sat kind of on opposite ends of the seesaw. Maybe we were actually trying to achieve the same things and just wanted to come at them from different ways, but Tim certainly was a man of huge integrity. I like raising this point: he was a little bit older than I am, but back in the day when we were growing up HIV was a hugely scary issue – and we all know those ads – and for Tim, in his early stages, to want to go into a career and dedicate himself to the health of very vulnerable people in an unknown space I think speaks a lot to the man. Also then to focus on sexual health – which is, again, not for the faint-hearted – and then to go into bat on issues in this place around VicHealth and the importance of health prevention shows a healing life in itself.

These are my reflections on Tim. Reading his valedictory speech, 'hope in motion', as Minister Symes just said, was a nice thing to think about – hope in motion. We do not often walk into this place thinking it is hope in motion, but that is a really good thought to take into our hearts as well. The other comment is that he often had a smile on his face for others; he wanted to do the work so that there would be a smile on the face of others into the future. When, with time, that healing occurs, hopefully, for all of his family and friends, he will crop up as a smile on the face of those that loved him. So may I say vale, Dr Tim Read.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:35): On behalf of the community of Legalise Cannabis Victoria, we are deeply saddened by the passing of Dr Tim Read. Tim brought compassion, integrity, experience and always humour, with a wealth of knowledge, to his work in this Parliament and the community. He cared deeply about the people he represented, and he was not afraid to stand up for what he believed in. We collaborated on a range of campaigns, and Tim was always forthright and insightful and shared generously with his colleagues and the community. It was a privilege to work alongside him. Our thoughts are with his family, friends and colleagues at this very sad time. Vale, Tim Read, a Renaissance man, advocate and campaigner, well loved by so many.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:36): I also rise to make a short contribution on the condolence motion for Dr Tim Read, the member for Brunswick. Dr Tim Read has been acknowledged across the Parliament as a member of conviction and compassion who championed human rights and fought for integrity in public life. When I was the member for Pascoe Vale in the other place, which is obviously a neighbouring district to that of Dr Tim Read, I saw those attributes in force across our shared communities. I personally came to know Tim as a genuinely decent man. Whilst Dr Read and I strongly disagreed on some policy matters, when you were hanging out at a farmers market – indeed I think it was at a farmers market that I first met Tim, with his bike and a basket full of vegetables – or a citizenship ceremony together, it became more often than not about what you had in common.

Dr Read fought gently but relentlessly for justice, self-determination and better outcomes for First Nations people; a more humane approach to those who seek asylum in this country; the protection and enhancement of the rich multicultural fabric of Melbourne's north; the fundamental human right of shelter, a safe home; and our local environment, particularly our local waterways. He was a champion of active and accessible transport, as others have said. We ultimately agreed on bike lanes, although some were more controversial than others. I particularly want to acknowledge his work in pushing for the government to do more to address gambling harm. Dr Read was a man who lived and fought for his values.

I also had the opportunity to serve with Dr Read on the Parliament's Electoral Matters Committee. Tim brought professionalism and integrity to the table. Alongside members in this place we conducted an important inquiry into the impacts of social media on Victorian elections and Victoria's electoral administration. In that inquiry we heard how public discourse in elections could be poisoned through the use of social media to abuse, mislead and manipulate others. We know the test of anyone's character is how they conduct themselves during the contest of an election. Unfortunately, this contest and this discourse is worsening over time. Whilst the final report highlighted these ongoing challenges, Dr Read did not just call out this behaviour from the comfort of a parliamentary committee report. I really want to acknowledge and thank Dr Read for his generosity and kindness during the 2018 election campaign when I was the subject of personal bullying and misogynistic attacks in Pascoe Vale. It would have been easy to do as some did and look the other way, particularly as a new candidate from another party. But Dr Read was a professional who understood the difference between policy disagreement and abuse and personal attack, and even though he was not contesting Pascoe Vale, he called it out for what it was. I did not get the opportunity to say this to him, but I will never forget his kindness in relation to those matters.

As I said at the outset, clearly Dr Read was someone of compassion and conviction, someone who was gentle and kind and someone who was brave and a true professional. He did not just say that integrity should be a key feature of the political discourse, he lived it each and every day. I am grateful for knowing Dr Read and for the opportunity to have worked alongside him locally and in this place. I acknowledge and express my condolences to Tim's family, his friends and his staff and to the Greens political party. I wish you peace in the comfort that Dr Tim Read helped make the world a better place. Vale, Tim Read.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:40): I also rise to add my voice to the condolence motion for Dr Tim Read, the member for Brunswick, who died on 19 September at the age of 64. I want to extend my condolences to Angela, his children Martin and Louisa and his wider family, his staff and his Greens colleagues. I cannot imagine the enormous pain and grief you would all be going through. I want to express my deep condolences to you all.

I will be very brief. A lot of people have discussed Dr Tim Read's extensive background as a doctor. He really did have the sort of kindness and curiosity that most people have come across at GP clinics throughout their lives. That inquisitive nature and kindness came across in my interactions with Tim Read. We first crossed paths back in 2018, when I was running for the Northern Metro Region in the number two position and I attended a metropolitan transport forum in Brunswick alongside him. The first thing he said to me was, 'You're brave – not many of your friends here.' We joked in that regard. We disagreed that night but with good humour. He was very strongly in favour of protected bike lanes on Sydney Road, and I had more concerns about the impact on small business, but he always found a way to make humour out of it and disagree well. Our Parliament will miss him for that, because there is not enough of that in this Parliament. His legacy leaves a good example for the rest of us on how to disagree.

Our paths crossed again in 2022 when I returned to the same Brunswick town hall for the metropolitan transport forum, where we also disagreed in good humour. I recall the enormous warmth in the room for Dr Tim Read. We were on a pre-poll booth together in Brunswick, and I could see the enormous warmth of the Brunswick community. I had a couple of old ladies come up and say, 'Good on you for

being here. We're Liberal voters, but I love that man Dr Tim Read. I'm going to have to vote for him in the lower house.' You would see that over and over again, and I think it is a sign that he was clearly a very good local member. That resulted on election night in an almost 12 per cent swing towards him. That goes to show the enormous work he did behind the scenes for his community and the effort of his staff as well to assist the community with all sorts of local matters, and he should be remembered fondly in that regard. He was loved by his local community. We have all crossed paths with him on the roads as we would see him coming into Parliament. I often come into Parliament via Brunswick, and we would all see him cycling in.

I also would like to, as other members of Parliament have, acknowledge the work he did on the Integrity and Oversight Committee and the work he did on broader integrity reforms in this place. Vale, Dr Tim Read.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:44): I want to add my contribution to this. It is a measure of Dr Read that someone who is the polar opposite to him on the political spectrum is standing up here and saying how sad he will be to not see Tim around the place again. Tim and I did not agree on many things politically, but the one thing you could always count on him for was good humour and the occasional dad joke. No matter how bad a mood he was in, he would always be able to give you a smile. I do not think the words 'thoroughly decent' do the man any justice. He is probably someone we can all learn from in this place about how we can have different views but be nice about it. He will be missed. Vale, Dr Read.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:45): I rise today to give my contribution to this condolence motion, and I want to express my deepest condolences to Tim's loved ones. Cancer is a profoundly cruel and indiscriminate disease, and in this case it has taken from our community a truly decent and compassionate person far too soon.

Tim was an electoral neighbour. In fact his office felt like it was about only 200 metres away. We shared the same diverse, passionate community across Melbourne's inner north, and he was a constant presence in the area. He backed the local cafes, he supported the hardworking traders up and down Sydney Road and he regularly showed up at our community health hubs. He understood the progressive, caring spirit of Brunswick because he shared it, he lived it and he breathed it every single day.

Politics in this place can often be combative and filled with disagreement, but you would be hard-pressed to find a single person in this Parliament who would not describe Tim Read as a decent man. You just knew that he genuinely cared about people. You knew he was a person who lived his values every single day. I knew it because it was in my mailbox all the time. You knew his convictions were always grounded in a desire to leave the community better than he found it. Nowhere was this more apparent than in his lifelong dedication to health.

Before he came to this place, Tim worked on the front line of public health as a doctor and a clinical researcher, and he brought that expertise and immense compassion directly into political life. He understood intimately that health care is not just about treating symptoms in a clinic, it is about addressing the root causes of vulnerability and inequality in our society. Having spent time working in community health myself, I have always had a profound respect for the way Tim championed evidence-based, health-led policies. He was a strong advocate for the most marginalised Victorians not being left behind in a system meant to help them. He knew that the best public policy is always driven by science and tempered with empathy.

Beyond his work in health, Tim was deeply committed to a brand of progressive politics that sought to genuinely lift people up. I want to thank him for being an ally to First Nations Victorians, especially mob in my neighbourhood, who spoke of him with such kindness and affection. When it came to the hard, necessary work of treaty and truth-telling, he walked alongside Aboriginal Victorians. I will always be grateful for his solidarity. This weight of loss in the community is really heavy.

To his colleagues in the Greens, who have lost a dear friend and a dedicated advocate for their movement, I want to offer my sincere condolences. To his electorate office staff, who I often see at Sparkly Bear, who share his passion for the Brunswick community and who are now navigating this heartbreaking loss while continuing to keep the doors open for locals: my thoughts are with you. To his family and loved ones: please know that his legacy is one that you can absolutely be proud of. He gave so much of his heart to the people of Brunswick. His legacy of kindness and advocacy will endure.

I was trying to reflect on a beautiful memory with Tim. I have got to tell you, a little bit like Mr Mulholland, my memories are of the long days on pre-poll with Tim, because you get to know a person on pre-poll. I got to know Tim there. I remember seeing the joy on his face because he was spending all day talking to his neighbours. Sometimes he even had former clients come up, and it was like he was running a doctor's clinic right there on the pre-poll. They came up with such joy, and they thanked him for what he did for them. He remembered them and their stories. It was kind of extraordinary to watch. He had genuine care for everyone that came up and asked him a question about what he would do for the community. He was a man of principle and, above all, a man of deep, deep kindness. I remember when I joined this place the first thing anyone told me about Tim Read was, 'Oh, he's so nice.' Everywhere I would go in Brunswick they would speak with such affection for Dr Tim Read: 'He's so nice, he's so good and he's so just.' He will be deeply missed in his community and right across the Parliament. Thank you for your allyship, and I will miss you too. Vale, Dr Tim Read.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:50): I also would like to speak in support of this condolence motion remembering Dr Tim Read. I would first like to express my condolences to his family, friends, staff and of course parliamentary colleagues, for whom this must be devastating.

When I listened to Tim's valedictory speech, talking about people that he disagreed with but still had a good relationship with, I could not help thinking that he was talking to me. We disagreed on almost everything politically, but I never had a run-in with Tim and actually always had a very good relationship with him. In fact I would like to just share an anecdote which his colleagues may not be aware of. There was a very different dynamic after Tim and I were first elected in 2019. This was before the pandemic, and there were many on the crossbench that were very optimistic about the prospects for drug law reform. Although I disagreed with Tim on many things, drug law reform was one issue where we both strongly agreed on many things.

Tim was very generous. I think he saw it as strategically valuable to have allies on this sort of issue such as me, because it was quite unusual to have someone from what is considered the right of politics advocating for drug law reform, and we actually cooperated on a number of things in 2019. One of those things was an event – I do not think it was organised by the Greens, but you could say that the audience was very Greens aligned – and I was invited to speak at that along with Tim. It was at a bar in Brunswick, and there were lots of Greens supporters there. People were drinking beer and having fun, there was music and stuff, and then they got these two guys on the stage, Tim and me, to talk about drugs. Tim was very gracious in the way that he dealt with me on the stage, considering that he sort of acknowledged that I was in foreign territory and might get a hostile response, and he encouraged people there to listen to my views on things and how they might be a bit different but actually we might even agree on some things. It was really annoying, because I really wanted to hate the Greens all the time and I could not hate him. He was just one of those guys that you could not really find a way to hate. I agree with him that you might have people in this place – and people from the outside do not see it – with whom you might have very divergent political views on things but nevertheless you do have that human affection for them in one way or another. He acknowledged that; in fact he said it in his valedictory speech.

I would just like to say that I am going to miss Tim as well. I did enjoy the times when we did agree on things and cooperate on things. I will always remember that time in the pub in Brunswick – and I was actually feeling very nervous at that time, I might add, because I was just newly elected and going

into a Greens pub in Brunswick was a bit daring of me. I am going to miss Tim as well. He was a decent person, and I think that, as has been said by everyone, we all acknowledge that. We are going to miss him.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:54): I rise also to make a contribution about a dear colleague who we are going to miss greatly. It is really hard to put things into words, but like so many who have sought to do so as part of the motion today, I wish to offer my condolences to the Brunswick community, particularly to his partner Ange, his children and family and all of his office staff. Tim was an amazing person. He listened to people even when he really did not have to; he would always listen. He had this ability to have such an open mind that is really becoming of a person who does this line of work. That openness, I think, could be welcomed across the political divide in finding solutions for community.

Something that I really admired about Tim was his courage, which is not necessarily the first thing that people would attribute to him, but he had far more courage than I ascribe to myself. He would go in there and he would have the tough conversations, and he would relish the opportunity to make a rational argument and to contribute in those moments. He would never shy away from those opportunities. I think that courage and his reputation preceded him. It preceded his time in the Parliament: his time as a GP during the HIV/AIDS crisis, his decision to specialise in sexual health and his PhD in HIV control. I was at an event just last week that turned out to be the day before he passed, and it was a room full of medical researchers and stakeholders who spoke with such love about Tim and wished that he was in the position healthwise to be there to see them all, because they recognised the contribution that he had made over many years.

He was a man of bold ideas. Many of those are now policy in this state and have made our community better. Some of his ideas were too bold, and so I cannot even speak of some of them because they are too bold. I would find myself often aligning in conversation with him on some of those topics. That was something that I really appreciated, finding solidarity in some of those moments.

Tim was integrity. You could not fault the man. Over the weekend I was listening to JOY 94.9, which is a queer radio station, and they broadcast an interview that they conducted with Tim back in 2025. It is online as a podcast; you can all listen. A lot of it was really quite telling about him and his beliefs and his character, and a lot of it is still timely, even for this week when we are considering legislation before the Parliament. He spoke about trust in institutions. He spoke about the need for transparency and openness. These were things that he lived. He spoke about the need to change a cautious culture of reticence, redaction and secrecy. He said that when governments and departments get secretive, people get suspicious. He was reflecting on the distrust in institutions and in governments that we are seeing at the moment. He said:

> … the voting public will be more forgiving of ministers and governments when, over time, they understand more about why decisions are made.

I think this is something about Tim: his advice, whether public or private, was always so sage. I hope in this time of reflection that it is an opportunity for people to listen to some of those things that he put on record time and time again. He had the right idea on a lot of things. Tim is impossible to replace, and he was taken far too soon. We will miss him, and I hope that we honour his legacy. Vale, Tim.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:59): I speak with a very heavy heart. We knew this was coming, but we refused to accept it. Then we all found out the news over the weekend, and it still hurts. It hurts deeply. To Tim's beloved family Ange, Martin and Louisa and many friends we send our deepest love, condolences and prayers during this time. I am feeling very privileged right now to offer this contribution on this incredible man, leader and friend, Dr Tim Read. He was a strong and much-loved local member for Brunswick, a champion for his community and a giant of the Greens movement. If Tim could see all of this, he would probably say to us, 'What is all this fuss about?' This speaks to exactly who he was: never about him, always about others. This was reflected in the way that he interacted with people here in Parliament and in community. Even when

Tim received his diagnosis, he made the focus about others. His unending optimism in people was on full display, using his position, power and privilege to speak strongly on important issues. He stood strongly on why it was important for governments to invest sustainably in work on preventable diseases and why it was important to invest in good and affordable healthcare systems. More prominent was Tim's leadership in the push to save and to protect VicHealth, the world's first health promotion foundation, set up more than four decades ago, which was, sadly, dissolved by this government. Tim understood clearly why this was important: if people did not have to die from preventable diseases, it meant that they could spend more time with their loved ones.

Tim cared deeply about democracy that had strong foundations in integrity. He fought hard across the political aisle to put in place the strongest safeguards to protect democracy from exploitation. He got the job done by working for a long time to abolish group voting tickets, and I am so grateful that he got to witness these reforms take place. Now, this week, we get to pass stronger reforms for IBAC to give them the powers they need to strengthen and protect integrity and democracy in this state. Although, Tim, you will not get the public acknowledgement for all your hard work behind the scenes, today we acknowledge you. We acknowledge your long-held commitment to integrity in our democracy.

High-quality public education was important to Tim. He was our Greens spokesperson for education. He took this responsibility very seriously, leading the call for the recent parliamentary inquiry into public school funding. He understood that Victorian children and public schools could not afford any more delays, neglect and indifference and fought hard for public schools to receive the urgent upgrades they needed, including teachers having access to fair pay but also the necessary resources to educate our next generation.

Tim had a great zest for life and really embodied what it means to be a public servant for all. He would serve all his constituents of Brunswick with the same measure of fairness and care regardless of their political preferences. He understood people's anxiety about losing faith in institutions and how challenging times are right now for so many. He met people and organisations with such an authentic desire to make their lives better, and he did this with such clear purpose of responsibility and intentionality. If you need further evidence of this, just jump online to see the outpouring of love and gratitude for his work.

In this line of work Tim knew that he needed an extensive toolkit, but I reckon the sharpest tools that Tim had were his wit and his compassion. In 2025, last year, in summer both our teams had organised for Tim and me to go to the local park and hand out free Zooper Dooper iceblocks to locals on their way home from work. But what we did not plan for that day was that it was going to be a 35-degree-plus day. I had arrived with my esky on wheels and Tim, always on his bike, came pedalling through with his hi-vis, because safety and visibility were important to him. As we walked around the park and got our steps up, so many people came up to him – they knew exactly who he was – enthusiastically sharing their stories and also talking about the way Tim and his team had helped them with their local issues. This was Tim – never engaging community from behind a computer screen but instead choosing to be out there, visible and accessible. He understood the importance of one-on-one relationships, of listening and talking to people to hear where they were coming from and always being open to different lived experiences. I will never forget the day you told us you had made peace with your fate. It was very hard for us to accept this, but you stayed with us to the end, Tim.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Tim's team, who he absolutely adored and respected, because the reality is that beside any MP there is a dedicated and loyal team – his beloved team of Ebony, Tahlia, Emma, Mark, Neha, Violetta, Jovilyn, Iliana, Tim, AJ and Jay and many more he offered opportunities to throughout his eight years of service. You may have lost your fight to this cruel disease, Tim, but the largeness of your spirit and values live on in us. You were the best of us, and I thank you for your pursuit of honour and integrity in politics. Thank you for your service, your friendship, your kindness and your brilliance. You can rest now. Let us take it from here. Rest in love.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (13:06): I rise to also express my condolences on the loss of our dear colleague Tim Read. I share my deepest sympathies with Louisa, Martin and Ange, Tim's family. I want to say at this time: thank you for your generosity in sharing Tim with the world the way that you did throughout his parliamentary career and his time in the Greens. And thank you for your generosity now as we all grieve the loss of this incredible man. I send my sympathies to Tim's community, who adored him as their local representative, and to all of his close friends and family. Your Greens family are mourning with you as we farewell this incredible human. We have lost a champion for our climate, for public health, for bike safety and for integrity and democracy. Our party room has lost an irreplaceable voice.

Tim, you were endlessly sensible. You were kind, and you always had a joke ready to alleviate tension and to create connection with the people that you were debating or discussing anything with. You had an incredible ability to locate precisely the principles and the values at the heart of any decision that we were making and to allow those to guide the discussion and the conversation, which it would inevitably be with Tim. There was no hectoring; there was only an exploration of the correct course of action, and invariably you found your way there. Tim, you brought your Hippocratic sensibility to your work in Parliament. It has been spoken about today, and I know that your colleagues and your community felt that – the rare and beautiful curiosity and openness that you brought to parliamentary work. You were always willing to listen. You sought to understand and then to help where you could.

I have lost a friend. Tim, you were always the one that turned up. You came to the south side for one of our campaign events, and you got doored on Chapel Street for your trouble. You showed up to my gigs. I will really miss starting my day by bumping into you and seeing your smile at the bike racks here at Parliament. Your achievements are so many, and we will honour your memory and your legacy in all of the beautiful, positive changes that you have brought to this place and to our state and for our environment. Though you would not want the fuss, we will not forget your contribution in bringing forward those things. I am so glad you got to see some of those reforms pass in the last few weeks, and we will continue your work where it remains unfinished. Vale, Tim Read. Go well, my wonderful friend.

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

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

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (13:11): I move, by leave:

> That, as a further mark of respect to the memory of Dr Tim Read MP, the house be suspended for 1 hour.

Motion agreed to.

Sitting suspended 1:12 pm until 2:15 pm.

Peter Katsambanis

The PRESIDENT (14:15): I advise the house of the death on 5 September 2026 of Peter Argyris Katsambanis, member of the Legislative Council for the electoral province of Monash from 1996 to 2002. I ask that, as a mark of respect, members rise in their places for 1 minute.

Members stood in their places.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026

Multicultural Victoria Amendment Bill 2026

Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Royal assent

The PRESIDENT (14:17): I have a message from the Governor, dated 15 September:

> The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Acts of the present Session presented to her by the Clerk of the Parliaments:
>
> **38/2026** Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Act 2026
>
> **39/2026** Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Act 2026
>
> **40/2026** Multicultural Victoria Amendment (Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) Act 2026

I have a message from the Lieutenant-Governor, dated 22 September:

> The Lieutenant-Governor informs the Legislative Council that he has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Acts of the present Session presented to him by the Clerk of the Parliaments:
>
> **41/2026** Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Act 2026

Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Clerk's corrections

The PRESIDENT (14:18): Under joint standing order 6(1) I have received a report from the Clerk of the Parliaments informing the house that she has made a correction in the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026. The correction is as follows:

> Council amendment No 6 agreed to by the Assembly inserts a clause adding new section 171AAA. New subsection 171AAA(a) refers to the "Magistrates' Court 1989". I have inserted the word 'Act' between 'Court' and '1989'.

The correction ensures there is no ambiguity in the reference to the act.

Committees

Select Committee on the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Work from Home) Bill 2026

Election of chair

The PRESIDENT (14:19): I advise the house that I have received a letter from the committee manager of the Select Committee on the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Work from Home) Bill 2026, dated 21 September 2026. The letter reads as follows:

> The Select Committee on the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Work from Home) Bill 2026 met today to commence its Inquiry.
>
> I write to advise that the committee was unable to resolve the election of its chair. I report this matter to you so that you may bring it to the attention of the house for resolution under Standing Order 23.10(4) as it sees fit.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Electricity infrastructure

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:20): (1485) My question is for the minister for energy. Minister, I refer to your statements at the CEDA conference, where you were a keynote speaker, on Tuesday last week. You said to the attendees that you will 'stay the course' and that:

> Equivocating scares the market. Sends projects onto the scrap heap. Certainty is something that is incumbent on governments to be very consistent about.

And on 14 September you told the AFR that pausing transmission projects would see astronomically higher bills. I therefore ask: will the Premier's decision to order a review of the Western Renewables Link cause the heinous or shocking outcomes that you have predicted?

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:20): I appreciate the question, Mr Davis, but given your time in this place – you are asking me for an opinion, so technically it could be ruled an inappropriate question. However, what you have asked me about – I think you were in attendance at the same conference I was – I stand by my comments. And what I want to reiterate is that the way you have phrased your question is factually incorrect. There is no review of the project. There is no pause and review, which is the policy position of your party. What has been committed is a cost assessment, Mr Davis, in relation to transparency in relation to the cost of this project, impact on bills et cetera. The project is commencing. It will continue to commence whilst this assessment of costs is underway. This is not a pause and review of the project.

Last week I had the opportunity to talk about the Nexa Advisory report, which is all about what happens if you delay the project, basically putting the energy security of our state at risk. I am very happy to, again, seek to table the report, because what it does show is that the cost of not proceeding with this project, the cost of delaying this project, the cost of pausing this project, which others are on the record of doing, will cost Victorians more on their bills, risk energy reliability. Would you like me to table it, Mr Davis?

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:23): Well, that was pathetic. The minister tries to argue that a cost assessment will have no impact on the project. I ask: Minister, what if the cost assessment argues that the costs are high? Will the project proceed to add to the bills of Victorians, even at the range of $4 billion?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:23): Mr Davis, thank you for your question. What we know is that the cost to not build this transmission line is something that we cannot afford. This is about –

David Davis: On a point of order, President, the minister was asked about a cost assessment and a particular outcome. She was not asked a question about if that outcome does not occur. She cannot answer a question of her own choosing; she has to answer the question that is asked.

The PRESIDENT: I believe in her answer she was answering the question.

Jaclyn SYMES: What we know is that the cost of not proceeding with this project is something that is unaffordable. In relation to the cost assessment, this is about transparency.

Mpox

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:24): (1486) My question today is to the Minister for Health. Minister, as you would be aware, mpox rates are rising again in Victoria, with at least 52 cases reported since the start of last month. What new actions have you taken to ensure that

people most at risk are aware of the current increase in cases and are being directed towards testing and vaccination?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (14:24): I thank Mr Puglielli for this important question, and it is obviously an issue of importance in terms of public health, and our government will continue to support the incredible work particularly of the community health sector and the sexual health services that are out there every day providing that expert public health advice. I have been updated by the department in relation to the additional public health messaging that is being issued to Victorians about this issue, and there have been additional alerts sent out by the chief health officer. Obviously we are very keen to make sure that people are aware that there is a vaccination available, and that is something that I know the health department, the chief health officer and our health services, including primary health, are all working very hard on to get that message out there. There is an important message to be heard about the fact that vaccinations do make a big difference. We also want to make sure that the stigma associated with coming forward and presenting to health services, if somebody feels that they need assistance, is not a barrier to seeking health care and vaccinations. We will continue to work closely with and take the expert advice of our public health team within the department.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:26): Thank you, Minister, for that response. Minister, how is surveillance being undertaken to quickly respond to new surges in cases or outbreaks?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (14:26): There is monitoring that occurs through the public health team within the Department of Health. I am very happy to seek some further updates for you and provide that outside of the standing orders, but I know that our public health team, under the leadership of the chief health officer, works hard to make sure that we are keeping track of the cases that are being notified. Of course there is always the issue around under-reporting or under-representation in those datasets, so I am happy to take some further advice from the department and get that to you.

Ministers statements: mineral resources

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:27): Today I rise to update the house on the release of the 2026 *Victorian Critical Minerals Roadmap* update. Recently I had the pleasure of visiting Southern Cross Gold, a great local company based out of Kilmore, to mark the opening of their Sunday Creek exploration decline, the first new underground mining decline developed in Victoria in 20 years. Underground drilling has started; it is all about testing the feasibility of mining in the area, and it is the first major step towards establishing a new antimony and gold mine. The project already employs around a hundred local people and, if it progresses, could support around 500 jobs. This will in turn contribute more than $5.5 billion to Victoria's economy over just the first decade.

The opening comes as Victoria builds momentum across its critical minerals sector, turning growing interest into investment and new projects. A fully developed critical minerals sector could create more than 7000 jobs across Victoria over the next 10 years, of course with major opportunities in regional Victoria. The Sunday Creek project provides a real-world example of how the Labor government is working to support the state's critical minerals industry by enabling responsible exploration and building future supply chain opportunities. Through our updated critical minerals road map we are helping to unlock the state's resource potential in a way that creates jobs and attracts investment whilst maintaining the high standards that the community expects.

Regional growth starts with jobs, and Victoria is open for business for responsible minerals developments. We will continue to support this project and others that evolve in the coming years. It

is only Labor that will guarantee secure local jobs for working people and back projects that could deliver billions of dollars for Victoria.

Electricity infrastructure

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:29): (1487) My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. AusNet is controlled by Brookfield Asset Management. On 6 March 2026 a Brookfield fund filed its annual report with the US Securities and Exchange Commission. It described the Western Renewables Link as a A$4 billion project and stated:

> AusNet finalized the commercial framework with the Victorian Government and executed a binding construction contract for WRL …

Minister, does the government accept Brookfield's description of the Western Renewables Link as an approximately $4 billion project – yes or no?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:29): I thank Mrs McArthur for her question. Mrs McArthur, as per my answer to Mr Davis's question, in relation to the government's position we are undertaking a cost assessment to provide transparency to Victorians. We want to ensure that we have up-to-date independent information about the cost of this project. At this point in time, procurement has commenced, and as I have indicated in my answer, this is a cost assessment that will demonstrate the true cost of this project. But what we already know is that we cannot afford not to build transmission.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:30): Well, Minister, you failed to answer the question. On 18 May, more than two months after the $4 billion Securities and Exchange Commission disclosure, PAEC asked your predecessor to provide updated advice on total estimated investment costs for WRL. She replied, 'Absolutely,' acknowledging those costs end up on bills. Yet on 27 May your government responded in writing with only a $1.53 billion construction estimate and a $1.6 billion construction contract. If Brookfield's $4 billion figure is wrong, will you unequivocally state today that the government's total investment cost for WRL remains at $1.53 billion?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:31): I thank Mrs McArthur for her question, and what I take from your question is a full endorsement of an independent cost review, which we have commenced.

Medicinal cannabis

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:31): (1488) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister Hamer. Last week the New South Wales Parliament passed legislation to create fairer drug-driving laws for patients who use lawfully prescribed medicinal cannabis. Under the New South Wales reforms, eligible patients will no longer automatically face penalties simply because THC is detected in their system at the roadside, provided they meet strict conditions and are not driving while impaired. This recognises a basic reality: THC can remain detectable in a person's system long after the effects of impairment have passed. Yet in Victoria, patients prescribed medicinal cannabis can still face serious consequences simply because THC is detected, even when they are not impaired. So my question is: Minister, will the government commit to following New South Wales's lead and fixing Victoria's roadside drug-testing laws for medicinal cannabis patients?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (14:32): I thank Ms Payne for her question. I will refer it accordingly.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:32): I thank the minister for referring it on. In 2024 the Victorian government committed $4.9 million to a driving trial, acknowledging the need to reform driving laws for medicinal cannabis patients. While I acknowledge that in November 2024 the

government accepted Legalised Cannabis Victoria's amendment to the Road Safety Act 1986 giving courts discretion not to cancel the licences of medicinal cannabis patients who test positive for the presence of THC while driving, this matter is still unresolved at the roadside drug-testing stage. This government's 18-month closed-circuit track trial is well and truly completed, according to the government's own timeframe, yet we are still awaiting the findings. Victorians deserve certainty – to know what the evidence shows and when the government will act. Minister, when will the trial findings be released so that we can finally reform Victoria's outdated driving laws for medicinal cannabis patients?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (14:33): I thank Ms Payne for the supplementary, and I will refer that accordingly also.

Ministers statements: kindergarten funding

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (14:33): I rise to update the house on the Carroll Labor government's nation-leading free kinder program. Last week new research from the University of Melbourne confirmed what parents, carers and educators across Victoria already knew: that access to two years of quality early childhood education gives children a better start in life. The landmark five-year educational and developmental gains in the early childhood study involved 149 early childhood services and more than 2000 children, teachers and families. The research found that two years of kindergarten means stronger language development, improved memory and stronger early numeracy compared to children who only complete one year of kinder. Under this Labor government Victoria has been the first in the nation to roll out 15 hours a week of universal free kinder for three-year-olds. Before we introduced our free kinder reforms, a little over a half of eligible children were accessing three-year-old kinder. Today the participation rate is over 90 per cent, which is why, despite repeated attempts from those opposite to talk down this nation-leading program, we are getting on with the work, building and expanding hundreds of kinders and creating thousands of new places in every part of the state.

This includes an investment from our government of over $170 million in the City of Casey to deliver 79 projects, creating more than 3700 new kinder places; $239 million in the City of Wyndham to deliver over 100 projects, creating more than 6500 new kinder places; and $163 million in the City of Hume to deliver over 100 projects, creating more than 4000 new kinder places. In the interests of time I will not go on, but I will continue to take every opportunity to talk about this government's historic investment in our free kinder program – a program which Jess Wilson wants to cut. More than $5000 in savings for families will be cut, improved learning and development outcomes for children will be cut and flexibility for working parents will be cut – *(Time expired)*

Illicit tobacco

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:35): (1489) My question is to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. Minister, Queensland's closure powers shut 148 illegal tobacco stores in their first 10 days of operation. Victoria's powers, which the government now describe as the toughest in the country, have produced 22 closures over the same period. Minister, if we have the toughest laws, why has Victoria closed fewer than one-sixth of the number of shops Queensland has with comparable powers over the same period?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (14:36): I thank Mr Mulholland for his question and his interest in our illegal tobacco closure powers. My apologies – I have a scratchy voice, but in the interests of Parliament I will endeavour to answer this question, because it is an important one of public interest and one that I am very passionate about. Mr Mulholland, I am proud of the work that we have done as a government. We have established the first-ever tobacco regulator in our state's history, and now it is harder to sell and harder to profit from illegal tobacco and easier to close down illegal tobacco stores. What we do know is since Queensland first introduced those closure powers we have adopted a similar approach, and 22 stores have been closed. Anecdotally, what we hear is that

many other stores have closed because the business model is changing. They know that closures are happening, that arrests are being made, and as such they are closing. Anecdotally, they are closing stores in advance of being raided by police and by Tobacco Licensing Victoria. But we are always willing to do more, and there are cross-border operations afoot, which I obviously cannot disclose for operational reasons.

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, on relevance, my question went to why Victoria has closed fewer than one-sixth of the stores that Queensland has closed, and the minister should come back to that question.

The PRESIDENT: The minister was being relevant.

Enver ERDOGAN: I think what we will see is that 22 is a strong start. We will continue to see further closures in the coming days, but I will not be revealing operations that are being planned. We are part of a national operation group between jurisdictions that involves Tobacco Licensing Victoria, and there is a lot of considerable work being done by federal agencies and Victoria Police, which I will not be disclosing in the chamber.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:38): My goodness. Minister, with as many as 10,000 tobacco retailers operating in Victoria and a recent investigation finding that 84 per cent of stores checked were selling illicit tobacco or vapes, how long will it take for the Victorian government to shut the thousands of illicit tobacco stores currently operating in plain sight across the state?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (14:38): I thank Mr Mulholland for his supplementary question. Mr Mulholland, you know that this is a complex issue that requires a national approach. We know that we are seeing the proliferation of illegal tobacco across jurisdictions, across borders, and in fact there is a multinational element to this crime, and it is having a devastating effect. It is not a victimless crime. We are determined to protect legitimate businesses and make sure that there are tough penalties for those breaking the rules. That is why I have introduced penalties that lead to prison sentences of up to 15 years and fines of over $1 million for those doing the wrong activity. We will continue to cooperate with Commonwealth agencies and across jurisdictions and take the tough action needed to target these criminal organisations. Tobacco Licensing Victoria is doing its bit, but we know there are multiple approaches and multiple angles. We will not stop; we will do more if needed.

Breast screening

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:39): (1490) My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, Judy had her routine mammogram through BreastScreen in Geelong in early June. On 3 August she finally received an email saying she needed to return for reassessment. She had her follow-up mammogram and a biopsy and received the devastating news on 14 August that she had cancer. Minister, why is it taking 71 days for women to get their results for a routine mammogram?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (14:40): I thank Ms Crozier for her question, and I am sorry to hear about the experience of that particular individual –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Ingrid STITT: Judy. As you would appreciate, I do not have the details of her particular case, nor would I, but if you provide me with those details, Ms Crozier, I would be very happy to follow that up with the department and have them liaise with BreastScreen Victoria, who I must say do an amazing job across the state. If you provide me with her consent and the details, I will be more than happy to follow up.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:41): That is not answering the question: why is it taking 71 days? Minister, I spoke with Judy. She feels incredibly let down. In her email to me, which I believe was also sent to her local MPs, a number of them – a number of them sitting in the government – she said:

> I am learning now that I need to trust the process in my care and … treatment. But I am angry that the process of mammogram – results has let me down. I kept up my end of the process, only to be let down by your end of the process and that is so disappointing.

Minister, this is not timely care. Delays in obtaining results can mean the difference between life and death. How many other women have developed cancer as a result of these delays?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (14:41): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. Of course nobody in this place would argue the importance of timely health screening. I do want to acknowledge that BreastScreen Victoria do run an absolutely amazing service for women right across the state, particularly those –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Ingrid STITT: Ms Crozier, you can continue to interject. President, on a point of order, this is becoming a bit of a habit here, where Ms Crozier comes in and does not want to listen to the answers but just actually wants to interject while I am trying to give a very serious answer to a very concerning experience of a Victorian in our healthcare system.

Georgie Crozier: On the point of order, President, the minister is debating. She cannot even answer basic questions, and I am going to continue to bring these cases in and highlight to Victorians the failures under Labor.

The PRESIDENT: The minister was answering the question, and it would be a lot better for the chamber if we could hear her answer without any interjections.

Ingrid STITT: I have been consistent in the chamber when individual patients' circumstances are raised. It is not for any other reason but respecting the privacy of the medical issues at play here, and I have been –

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, the minister refuses to respond to the questions I ask. This is not asking about the person's individual circumstances. This is about why the system is failing – 71 days to get results – and how many other women have got cancer because of the failures in the system. I ask you to bring the minister back to answering the specific questions that I ask of her.

The PRESIDENT: The minister is being relevant.

Ingrid STITT: Yes, and the answer I am giving is highly relevant because it goes to the patient privacy considerations when matters are raised in the chamber. Ms Crozier is being quite disingenuous here, because she knows that my office follows up very promptly when that consent is provided – *(Time expired)*

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:44): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Ministers statements: mental health system

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (14:44): I rise to update the house on how the Carroll Labor government is delivering better access to specialist mental health care for children and families in Melbourne's growing west. Yesterday I was pleased to join the member for Tarneit Dylan

Wight to officially open the relocated Royal Children's Hospital south-west infant, child and family mental health and wellbeing service. The service provides community-based assessment, treatment and care for children aged zero to 11 years, and importantly it is focused on early intervention and family-centred care. The new location provides improved clinical accommodation, including consulting rooms, observation rooms and workspaces, to support contemporary models of care. These spaces will support specialist clinical care and future service growth in an environment that is designed for infants, children and their families. Delivered as part of our government's $33.4 million community mental health expansion program, this investment forms part of our ongoing commitment to expanding community-based mental health care throughout Victoria.

Nick McGowan: What about Ringwood?

Ingrid STITT: I opened a local there last week. We are investing in community-based services like this one right across Victoria, because we know how important it is for care to be provided –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Minister, go back a few sentences, because I could not hear, and then you can go past the clock to finish your statement.

Ingrid STITT: I am happy to go from the top if you would prefer.

The PRESIDENT: If you are happy to, we will reset the clock. Two minutes, please.

Ingrid STITT: I rise to update the house on how the Carroll Labor government is delivering better access to specialist mental health care for children and families in Melbourne's growing west. Yesterday I was very pleased to join the member for Tarneit Dylan Wight to officially open the relocated Royal Children's Hospital south-west infant, child and family mental health and wellbeing service. The service provides community-based assessment, treatment and care for children aged zero to 11 years, and importantly it focuses on early intervention and family-centred care. These spaces will support specialist clinical care and future service growth in an environment that is designed for infants, children and their families. Delivered as part of our $33.4 million investment into community mental health expansion, this forms part of our ongoing commitment to expanding community-based mental health care throughout Victoria. We are investing in community-based services like this one across Victoria, because we know how important it is for the care to be provided when and where it is needed the most. Delivering care in the community means that children and families remain connected to their schools, local services and support networks while receiving the treatment they need. As Melbourne's western suburbs continue to grow, we are investing in the services that children and families need now and well into the future.

Health system

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:48): (1491) My question is again to the Minister for Health. Minister, the referrals of 150 Victorians from their GPs to see a specialist in Mildura were left in a box and forgotten for 16 months. Tragically a number of these forgotten Victorians have died before being seen in a timely manner. Why has the government failed to deliver what it promised to Victorian patients, and that is timely care?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (14:48): I thank Ms Crozier for the question. The reports of delayed specialist referrals at the Mildura Base Public Hospital are deeply concerning. All affected referrals, I am advised, identified by the hospital have now been reviewed, triaged and, importantly, booked according to their clinical need, which is the appropriate course of action. I also want to indicate that the matters have been referred and reported to Safer Care Victoria, which is the appropriate course of action for that health service to take, and the Mildura Base Public Hospital is continuing to work closely with the department on making sure that there is that proper oversight of its clinical models of care, including the importance of referrals from GPs to specialists and the

appointment process. The hospital's board and executive are working with the department on a comprehensive performance improvement plan, and that is absolutely appropriate. Safer Care Victoria has been continuing to support the hospital through its sentinel event program. Importantly, the government has also appointed an independent expert delegate to the board to provide advice and regular updates to the department and to me as minister on the services at the Mildura base hospital, and we expect the hospital to fully understand what occurred, support those affected patients and their families and make sure that the appropriate safeguards are in place so this can never happen again.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:50): What hollow words. It is no consolation to those patients that are absolutely furious and those families who have lost their family members because they have, sadly, tragically died. Minister, many of those 150 forgotten Victorians now need surgery but will be put on a waitlist. You refuse to release the waitlist data for the June quarter, so I ask: what is the current advice you have as to the number of Victorians who are waiting for surgery?

The PRESIDENT: I do not believe that is, as far as it being the supplementary goes, referring to the substantive, Ms Crozier.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, this is a really serious question.

The PRESIDENT: I do not dismiss that, but I am just wondering if the supplementary refers to the substantive question and the answer.

Georgie Crozier: Of course it is related, because the 150 Victorians who need surgery or procedures are going to be on a waitlist. The supplementary goes directly to the substantive, and I am asking the minister how many Victorians are waiting for surgery. It is a very relevant and relative question.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, I get that, and I understand what you are getting at, Ms Crozier. I am just wondering as far as how releasing some data goes compared to the substantive question. I am happy for the minister to answer as she sees fit.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (14:51): I think this is a good example of Ms Crozier not listening to the actual answer that I gave to her substantive question, in which I pointed out that there has been a power of work that has occurred in Mildura to triage and to rebook these patients according to clinical need. Now, that is a decision for clinicians. It is not a decision for any politician to be making, and health services are responsible for making sure that timely care is delivered in accordance with those clinical standards. In relation to –

Georgie Crozier: I was hoping the minister was getting to it, but I will raise my point of order anyway, because my question was relating to the number of Victorians on the waitlist given we do not have any data. The government refuses to release it, so I will ask again. I will ask you to bring the minister back to the question I asked and ask her to answer it.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister was being relevant, and I said she could answer as she saw fit.

Ingrid STITT: I mean, I have been asked this a number of times now by Ms Crozier, and she has a habit of asking a question about a specific topic or health service and then seeking to use her supplementary as a fishing expedition about the whole of the health system in Victoria.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I would ask you to ask the minister to answer the question rather than give that ridiculous and insulting answer to the Victorians who are waiting for surgery, and more specifically those in Mildura. The minister is holding Victorians in utter contempt, and I would ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question about how many Victorians are waiting for surgery.

The PRESIDENT: The minister was being relevant.

Ingrid STITT: As Ms Crozier knows very well, the Victorian health services performance data is publicly available quarterly. There is a process that is gone through to make sure that that is validated and that quality assurance processes are undertaken before that data is publicly released, and it will be publicly released in due course.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:54): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Energy policy

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:54): (1492) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. There has been a bit of interest already today in this chamber in your first keynote speech since becoming the energy and resources minister, which you gave to the energy industry recently, in which you stated that the government intends to 'stay the course' when it comes to our renewable energy targets and the retirement of our coal-fired power plants. You also indicated that 'equivocating scares the market' and that it is critical for governments to provide certainty. Even the government acknowledges that community engagement with respect to WRL has been historically poor and has contributed to distress and anxiety for communities as well as delays, and that lack of certainty is a key driver of that lack of trust and anxiety. Within an hour of that address, the Premier issued a press release saying that the Western Renewables Link would be reassessed in light of a re-costing that would not be released until after the election. How are these delays and uncertainties consistent with the commitments you made during that address?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:55): Thank you, Dr Mansfield, for your question. I can reiterate my answers to the previous questions that I have received in question time. There are no delays as a result of assessing the costs and providing greater transparency in relation to that once that work is done. But in relation to continuation with landholders, many of those who have already signed up to voluntary arrangements and the like, those conversations are still happening and the projects are commencing, whilst there is a separate procurement process for independent assessors for looking at the costings that we can then release publicly.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:56): Minister, Yallourn coal power station is due to close in 2028 and Loy Yang A in 2035. In order to meet those timelines, Victoria needs enough renewable energy built and online, and that includes transmission. Can you guarantee that this process that WRL is going through now will not impact on the timelines for the closure of Victoria's coal-fired power stations?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:57): Under a Labor government, WRL will proceed. Under a Labor government, VNI is proceeding. The only risk to those projects is sitting across there.

Ministers statements: energy supply

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (14:57): The Essential Services Commission plays a vital role in protecting Victorian consumers. It sets the standards that keep energy reliable, affordable and fair. Today I want to highlight important reforms that demonstrate what that protection means for our most vulnerable Victorians. During storms, prolonged power outages create life-and-death risks for Victorians who depend on life support equipment. Our reviews found issues in the accuracy and size of life support registers which affected how emergency services could contact

people who critically rely on life support equipment during large outages. To address these concerns we have implemented new life support reforms after extensive consultation with industry.

There is now a standardised medical confirmation form that identifies customers and the equipment they rely on and flags life-threatening conditions. This helps emergency agencies triage effectively when minutes matter so much. We are introducing new processes requiring energy retailers to check in yearly with life support customers so their details stay current, and life support customers can now nominate a secondary contact to receive outage communications through their preferred method. These changes are tailored and precise. They do one thing: ensure that when the lights go out, emergency services know exactly who needs help and how to reach them best.

Besides the industry, the ESC has worked closely with the national regulator, the Australian Energy Market Commission, in developing these reforms. This keeps implementation costs down for industry while ensuring consistent protections across the country. This is what good regulation looks like: getting the fundamentals right to protect the people who are most at risk.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (14:59): Minister Blandthorn will get, under the standing orders, answers for Ms Payne from the Minister for Roads and Road Safety.

Constituency questions

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (14:59): (2625) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will you fund a safety upgrade of the intersection of Maple Street and High Street in Golden Square? High Street is Bendigo's busiest road, with 40,000 vehicles per day travelling along it, and there is a 1.4-kilometre section that runs through Golden Square without a safe crossing point. The Golden Square Action Group are calling for an upgrade of the intersection of High Street and Maple Street to provide a safe pedestrian and cyclist crossing with user-operated traffic lights. Numerous schools, clubs and businesses have written letters of support for the project, and the Golden Square Action Group has collected 500 signatures on an online petition. The crossing could link with the existing regional city trail and promote more bicycle use in a city that is often car dependent. I urge the Victorian government to get behind this project to make it a reality.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (15:00): (2626) My question is for the Minister for Education. The school community of Pascoe Vale North Primary School in Northern Metro have raised concerns with me and our Pascoe Vale candidate Angelica Panopoulos about the school's longstanding infrastructure gaps. Pascoe Vale North is a growing school of around 340 students, with temporary toilet facilities that have been in place for more than 20 years and continue to experience maintenance, plumbing and accessibility issues. Its ageing basketball court has significant drainage problems and is regularly unusable after rain, while the school lacks a covered outdoor learning area, meaning assemblies, performances and community events are often exposed to extreme weather. Students have also raised concerns about ageing portable classrooms and an outdated multipurpose room. The school community has repeatedly sought funding and is fundraising where it can. Minister, will your government commit funding to address these longstanding infrastructure needs at Pascoe Vale North Primary School?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (15:01): (2627) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education. Victoria has just four fully selective government secondary schools, while New South Wales has 21 fully selective and 26 partially selective high schools. In Melbourne's growing north I hear from parents who are travelling great distances to give their children access to the educational opportunities they want and deserve. The Liberals and Nationals have committed to

building a new select-entry high school serving Craigieburn, Roxburgh Park and surrounding suburbs as part of a plan to significantly expand opportunities for high-achieving students across Victoria. Entry would be based on academic performance, aptitude and socio-economic circumstance, ensuring access is not determined by wealth or postcode. Every student deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential, including those living in our rapidly growing northern suburbs. Will the minister match the Liberals and Nationals' commitment to deliver a new select-entry high school for Craigieburn, Roxburgh Park and surrounding suburbs?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (15:02): (2628) My constituency question is to the Minister for Disability. A constituent of mine who has worked on the Changing Places program for more than 15 years has raised concerns about the future of these essential facilities. Changing Places provides hoists and adult-sized change tables for people with high support needs who cannot use standard accessible toilets. The Changing Places website helps people locate these facilities, access technical guidance and participate more fully in our community. But since the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing stopped funding the website management of Changing Places more than two years ago the website has been allowed to languish and is now badly out of date. The Access Consultants Association has proposed taking over the day-to-day management through a cost-recovery model requiring no government funding. The proposal has been with DFFH for nearly 12 months and is still apparently without a decision. Minister, will you act to facilitate the transfer of Changing Places to the ACA so this vital service can be properly maintained, allowing people with disabilities to access up-to-date services?

The PRESIDENT: And that is in your region?

Katherine COPSEY: Yes.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:03): (2629) My constituency matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Last year I asked for 'Keep clear' sign markings to be placed on Elgar Road at the corner of Anthony Crescent in Box Hill, where residents struggle to get in and out of their side street safely, particularly during peak hour. The government declined, advising that 'Keep clear' markings are not installed to help traffic turn out of side streets. However, in a 2019 tweet, VicRoads said:

> Keep Clear zones … allow people to merge or enter from side roads …

and posted a diagram of a car driving out of a side road. There are also examples of exactly this nearby at the intersection of Melrose Street and Elgar Road. Residents in Anthony Crescent are simply asking for the same consideration in the interests of their safety. Will the minister ask the department to reconsider adding 'Keep clear' markings at Anthony Crescent and advise residents when they can expect a decision?

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (15:04): (2630) My question is for the Minister for Children. Families in Hopetoun have been without a childcare centre for more than two years following the closure of the local early years centre, with the community now facing the prospect of another two years without a service. At the same time the local kindergarten has also been temporarily relocated to the senior citizens building, displacing those who were using this service. When parents cannot access child care, they cannot participate fully in the workforce, and businesses and the economy suffer as a result. Local families without access to care have already stated that they have had to reduce their work hours and increase their travel time. Regional Victorians should not be left behind simply because they live outside of Melbourne, yet stories like this are all too common across

my region of Northern Victoria. Will the minister commit to a new integrated early years facility to provide a long-term solution for this community?

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (15:05): (2631) I have been contacted by constituents recently who work as allied health professionals, and they are undergoing significant issues at the moment. They are going through negotiations with the government, and they are concerned about the impact of their ability to support the healthcare needs of the communities, particularly in regional areas. Victorian allied health professionals continue to earn less than many others across the country, and there are significant challenges, firstly, attracting and, secondly, retaining workers in that area. My question to the minister is: what are you going to do about this to make sure that there is a good outcome so that we can have a good system in Victoria and not just lose people to other states?

Western Metropolitan Region

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (15:06): (2632) My question is for the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts, represented by Minister Stitt. My constituent in Sunbury is gutted at the sale of several state-owned much-loved heritage-listed properties atop Jacksons Hill for *The Block*. Sunbury MP Josh Bull told Nine that turning the properties into luxury homes on TV was 'in line with what the community called for'. That is simply not true. They actually called for it to be converted to parks, creative spaces and education hubs to benefit residents, not merely Channel Nine and a handful of millionaires who can actually afford to buy the properties. As transparency is no longer optional, will the minister disclose the valuation and sale price of the Jacksons Hill properties and why they were not sold through an open and competitive process?

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:07): (2633) My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment. The upgraded Lang Lang boat ramp and jetty reopened in March. The snapper and fishing season are starting, and users are very concerned about the safety, with its new flawed design. The structure is supposed to service five vehicles, but it only has two ladders and they are both at the jetty head. The design also creates bottlenecks, impedes boarding and disembarking and has a significant height differentiation between the boat and the jetty. Boaters are also concerned about the inadequate lighting in the case of launching and retrieval and pedestrian safety. We have got a new system, and we have got a new piece of infrastructure that is not up to standard. It is not specified to the standard of Better Boating Victoria's facility guidelines, so I ask the minister: why hasn't this been done, and what is she going to do to make sure that this is up to standard and safe?

Northern Victoria Region

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (15:08): (2634) My constituency question is for the Minister for Community Sport. My constituents ask: will the minister commit funding of $350,000 to Longwood Football Netball Club to upgrade the arena lighting at the Longwood Recreation Reserve? The Longwood Recreation Reserve is the only significant green community space in Longwood and is the home to the mighty Longwood Redlegs during the football and netball season. The reserve regularly hosts community events and played an important role in protecting the community as an area of last resort during the devastating Longwood fires. The reserve currently has halogen lights on two towers, and the proposed upgrade will see LED lighting fixed to each tower to produce 100 lux lighting. This upgrade would create a safer environment for players and other community members utilising the reserve. The fires last January showed that Longwood is an amazingly resilient community who deserve improved infrastructure in their town, and I urge the minister to commit the $350,000 needed to make this lighting upgrade a reality.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:09): (2635) My question is to the Minister for Police. Crime is out of control in this state, with perpetrators now stealing copper wires from streetlights to sell on the black market. A constituent recently contacted me explaining that her neighbourhood streets have been pitch-black for many weeks now, after thieves stole copper wire from the streetlights. Residents fear for their safety, especially the families who have young children. Despite contacting relevant authorities, residents have no idea when they will get the lights back on. This is not an isolated incident. Recent statistics show that Clyde North and Berwick are the top targets for thieves, with 27 and 23 incidents of copper wire theft respectively since the start of this year. In an incident in Clyde up to 4 kilometres of wire was stolen. Minister, the Carroll Labor government's gross mismanagement of crime has now left Victorians literally in the dark. What meaningful action will you take to address the surging copper theft in Victoria, especially in the south-east?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (15:10): (2636) My question is to the Minister for Police. There are currently 1400 vacancies on Victoria Police rosters and over 40 police stations, including Castlemaine and Kyneton, on reduced opening hours. I also spoke with a police officer recently who said there were no funds available for them to order name badges and there were delays ordering drug tests, as money had run out. Yet just ahead of the state election I was advised that Victoria Police are running a statewide operation known as 90 Days of Activation. It starts this week, deploying extra frontline police to patrol certain areas in Bendigo, including the Marketplace shopping centre, railway precinct, CBD and Rosalind Park. Minister, why is it that we are seeing an increase in police patrols just ahead of the state election when local residents have been calling for a greater police presence to combat rising crime for years? The Nationals in government are committed to recruiting 3000 more police and reopening stations and will make sure that those who break bail face the consequences.

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (15:11): (2637) My constituency question is for the Treasurer, and I ask: why is this government failing to combat the cost-of-living pressures facing regional communities like Cape Clear? Evelyn and her dedicated volunteers were delighted to have the Liberal candidate for Eureka Emma Muir supporting the Cape Clear community pantry recently. We were told that almost half the town relies on them. No resident caught public transport to work at the last census, so rising fuel costs bite. Across Golden Plains shire half of all households are paying off a mortgage, compared with just over a third statewide. The emergency services tax is almost double the rate on family homes, let alone farms, compared with the old fire services levy, and it landed on council rate notices in recent weeks. Western Victorians cannot cope with these costs, and they cannot afford another day under Costly Carroll.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:12): (2638) My question is to the Premier. The JL Murphy Reserve in Port Melbourne is currently struggling to support six sporting teams and 80 players. The City of Port Phillip purchased the former Australia Post business centre site in 2023 for the development of much-needed sporting fields, and at the time there was a lot of discussion between the government, the former Premier and ministers with the local council. After outlaying almost $40 million the City of Port Phillip council were expecting the state government to contribute the promised $57 million to develop the site. The government has now reneged on that commitment and confirmed that the funds will not be available until at least 2034. Well, you know, pigs can fly. What is left is a great big ugly concrete slab that nobody can use. I ask the Premier: will you undertake to urgently meet with the mayor, as he has requested, and the CEO of Port Phillip to resolve this outstanding issue?

Petitions

Data centres

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 2090 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the total absence of state laws to protect communities from hyper-scale data centres, highlighted by the Clyde North application PA26-0190. Your petitioners therefore state that:

1) Victoria completely lacks dedicated state-level legislation to protect residential communities and state assets from the detrimental impact of hyper-scale data centres. The site's location within the Urban Growth Zone exempts it from standard public notice, completely shutting the local community out of the process and blocking a VCAT appeal. While subjected to standard localized environmental tests like noise and stormwater, these narrow reviews completely fail to assess the massive macro-level impacts on Victoria's electricity grid and municipal drinking water security.

2) Allowing the Clyde North development to proceed sets a dangerous statewide precedent that prioritizes corporate development over community concerns and state resource preservation.

The Petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Victorian Government to:

1) Institute an immediate statewide moratorium on all new large-scale data centre approvals, including Clyde North.

2) Maintain this moratorium until specific state legislation is enacted that mandates strict caps on power and water usage, guarantees independent macro-impact assessments and protects neighbouring residents' health and wellbeing.

Katherine COPSEY: As this is a petition qualifying for debate under standing order 11.03(10), I give notice that I intend to move 'That the petition be taken into consideration' on Wednesday of next sitting week.

Wyndham health services

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) presented a petition bearing 2295 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council to the need for a new public hospital in Tarneit by 2030. Wyndham is one of Victoria's fastest-growing communities, yet **healthcare infrastructure remains under significant pressure**. Wyndam's **population is projected** to reach approximately **340,688 by 2031**. Wyndham City Council estimates the municipality currently needs around **797 public hospital beds**, increasing to more than **1,200 by 2046,** and has identified **inadequate hospital infrastructure** and capacity as a **significant challenge for the community**.

While the expansion of Werribee Mercy Hospital, which currently serves more than 300,000 residents, is welcome and necessary, **it should complement** – **not replace** – **long-term planning for additional hospital capacity.**

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council ***commit to a new public hospital in Tarneit by 2030*** *and carrying out the following:*

1. Identify and secure a suitable site; 2. Develop a detailed business case and delivery plan; 3. Provide a clear funding commitment and construction timeline; 4. Plan workforce requirements, including doctors, nurses and allied health professionals; 5. Ensure the hospital opens with the facilities, equipment and staffing required to provide quality care.

Sarah MANSFIELD: As this is a petition qualifying for debate under standing order 11.03(10), I give notice that I intend to move 'That the petition be taken into consideration' on Wednesday of next sitting week.

Committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 13

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (15:15): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest* No. 13 of 2026, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Sheena WATT: I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

In doing so, I thank the secretariat for their extraordinary efforts over the term of this Parliament. I would like to pay particular respect to Helen Mason, an actual giant of our Parliament that deserves all the respect that this place can afford her. She and her team do extraordinary work every sitting week to prepare for these committee meetings. I also would like to thank all the other members of this chamber and the other for their diligence and professionalism in what is an often unseen but nonetheless very powerful committee in our Parliament. It has been a true honour for me to serve on the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee over this term of Parliament.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General – Public Lottery Licence Extension, September 2026 *(released on 16 September 2026 – a non-sitting day) (Ordered to be published).*

Crimes (Assumed Identities) Act 2004 – Report, 2025–26, under section 31 of the Act, by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission.

Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958 – Reports, 2025–26, under section 42BI of the Act, by –

- Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission.
- Victoria Police.

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under section 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule No. 120 *(Gazette G38, 17 September 2026).*

Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Act 2014 – Practitioner Remuneration Order 2027.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of the –

- East Gippsland Planning Scheme – Amendment C175.
- Greater Geelong Planning Scheme – Amendment C433.
- Greater Shepparton Planning Scheme – Amendment C258.
- Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme – Amendment C147.
- Melbourne, Port of Melbourne and Port Phillip Planning Schemes – Amendment GC240.
- Mitchell Planning Scheme – Amendment C179.
- Victoria Planning Provisions – Amendment VC313.
- Wodonga Planning Scheme – Amendment C142.

Public Interest Monitor – Report to the Attorney-General, 2025–26, under section 62(1) of the Human Source Management Act 2023.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

- Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 – No. 124.

Supreme Court Act 1986 – Nos. 122 and 123.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 118, 120, 121, 122, 123 and 124.

Surveillance Devices Act 1999 – Reports, 2025–26, under section 30L of the Act, by –

Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission.

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

Game Management Authority.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission.

Victorian Fisheries Authority.

Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003 – Report, 2025–26, under section 37F of the Act, by Victoria Police.

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

Consumer Legislation Amendment Act 2026 – Sections 178ZF and 178ZJ – 16 September 2026 *(Gazette S510, 15 September 2026).*

Health Legislation Amendment (Regulatory Reform) Act 2026 – Section 9 – 30 September 2026 *(Gazette S510, 15 September 2026).*

Committees

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into Claims Made through the Transport Accident Commission (TAC)

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: the government response to the Legal and Social Issues Committee's report on the inquiry into claims made through the Transport Accident Commission.

Petitions

Responses

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: Minister for Roads and Road Safety's response to petition titled 'Financial assistance for roadworks in Pakenham'.

Production of documents

Biodiversity protection

Magistrates' Court of Victoria

Suburban Rail Loop

Housing

The Clerk: I table three letters from the Attorney-General, all dated 21 September 2026, in response to the following resolutions: on 29 July 2026 relating to Victoria's threatened and endangered species on the motion of Dr Mansfield; on 26 August 2026 relating to imprisonment, warrants and infringement notices on the motion of Ms Payne; and on 9 September 2026 relating to the rail improvement charge for the Suburban Rail Loop on the motion of Mr Mulholland. The letters each state that the government is unable to provide a final response prior to the expiry of the Legislative Council.

I table a further letter from the Attorney-General dated 21 September 2026 in response to a resolution on 1 April 2026 on the motion of Mr Puglielli and further to the government's initial response on 13 May 2026 relating to rental controls. The letter states that the government has searched for and identified five documents in response to the order. The government makes a claim of executive privilege over the five documents in full. I further table a schedule of the identified documents, which

also outlines the relevant grounds of executive privilege. The letter further states that the government included the most relevant documents within the scope of the order, created since 1 July 2023, and that responding to the broad scope in its entirety would capture irrelevant or outdated documents.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, there were four sets of documents – three with trite responses about insufficient time and one providing excuses as to why the government will not provide the documents after a five-month period. I think it is incumbent on somebody in government – one of the ministers at the table, and there is only one, Minister Stitt. Perhaps she can provide some explanation as to why the government continues to treat the chamber with such contempt.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Davis, if you want to take note of the Attorney-General's responses on the next day of meeting, you can move that motion; that is your current recourse.

David Davis: I was actually seeking an explanation.

The PRESIDENT: I am saying to you that is your current recourse.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (15:21): I move:

That the Council take note of the Attorney-General's responses, or lack thereof, on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:21): I move, by leave:

That the motion be debated forthwith.

Leave refused.

The PRESIDENT: I would ask the house to refrain from interjecting on the Clerk.

David Davis: It was not directed at him.

The PRESIDENT: Can you hold your fire. There no point yelling while the Clerk is doing the job that he is paid to do.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

The PRESIDENT: It was yelling, and it is unfair.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

General business

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (15:37): I move, by leave:

That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 23 September 2026:

(1) order of the day 1, second reading of the Liability for Climate Change Damage (Make Polluters Pay) Bill 2026;

(2) notice of motion given this day by me on road maintenance;

(3) notice of motion given this day by me on the workplace protection order scheme; and

(4) notice of motion given this day by Moira Deeming on the protection of children in relation to commercial sexual services.

Motion agreed to.

Standing and sessional orders

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:38): I move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to the extent necessary to allow:

(1) the house to interrupt business at 6 pm on Tuesday 22 September 2026 to allow Harriet Shing to make a valedictory statement at that time;

(2) the following to be the order of business on Wednesday 23 September 2026:

Messages

Formal business

Members statements (up to 15 members)

Private member bills – moving second readings of bills for which precedence has been ordered

Short form documents motions (up to two motions)

General business

At **12 noon** questions

General business (continues)

At **5:15 pm, or after 300 minutes of general business has elapsed (whichever is later)** statements on tabled papers and petitions (30 minutes)

Petitions (qualifying for debate) (30 minutes)

Valedictory statement made by Shaun Leane

Valedictory statement made by Wendy Lovell

Valedictory statement made by Joe McCracken

Adjournment (up to 20 members).

(3) the house to interrupt business at 2 pm on Thursday 24 September 2026 to allow Nick McGowan to make a valedictory statement at that time; and

(4) Adem Somyurek to be permitted to incorporate a valedictory statement by submitting it to the Clerk in line with temporary order 3.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Interfaith communities

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:40): It was a privilege to host the interfaith gathering at the Parliament of Victoria in the distinguished presence of Sadguru Shri Swatantra Deo Ji Maharaj, the presiding sadguru of Vihangam Yog, and Sant Naam Deo Ji from India. It brought together faith leaders, community representatives and distinguished guests from diverse backgrounds to celebrate the shared values of peace, compassion, mutual respect, unity and diversity. It was inspiring to witness meaningful conversations on the role of spirituality and faith in fostering social cohesion and interfaith harmony. A highlight was the blessing of the sadguru, whose teachings emphasise inner spiritual awakening, universal consciousness and peace beyond all boundaries. It was also wonderful to hear from Victorian Premier Ben Carroll, who spoke about the importance of interfaith harmony in building a stronger and more inclusive Victoria. His presence and message reinforced the important principle that Victoria's strength comes from the contribution of people of different faiths, cultures and traditions and from our ability to come together with respect and understanding.

Visiting the Swarved Mahamandir Dham in Varanasi in India was a profound experience, revealing its remarkable service to humanity, and it deepened my appreciation of Vihangam Yog's broader vision. Thanks to Sadguru Sadafal Deo Vihangam Yoga Sansthan Australia and Astralaya-Australia India Business and Cultural Council and everyone involved in making this important occasion possible. As members of Parliament we share the responsibility to help build a society in which every

Victorian, regardless of faith, culture and background, feels respected, included and a true sense of belonging. Let us continue to celebrate our diversity, respect our differences and honour our shared humanity, and together let us continue building a more peaceful, compassionate and harmonious Victoria and a more peaceful world.

Peter Katsambanis

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:41): Today I want to draw the chamber's attention to the sad death of my friend and former colleague Peter Katsambanis. He was elected in 1996 to this place and was not re-elected in 2002. But his career was remarkable in the sense that he was a member in three chambers in Australia, both the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly in Western Australia and also this chamber here. He was a very good member for Monash Province, as it was in those days, and he will be sorely missed. He was a very strong member of the Greek community and church and a very active Christian. Also, I should say, he was a very active liberal student, a person who was in many ways a purist in the way he looked at things philosophically. He was always prepared to have a very strong debate with people, and I enjoyed many of those debates with him. He married twice, but most recently he was married to Karalee Tilvern, now Katsambanis, and she spoke remarkably at the funeral on Friday. There were so many people at that funeral. The church in Prahran was absolutely packed to the rafters and out onto the street, with I think several hundred people in fact out on the street. I was one of those just near the door of the church, so I could hear and see everything. Peter will be missed greatly. He was a friend, a colleague and a person of great integrity.

Climate change

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (15:43): Extreme heat is more deadly than bushfires, floods, storms and cyclones combined. Extreme heat can kill by affecting the heart, kidneys or respiratory system, and it disproportionately impacts older people, outdoor workers and people in poorly cooled homes. For anyone who has not noticed or is trying to ignore it desperately, our world is getting hotter. August 2026 was the hottest month on record, and we are staring down the barrel of the fastest developing El Niño on record. The evidence is clear: slowing down or going backwards on climate action will kill people. The Greens are the only party taking this threat seriously. We are the only ones with a plan to end coal and gas – because we are the only ones who are not funded by the fossil fuel companies who are profiting from destroying the climate and from endangering our communities. Labor have opened five new fossil fuel projects in Victoria in the past year, approving 37 across the nation, even drilling near the Twelve Apostles, and the Liberals and One Nation want more coal, gas and logging. They are all in a race to the bottom when it comes to transmission infrastructure that is crucial to switching to clean and affordable renewables. The Greens will replace Labor's coal and gas with cheaper, publicly owned renewable energy to cut climate pollution, and we will permanently lower Victorians' energy bills in doing so.

Joan Creati

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria) (15:45): I rise to pay tribute to Joan Louise Creati, a dearly loved and deeply respected member of the Geelong community. Joan was a woman of remarkable intellect, curiosity and compassion. A teacher, librarian and distinguished scholar, she believed strongly in the power of knowledge and education to change lives. She generously shared that knowledge as an engaging storyteller and inspiring mentor who encouraged others to think more deeply about the world around them. Some years ago Joan wrote about her travels through Iran for my community newsletter, concluding: 'I came home with a clear knowledge that three weeks in Iran raised more questions than I had when I entered.' That was Joan – always learning, always questioning and always open to a new perspective. Joan was also a tireless advocate for fairness and social justice, generously sharing her time and wisdom through decades of community involvement in the labour movement. Above all, Joan loved her family and spoke of them with enormous pride and affection, describing them as their family glue, speaking volumes about the place she held in their lives. I was proud to call Joan a friend and held her in the deepest respect and affection. Her sudden passing is a

tragic loss for her family and friends and a profound loss for our community, and I extend my deepest condolences to Joan's much-loved family. Her legacy will live on through the many people she taught, mentored, inspired and supported. Vale, Joan Creati.

Geelong Running Festival

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (15:46): I want to pay tribute to Lee Troop, three-time Olympian and Geelong running legend, who was the creator, owner and organiser of the inaugural Geelong Running Festival that took place in Geelong this past weekend. It was great to see our fabulous Liberal candidate for South Barwon Libby Pettit on the track with her son Rupert in his first race – Libby herself being a former national-level 800-metre runner. Over 6000 runners competed in numerous events, culminating in the marathon. My grandson even competed in his first under-5s event, beating by a mile my husband, who was way behind him – but he later competed in the 6.5-kilometre race because he has to get ready for the Melbourne half-marathon in a couple of weeks time. All of Geelong came out in support of this fabulous event. The track was lined absolutely everywhere. The runners said they had never had such support – way better than the Melbourne Marathon. It was a huge success. Lee Troop and his team need to be congratulated and need to be supported in the future, which we of course will do. I thank him for his efforts and his inspiration to get this fabulous event off and running. We love Geelong and we love the inaugural Geelong Running Festival.

Renewable energy

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (15:48): On a glorious spring Saturday the peaceful township of Benalla was stirred by the sound of dozens of tractors, trucks and utes and chants of farmers and residents sick of being ignored by this government. There are over 1.2 million solar panels planned for this beautiful region, not to mention the countless ugly, noisy and potentially dangerous shipping container sized batteries. Regional communities have had enough. For years they have borne the brunt of a government who do not listen and just bulldoze over them. Well, these communities say to the government: enough is enough; it is time to listen to the people and actually represent the communities who have put you in the position you hold.

South West Tech School

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:49): The Carroll Labor government is backing young people, science and innovation in the heart of south-west Victoria. Along with the south-west schools, local governments, community and South West TAFE, it was my deep honour to open the South West Tech School at Warrnambool last week, and it was a particular delight to represent Minister for Education Gab Williams. It was an absolutely joyous occasion. I was particularly pleased to be joined by former Minister for Skills and TAFE Gayle Tierney. Local musician Shane Howard of Goanna fame treated us to a performance of his song *The River Knows*. School students were excitedly getting on with 3D printing, creating products from recycled plastic and even making ice cream in the food technology lab. These are hands-on and high-energy experiences that will help students build practical skills and gain insights into the jobs of the future. I want to congratulate Mark Fidge, CEO of South West TAFE; Rohan Keert, director of South West technical school; and everyone involved, including all of the other businesses, community groups, government services like Wannon Water and the partners involved with the tech school.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:50): I want to thank my community and celebrate some of the many wins we have had together over the last four years, noting some are still a work in progress. Congratulations to locals involved in stopping the Hampton Park waste transfer facility in a residential area with underground waterways. To residents near Kingswood and Rossdale golf courses who slowed down Labor's inappropriate developments, thank you. To Springvale business owners for campaigning against the needle syringe machine making your

community unsafe, thank you. To residents in Berwick Springs for not letting this government get away with unilateral decision-making, thank you. To businesses and manufacturers in Progress Street for speaking out on poor planning and road safety, thank you. To the Australian Horse Industry Council, thanks to you Victoria now has nationally accredited training and a large animal incident rescue service. To the Filipino community that fought to keep its social worker and residents in Heatherton next to the stabling yards fighting the broken promise of the chain of parks, thank you. To the families and individuals speaking out for the fatalities and victims of poor road-planning decisions, thank you. To the healthcare workers, frontline services, teachers, nurses, doctors, ambos, police, firefighters, conservationists and families of the south-east, thank you for trusting me to be your voice. To my husband, family, loved ones and staff, thank you for supporting me. Having lost my father, mother-in-law and brother-in-law, your unwavering love and support gave me the strength to keep going. There is a parable about a boy on a beach with thousands of stranded starfish. He picks them up one by one and throws them back into the ocean. He is told, 'This is useless. You can't help them all.' Throwing another starfish into the sea, the innocent replies, 'Well, I made a difference to that one.'

Climate change

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (15:52): I just want to take a moment to acknowledge all the community groups who are fighting to defend this planet on which everything, including our very existence, depends. To Southern Ocean Protection Embassy Collective, Wathaurong, coastal communities, ocean lovers and surfers who paddled out to save southern sea country from seismic blasting; to folks in Anglesea, like Keith, Dick and Taryn, who studied and wrote submissions and signed and sang and rallied the community to Dump the Pump and protect precious groundwater and the Anglesea River; to Les, Charles, Mel and the community in Lara, who doorknocked, petitioned, rallied and held meeting after meeting to valiantly fight off a massive waste incinerator; to the environment groups, birdwatchers, First Peoples and the Geelong community who continue to organise and pick apart the baseless case for two floating gas terminals in Corio Bay; to Land and Water Resources Otway Catchment, the ecologists and forest and wildlife defenders who work tirelessly to protect the beautiful Otways from logging and destruction; to the growing groundswell of people in Melton and surrounds who are resisting the imposition of energy- and water-guzzling data centres, I have seen your work firsthand, and it has been an honour to fight alongside you. We have won some, and we are yet to win others. But it is you and others like you right across the state who keep me motivated in here. We should not have to fight so hard to protect our home and that of all living things, but still you choose to fight. You turn up despite the exhaustion and despite the best efforts of the forces that would have us continue down the path of endless consumption and destruction. If we want a better future, or any future, we do not actually have any choice but to fight – and the Greens will be right here with you.

Croydon North Kindergarten

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:54): Recently I had the absolute pleasure of visiting the wonderful staff, children and families at Croydon North Kindergarten in my electorate. Kindergarten is where our youngest Victorians build their confidence, make their very first friends and lay the foundation for a lifelong love of learning, and to give our kids the best possible start in life we need top-tier, modern facilities that grow alongside our local communities. That is why I am thrilled to share that Croydon North Kindergarten is receiving a massive $4.5 million investment from the Carroll Labor government's Building Blocks program. The substantial funding will deliver a brand new second kindergarten room, expanding local access so even more children can benefit from quality early childhood education close to home. Importantly, this project goes beyond early learning; it will also deliver dedicated, modern maternal and child health spaces right onsite as well. Having these essential services co-located under one roof means local parents can access vital health care, developmental checks and parenting support in a convenient and familiar location. The $4.5 million upgrade is a game changer for the families in Croydon North, and I want to thank the dedicated

educators and staff at Croydon North Kindergarten for everything they do. I look forward to seeing this exciting project delivered for the community in years to come.

Peter Mason

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (15:55): I rise to put my condolences on the record for Peter Mason, who passed away over the weekend. Peter, known to many as Tiki, was a 71-year-old Ballarat man, a retired spray painter and the respected president of the Eureka Social Riders. Sadly, Peter died on Sunday after his motorcycle struck a pothole and he lost control on the Western Highway near Trawalla Road, just west of Ballarat. Emergency services were called at approximately 12:50, but he tragically passed away at the scene. The family of Peter have said very publicly that they do not want him to be remembered as a headline, they want him to be remembered as a person, and I want to put my condolences to the family and friends of Peter who have really suffered at this quite sudden and shocking passing of Peter. Peter's death should not be in vain, and if there is any message that comes from this tragic situation it is that road safety is really important. I bet Peter would want that message to be put out to everyone: to be safe on the roads, to drive to the conditions and to make sure that the roads are in the best possible condition they can be for everyone who is using them.

Peter Katsambanis

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:57): I also rise to pay tribute to Peter Katsambanis. I did not know Peter, but it is clear he had a massive influence on many in this chamber, in the other place, in a Parliament on the other side of the country and the Hellenic community around the world. Peter packed so much into his life. Since his passing, I have heard so many stories of the type of man that he was: thoughtful, helpful, generous with advice and a fierce advocate for his beliefs. At his funeral last week there were representatives from this chamber from both sides, former ministers from both sides of politics, politicians from multiple parliaments and states and of course the 2023 premiership cup on loan from his beloved Magpies. If the mark of a man's life is his friendships, then Peter was pure quality. However, as much as Peter obviously achieved in his life, he was also a loving family man, husband and father. When a member of my staff reached out to his son Ross to pass on his condolences, the response he received was: 'He was so giving and loving, and we all miss him dearly. He was a great man, but to me he was just Dad.' Vale, Peter Katsambanis.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria) (15:58): I move:

> That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 1632, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Jaclyn Symes:

> That the bill be now read a second time.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:59): I am pleased to make our contribution on the Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026. From the outset, we really believe this should be two bills. There are no logical reasons why these two issues have been crammed together in one bill, and they really should be separate. The issues within them should be considered separately, and they have completely different sets of merits and arguments around them.

I will start with what the bill does and some of the things we do support within the bill. The bill amends four acts: the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013, the Accident Compensation Act 1985, the Transport Accident Act 1986 and the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004. It discusses specialist disability accommodation, financial guarantees for self-insurers, board appointments and medical panel fees, and then in the middle of all that it segues into a massive transfer of investigative power from the regulator to representatives of unions or OH&S representatives in a workplace, which has nothing to do with any of those prior things.

We do support the changes to specialist disability accommodation. In 2024 the Parliament moved group homes under a broader definition of SDA dwellings in the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and replaced references to group homes across the statute book accordingly – in the Transport Accident Act and in the workers compensation acts. But it was not a like-for-like substitution. It swept NDIS-funded housing into a definition of supported accommodation and with it the costs of that accommodation across the TAC and WorkSafe Victoria, which had never previously met, were never designed to meet and were never asked by the Parliament to meet. That has introduced ambiguity, so that it is possible that someone will end up disadvantaged or a claim will turn on it, and left alone it would be tested, so correcting it now is the responsible thing to do. The coalition supports it without qualification, and we would have supported it immediately if it had come up on its own.

We also support the changes to the surety bonds. Victoria has 33 self-insurers, including Westpac, BHP, Qantas, Melbourne Water, RACV and Mars. They carry about 5 per cent of the scheme. They manage their own liabilities, and in exchange they must lodge a guarantee with WorkSafe worth one and a half times their claims liabilities or $3 million, whichever is greater. That guarantee must presently be a bank guarantee, which means real assets are pledged as collateral and mortgaged in place and are unable to be sold or borrowed against, so it is a lien against the company's assets. For a large employer that is a great deal of capital doing nothing at all. A surety bond does the same job without freezing the balance sheet, and the bill sensibly requires the issuer to be APRA-regulated. Victoria has 34 self-insurance licences. New South Wales, which is a fairly comparable economy, has 70. South Australia, much smaller, has 71. The Self Insurers Association of Victoria supports this change. In our consultation not one self-insurer raised a concern, and neither do we. The administrative amendments – the board chairs' terms, the medical panel fees – are all sensible alignments, and we do not oppose them either.

But with those reforms there and supported, the bill is carrying this change to occupational health and safety, and we cannot quite understand why. The changes fold back to August last year, when the government commissioned Mr White to review the employee representative framework. He held over 30 meetings, received over 60 written submissions and made 17 recommendations. This bill acquits four of them in full and three in part, and the remainder, according to the minister, await further policy analysis in consultation and an assessment of their regulatory impact, so it is seven out of 17 recommendations. The seven, coincidentally, that will go through expand the powers of union officials, and the 10 that might have balanced them out require further analysis and have been pushed out. This makes even less sense when you consider the timetable. The provisions before us now do not commence on assent; they commence on proclamation, with a default date of 10 September 2027. The government has given itself the better part of two years. There is obviously no urgency here, and so there is no reason why these provisions could not return later to the Parliament – when the other 10 recommendations have also been considered – as part of their own bill, having been properly examined, and commence all on the same day.

We feel that bundling this in with some very worthy reforms and squeezing it in here is simply disingenuous and yet another example of the government not respecting the chamber, by putting two things together – which have nothing to do with each other and have considerably different concerns – as some kind of wedge to force them through. We have several areas of genuine concern about these occupational health and safety changes, and these are based on wide consultation with the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Business Council of Australia, Master Builders Victoria, the

South East Melbourne Manufacturers Alliance and the Australian Industry Group. I will go through the five concerns.

First is the reach of the document power. The bill allows health and safety representatives and authorised representatives of registered employee organisations – that is, unions – to inspect and copy any document they consider relevant to a suspected contravention. There is no limit here, so they can go into a business and they can look at documents around commercial terms, subcontractor arrangements, HR records, joint venture material, project plans – anything – infrastructure, personnel files. There is no line as to what they can and cannot look at, and any safeguards that are being proposed are effectively and in practice unenforceable. Yes, sure, the bill in writing prohibits the publishing of this material online, as if that is the only way information gets communicated or shared. It does nothing to stop it being handed to a union's office or a trades hall or anyone who asks. It sets no limit on how long copies may be kept and no requirement that they ever be destroyed.

Second, because these copies in practice will be photographs on a representative's own phone, the material leaves the employer's custody the moment the photo is taken. These are the safeguards; in other words, there are none.

Third, the scope of a visit can now grow while the investigation is underway. Today a representative must give notice of a suspected contravention before entering and must leave and re-enter to pursue a new one, which might be a bit of an inconvenience, but it is also due process. It is the only thing that keeps an entry bounded. Remove it, and the representative who came in to look at one matter can, on any pretext now, expand the remit of that investigation to any other matter they suspect. That is an extraordinary power. It is basically free rein to walk into a business on one pretext, go through every document in the company and then find other pretexts to continue on with. If that is not leaving a process open to abuse, I do not know what is. It is clearly a really poor way to remedy what you are trying to remedy, because there is no governance or boundary around it.

We also note that there is a regulator called WorkSafe Victoria, and it has extensive investigative and document-gathering powers exercised by trained inspectors, subject to oversight and answerable to Parliament. If those powers are not being used well enough, the answer is to make WorkSafe faster, more consistent and more willing to enforce. It is not to issue a set of parallel powers to a party who may be party to the dispute itself. A regulator that cannot keep up does not need a surrogate; it needs to be fixed.

Fifth, there is the question of cost. Every hour spent producing documents and potentially expanding the remit of the inquiry is a cost to the business. There is no safeguard to say there will not be vexatious investigations, and for the party performing them there is nothing to reel them in, nothing to make them answerable, nothing to make them transparent, no way to appeal what they are doing, no way to challenge the validity of what they are doing and no way to question whether it is vexatious. There is no due process. It is actually opening unfettered power to an interested party to go after someone.

Again, this is simply inviting abuse. All kinds of processes and procedures are not there to protect the best behaviour, they are there to limit and prevent the worst behaviour. To pretend that there will not be bad behaviour, to pretend that in all cases everyone will act aboveboard and will have no incentive or no temptation to act otherwise is naive in the extreme. Clauses 22, 23, 25 and 27 carry these powers. We do not support them. We will drill down on these in committee.

The minister, in her second-reading speech, said:

> These amendments do not disturb the operation of existing privacy, secrecy or confidentiality provisions under other laws.

That is rubbish. Of course they do, because they are widening the scope of what may be investigated and what documents may be seen. You can make the very simple observation that had these laws been in operation at any time over the last five years, an OH&S representative – say, from the Big Build, effectively a bikie – would have had the right to go into your office and go through every one of your

filing cabinets, because they could. If they find something in one filing cabinet, they can keep that and take a photo of that, and then they can move to another filing cabinet. They can probably ask you to empty your drawers, and they can probably ask to go into a safe, because there is absolutely nothing in the law that says they cannot; in fact the law expressly says they can. So it is a dangerous power. I cannot understand how anyone would put this before us and say this is an appropriate governance process. In its broadest sense, it is perfectly legitimate that we need to find documents and we need to make employers accountable for what they do, but handing powers to, effectively, unregulated people to do whatever they want is swinging the pendulum so far the other way you come around hitting yourself on the back of the head with it.

If an authorised representative – again, we can read 'union' – or others publishes material improperly, WorkSafe can allegedly prosecute. If a health and safety representative employee does exactly the same thing, WorkSafe cannot. The employer's only avenue is to take its own worker to the Magistrates' Court. The explanatory memorandum assures us these protections run in both directions: in one direction there is a regulator and in the other there is a private prosecution that will be very difficult and costly for people to bring.

Who actually decides what is relevant to a suspected contravention? It is the representative. There is no mechanism in the bill by which an employer can test that judgement at the point the demand is made – no review, no referral and no inspector to call. An investigation of a suspected contravention on a construction site can be made to reach infinitely into the confidential affairs of a company. What the government has in practice drafted is a search power that authorises itself and a warrant that writes itself, issued by the person who wants to use it.

We know what has been happening on other sites. We know about the intimidation. We know about the treatment of women on government projects, documented and reported across the past 12 months to two years. We know which organisation has been at the centre of it. Some of the documents this bill opens up are bullying and harassment records – complaints, names, allegations made by workers who were frightened to make them and were told the complaints would be held in confidence. It gives the right to copy those records to officials of the organisation whose members are in some cases the subject of the complaint. The government cannot tell anyone in this chamber that it is combating misconduct in the construction sector when handing the people implicated in that misconduct a lawful key into any complaints file, and it cannot ask a woman on a Big Build site to speak up and in the same bill make it possible for the man she spoke up about to learn her name through his union official. Those two points are irreconcilable.

The government says this legislation will combat misconduct in the construction sector, but I think it will do the opposite, and it will do it to the people least able to withstand it. We do not want to legislate this power, because we know it will be misused. We will not ask workers to report misconduct and then make their reports available to the people they reported.

The coalition is not opposed to employee representatives having the tools to do their work; we are opposed to the execution of it in this way. It is a clear distinction. Four changes would remove the bulk of our objection. Put a boundary on the document power defined by relevance, by reference to the notice of suspected contravention, and give the employer somewhere to go – a WorkSafe inspector on a day when it says a demand has gone beyond the original inspection. Deal with copies properly: require material obtained under these powers to be held securely rather than on personal devices and to be destroyed within a fixed period once the matter concludes. Every other comparable regime does that, and this one does not. Make the misuse provisions have teeth in both directions: give WorkSafe the carriage of enforcement against health and safety representatives as well as authorised representatives, so that the remedy does not depend on an employer suing its own employee. And report – the member for Eildon asked the minister to publish enforcement activity under the new coercion and misuse offences. We repeat that request here too. If the government believes these provisions are balanced, it will have no difficulty demonstrating it in the Parliament each year by reporting.

To close, we support the disability accommodation amendments, we support the surety bond changes and we support the administrative changes. We will vote for all of them if the bill is split. What we will not do is accept unbounded transfer of regulatory power to one party in the workplace, a power not needed until September 2027, as it lumps employers with undue regulatory requirement costs and further empowers the actors of misconduct.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:17): I rise to make some brief remarks on the Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026 on behalf of myself and Greens colleagues. We will state from the outset that the Greens are supporting this bill. Much of the detail of the bill has been covered, so I would like to make this just around a few particular elements of the bill. It seeks to progress some of the work of the independent review of employee representatives, a review conducted by Mr Eugene White into whether the powers, functions and support provided to authorised representatives of registered employee organisations (ARREOs) and health and safety representatives (HSRs) under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 remain effective and fit for purpose to deliver improved health and safety outcomes for all workers. This bill is acquitting, I understand, four of the recommendations from this review in full and three in part.

I will have questions in the committee stage to clarify some of the details of the bill, but in short I think it is important that this bill does ensure that ARREOs have access to the relevant documentation that they need and that employers will be required to provide these documents relevant to a suspected contravention. I think it is important that this bill provides clear mechanisms for ARREOs to escalate a matter and access the relevant documentation if an employer does not cooperate with the provision of documentation. Unions have always been at the forefront of protecting and improving worker safety in this state. I hope the improvements in this bill continue to support their vital work.

The bill also clarifies that the TAC and WorkSafe Victoria are not liable to fund specialist disability accommodation. I have received strong assurances from the minister's office that this will not impact any current TAC or WorkSafe recipients, and I very much hope that that is the case. While the bill does also cover some changes to options for self-insurers under the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013, the WorkCover scheme, I cannot sit down without also mentioning the plight of hundreds of injured workers across the state here in Victoria. Almost every week I am contacted by an injured worker who is navigating an unwieldy system that is making recovery harder, and in many cases, it is injuring them further. The level of gaslighting, the roadblocks, the delays, the challenges, the rejections, all the inconsistencies and the heartbreak, the stress, the financial strain, the hoops that injured workers are being forced to jump through – it is beyond belief what people are experiencing when trying to access support and recovery following a workplace injury. We need a serious shake-up of the WorkCover system so that the scheme actually treats injured workers with respect, dignity and empathy; genuinely supports workers through their injuries to improve people's health and wellbeing; and stops causing harm to people that it should be supporting.

As I have stated from the outset, the Greens support the bill. I will foreshadow there is the potential that I may be moving some amendments during the committee stage. We are still in active conversations across different parts of the chamber as to how we will proceed there, so I will not speak to those at this point. I will speak to that in the committee stage as appropriate. In saying that, I will leave my comments there, and I commend the bill to the house.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:21): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026. This is a bill with a fair few different moving parts to it, but it is fundamentally about ensuring that Victoria's occupational health and safety laws continue to support safe and fair workplaces. It is something that has long been a passion of mine, and indeed I know it has long been a passion of yours, Acting President Berger. With our respective backgrounds in the trade union movement and seeing the impact that a dangerous workplace or a workplace injury can have on particular workers, we know the difference that a workplace which embraces a culture of positive health and safety makes and the difference it makes on the physical and emotional wellbeing of working Victorians.

It is something that I often saw in my background with some incredible health and safety representatives (HSRs). It is why I am so pleased to see that this bill before us today makes some reforms to support the work that health and safety representatives in workplaces do. Having looked after union members in the retail, other service and food service sectors and seeing the difference that a HSR can make, especially one that is empowered, that is well trained and that is supported by their colleagues and by their members, it is quite extraordinary.

There are a number of reforms within this bill. In particular, when it comes to health and safety representatives, we know that these are often the people best placed in stores to identify hazards before they become a greater issue and before they present something that causes a worker to be injured. They are the best placed to identify and respond to those issues. Indeed, as part of the government's response to the independent review of employee representatives – a very important review, I might say, that ensures that WorkSafe safety practices are modern and keeping workers safe – this bill will implement three of those recommendations fully and another four partially. These are responsible amendments.

When it comes to HSRs in particular, as well as authorised representatives of registered employee organisations, or ARREOs, they play an integral role in Victoria's workplace safety framework, particularly by strengthening the ability of health and safety reps to resolve workplace safety concerns by allowing them to inspect and copy documents that are relevant to a suspected contravention. This means of course that hazards may not be immediately visible, such as psychosocial hazards. They can be more accurately identified should their impact be made primarily in document form. This change will help HSRs and ARREOs to investigate issues within the newer psychological health regulations that are already in place – in fact that commenced in December of last year. These new powers are supported by safeguards that ensure that gathered information is used appropriately and that it is not shared in ways that might damage a workplace's reputation, such as by sharing on social media or live streaming.

This bill also implements commonsense reform for ARREOs, who no longer need to leave and re-enter a workplace to investigate additional suspected contraventions, which may be discovered whilst they are investigating the first contravention. HSRs will also receive a standardised way to issue PINs – or 'provisional improvement notices' as they are formally known – to ensure consistency in this process and allow for digitisation, which will support that as well. I know many of the most effective HSRs would use PINs very effectively, not by issuing them willy-nilly of course but by approaching it in a responsible manner in having those conversations with management. With the ability to take that next step and issue a PIN, it obviously proves very effective in actually resolving the majority of disputes, in my experience, before a PIN actually needs to be issued. But when it does come to the issuing of them, it is very important that they are done in a way which is as straightforward and indeed as modern as possible and supports HSRs to fulfil and acquit their roles in the most effective way. There are many more things I could talk about in the substantive bill. However, I do wish to at this point, on behalf of the responsible minister, circulate the government's house amendments.

There are three broad themes to these amendments, which I will now speak to. The first, which I will come to later, relates to increased financial support for children who are affected by fatal road trauma. The other two broad schemes of amendments relate firstly to dust-related conditions. These amend common-law rights for workers with occupational dust-related conditions. They are intended to ensure that workers with dust-related conditions are treated more fairly and more consistently in a way that reflects the nature of these diseases. Dust-related conditions can develop over long periods and worsen over time, and a worker may first be diagnosed with one condition before later developing another separate condition arising from the same occupational exposure. The law should recognise this, and with the successful passage of this amendment today it will.

Firstly, the bill extends existing arrangements to allow workers with dust-related conditions to seek a second award of damages where they later develop another dust-related condition from the same exposure. This builds on the current approach for certain asbestos-related and silica-related conditions.

Secondly, the reforms address a historical gap in access to common-law damages for workers who were exposed between the dates of 12 November 1997 and 20 October 1999. These amendments help to ensure that compensation reflects the full circumstances of that exposure. Thirdly, the bill will also remove the limitation period for claims relating to dust exposure during that same period, recognising that dust-related conditions may take many years to emerge. Finally, the bill will remove prelitigation processes for common-law damages for dust-related conditions, which will support a more direct pathway to the Supreme Court. Taken together, these reforms will create a more coherent framework across Victorian legislation.

The second part of the amendments I wish to speak to relate to the sentencing of Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 offences. This house amendment will create a framework for courts to consider impact statements from affected persons, such as bereaved family members and others in OH&S sentencing proceedings. They will repeal improvement project orders, rename and expand health and safety undertakings and increase maximum penalties. They will significantly increase maximum penalties for reckless endangerment and introduce a new offence within section 32, which applies to contraventions of a health and safety duty and is not limited by a workplace element. These amendments will improve the ability of people who are affected by workplace incidents to participate fully and meaningfully in sentencing proceedings for OH&S offences and strengthen sentencing practices. The amendments are proposed to commence on 10 September 2027, unless they are proclaimed earlier, which is provided for in these amendments, to align with the commencement of other Occupational Health and Safety Act amendments in the bill and to allow time for implementation.

I also wish to turn to something that is a matter that is fixed by this bill, which is something that has come to the attention in recent months of the Legal and Social Issues Committee, with our inquiry into claims made through the Transport Accident Commission. This was a very worthwhile committee for me and many others, indeed some of them in this room, to be a part of. I do want to acknowledge at this point Mr Limbrick for his bringing this matter to the attention of the Parliament and for his instigation for the LSIC to conduct this inquiry. It is through that that we received many powerful pieces of evidence. As I spoke on at the tabling of the report, the majority of people who came and shared their experience with us shared some very deeply emotional and deeply personal stories about their experiences. We also had the benefit of hearing from others, including the TAC itself and medical and legal professionals who came and told us about their perspectives on the scheme. Whilst we did hear that overall the scheme is performing well and working well and there are a number of improvements being made, there are certainly some areas for improvement that we identified as a committee.

Our committee made 13 recommendations: 11 recommendations to the TAC itself and two to the Victorian government. I am extremely pleased to say that just earlier this day the government tabled its response to the inquiry's report, which perhaps may be a record – it is certainly a record in my time in this chamber – of a four-week response, about five months earlier than was required. I acknowledge the incredible efforts of those in Minister Dimopoulos's office, in the department and in the TAC and of Minister Dimopoulos himself in ensuring that the government's response to this inquiry could come through as quickly as it did. I think it shows a great deal of respect to everyone who participated in our inquiry. I hope that they have had the chance already to consult and consider the government's response and indeed the fact that the vast majority, 12 out of 13 recommendations, are being supported in full by the government.

I do wish to speak, though, specifically to the amendments in this bill and to recommendation 6 of our inquiry. Recommendation 6 came about as a result of evidence that we received from a remarkable couple, Bernard and Michelle Robertson from Geelong, who came and shared with us their story. Their daughter had a child as a single mother. She decided to have a child and was certainly, from what we heard as a committee, a wonderful and loving mum who was tragically taken from us all and from her family far too soon in a road traffic accident. As a result, Bernard and Michelle took over

guardianship and custody of their grandchild. However, due to what we could call a flaw in the Transport Accident Act 1986, the payment that they received for the care of their granddaughter as her new effective guardians was not the same as what it would have been – in fact was a fraction of what it would have been – had they been a surviving parent. This is a clear – unintentional but clear – inequity in the current set of arrangements, and it was something that I know concerned the committee, I believe, quite unanimously. I know it is something that also concerned the member for Geelong in the other place, Chris Couzens, who is the local MP for the Robertson family and who has been advocating for this case most strongly as well. Along with Mr Limbrick, I also want to acknowledge the member for Geelong for her tenacious advocacy that has also led to where we are today.

As a result, recommendation 6 of our inquiry's report does propose to remedy this. It is something that is beyond the power of the TAC to apply discretion to; it does require legislative intervention. I am delighted that as a result of recommendation 6 of our committee's report, and as a result of the government's response tabled earlier this day, these amendments will actually address that loophole, ensuring that for any families in future who are also subject to the same tragic circumstances, the people providing care for the child will receive the same entitlements as they would if they were a surviving sole parent. This is something that the Robertson family have been speaking up for incredibly selflessly on behalf of people that we do not know, but we know that this will, very sadly, happen again. The reforms in this amendment, which I sincerely hope will be passed along with the remainder of the bill by this chamber today, will make an extraordinary difference to these families. It is a very small number of families, but with the changing nature of families, evolving day by day, it is something that will, sadly, happen again to quite possibly more people. For those future people, this will make a profound difference.

Given that this is something that has been able to be achieved within such a short turnaround, within literally 28 days of our report being tabled – I had the privilege of meeting with the new minister very shortly after our report was tabled and drew his attention, although he was already aware, to recommendation 6 – I am really grateful to Minister Dimopoulos for the very keen interest he has taken in the work of the committee. I give him enormous credit for driving this reform through and finding a pathway so that we could address this issue today. I also particularly want to acknowledge Carla Ienco, the adviser in his office, and in particular, Rumaan Baryalai, who worked tirelessly in a very, very short space of time to find a way for us to bring this amendment forward. This amendment is very special to be able to talk to because it is a result of committee work in this Parliament, work that we all, as upper house members, constantly put in, delivering real and meaningful change for Victorian people. There are many who rightly deserve credit for this, including the member for Geelong, Mr Limbrick and all of those on the committee who put this recommendation forward.

It is a true honour to be standing here and commending this particular amendment to the house. This is one of those cases where in this job we are incredibly privileged to be able to be doing work which makes a profound difference in Victorians' lives – in this case, not a great many Victorians, but a profound difference for those who it will affect. I particularly commend this amendment, and in doing so, I commend all of the house amendments and the bill to the house.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:36): I also would like to speak a bit on the Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026. I have got good news and bad news on this bill. I will start with the good news. The good news is, as Mr Galea mentioned, the government is moving an amendment to this bill as a result of the output from the inquiry into TAC claims. One of the issues that was brought to the committee's attention by the Robertson family, who very bravely gave evidence at a public hearing on this, was that unfortunately, not through design but through what I think Mr Galea termed a loophole, something that was not foreseen was that when children are orphaned through a traffic accident and someone such as their grandparent takes over guardianship of the child, the payments to them are only a fraction of what they would have otherwise been if the surviving spouse had have been alive and received a payment from the TAC. Obviously for grandparents who might be in or approaching retirement, this unexpected

financial burden of looking after an orphaned child can have a huge impact. We certainly heard that from the Robertson family, who gave evidence to that effect.

I made a few complaints about the way that the government was using the funds in the TAC through taking dividends from the TAC. But one thing that I will not complain about is when those funds are redirected through an amendment like this to be paid to orphaned children and their families or their guardians. I think that this is a wonderful thing. I would like to thank my fellow committee members for unanimously agreeing that these issues were valid in terms of making recommendations and also Minister Dimopoulos for actually taking swift action on this. I agree with Mr Galea; I do not think I have ever seen a committee response come back so quickly. I am still going through the response myself. My team only just received it today, but certainly recommendation 6, which was around payments to guardians for looking after children orphaned through traffic accidents, is an excellent amendment. This is a good use of TAC resources. It is a good use of the funds that everyone pays for in their registration payments. As I said, there have been many cases where I have been upset at how these funds have been used, but this is not one of them. This is an excellent use of those funds, and I think that anyone who pays their registration into the TAC fund would think that this is a very appropriate way to use those funds to help the children and families who are suffering because of a car accident. So that is wonderful news.

The bad news is this bill otherwise has some problems. The main problem, as Mr Welch has pointed out, is around the new documents order powers that are going to be afforded to unions. I get the motivation for this. If there is a health and safety issue, you want to be able to make sure that you have got all the evidence available and that sort of thing. The problem here is that the reality is that we know at least one union has been, and we assume still is, infiltrated and corrupted by organised crime. We recently initiated and supported a royal commission into corruption in the construction sector. We do not know how many other unions have been infiltrated like this – I hope not many. I hope none actually, but we do not know. We will need to wait for the royal commission to do its work. The idea that people from a potentially corrupted union could go into a workplace and demand documents to be ordered – and not only demand documents to be ordered but go through their computer systems with very few safeguards – I would normally oppose, just because it is a property rights breach and causes all sorts of potential problems. But also, in the case of a union that has been corrupted, what is happening here is dangerous. We do not know what they might use these documents for or this information for. I think that this is an extremely dangerous thing to do, and quite frankly, I am surprised that the government would do this at this time when we know that this royal commission is just getting started.

Maybe we should get a handle on what sort of corruption is actually going on before we start handing over powers like this to union officials, because we do not know what sorts of people we are actually giving these powers to yet. I have some concerns about that, and I think that everyone in this place should have some concerns about that because we know that we have seen massive corruption through organised crime in the government construction sector, including by infiltrating the union and taking up positions. I will note that in one of the reports in the media it turned out to be a bikie that was a health and safety officer in the union – like, the exact person that you are giving these powers to. I think that that alone should be enough to make anyone hesitate in supporting this. I think that this is a very, very dangerous power, and maybe we should wait until we get the results from the royal commission before even thinking about something like this.

Therefore the Libertarian Party will be opposing this, but I will be letting it go through the second reading because I am interested to see what happens with the splitting of the bill. Hopefully this house will support splitting the bill, because I agree with the opposition here that this is a very, very dangerous power. It would be dangerous if the unions were not corrupted, but it is more dangerous knowing what we know. We actually do not know who we are giving these powers to, and I think that this is extremely dangerous.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:43): I rise to make a contribution on the Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026. I might just start with some comments around the work of the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into claims made through the Transport Accident Commission because, as other speakers have noted, in regard to this there were some things that the committee recommended and the government has acted on, in terms of children whose parents have died as a result of accidents or illnesses contracted through the workplace. So some of those things are quite positive. I then want to turn to some of the things that Mr Welch and also Mr Limbrick have commented on. As a union official of some 25 years standing, I thoroughly disagree with a lot of the concern that has been raised around right-of-entry powers and the right to inspect wages and books. But anyway, I will come to that shortly.

The Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee held an inquiry into claims made through the TAC and tabled its final report on 25 August 2026. The report made 13 recommendations designed to improve the outcomes and experiences for TAC clients and providers. The government proposed to support in full all the recommendations except for recommendation 1, which relates to a separate inquiry into the Freedom of Information Act 1982 and which government has already responded to in any event. The report made a recommendation, recommendation 6:

> That the Victorian Government review surviving spouse and legal guardian payments in the situation where a child is orphaned and a new guardian is appointed.

The recommendation follows the finding of the committee that the TAC legislation did not provide for fair and equitable treatment of all family types, including where grandparents become legal guardians of children following a transport-related death of the parent. The proposed amendment aims to address this recommendation. It is a really great credit to the committee and all who gave evidence to the committee that the committee has come up with these recommendations, because it clearly is I guess an unintended consequence of the way that the legislation operated. It is clear how the legislation operated on the face of it, but we are certainly addressing that point where grandparents or other family types might become legal guardians of children. No worker or family expects that a worker that goes to work will not be able to come home safely or will not come home at all, so adopting this recommendation and the proposed changes means that this will be amended and further hardship will not be visited upon families who already unnecessarily suffer.

Also there are dust-related condition amendments. Dust-related conditions are often very different from other workplace injuries because they can take years to develop and to appear. These can arise from exposure across multiple workplaces and are often progressive and incurable and can take a very long time. Sometimes people might have left a previous workplace where they had exposure and may not have known that there was exposure and then these things get traced back over a long period of time. These features, the way these dust diseases can progress, can make it harder for injured workers to access fair compensation under the current system. While Victoria has introduced reforms for workers with conditions such as asbestosis and silicosis, stakeholder groups continue to highlight the gaps in the law for other types of dust-related conditions. The proposed reforms are intended to address those gaps and ensure that the compensation system better reflects the nature of dust-related conditions. I think we can all reflect on what happened when – and this is just in recent memory – everybody was getting those stone benchtops. They might have looked great in the house, but the problem was that the dust that came from cutting those stone benchtops then led to silicosis forming in those workers who were exposed to the dust. Some of it was quite horrific, actually, the way the disease progressed and how workers were struggling to breathe; it really did reflect the journey of people who were exposed to asbestos. It just goes to show why we need strong health and safety regulation in this country.

I also just want to touch on the amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004. The house amendments will create a framework for courts to consider the impact of statements from affected persons, such as a bereaved family, bereaved family members and others. In the OH&S sentencing proceedings real improvement project orders rename and expand health and safety

undertakings and increase maximum penalties as well; also, they significantly increase maximum penalties for reckless endangerment and introduce a new offence within section 32 which applies to contravention of a health and safety duty and is not limited by the 'at a workplace' element. These amendments will improve the ability of persons affected in workplace incidents to participate fully and meaningfully in sentencing proceedings for OH&S offences and strengthen sentencing practices as well. The amendments are proposed to commence on 10 September 2027, unless proclaimed earlier, to align with the commencement of other OH&S act amendments.

Also, importantly, just on the dust-related conditions house amendments, the bill extends existing arrangements to allow workers with these dust-related conditions to seek a second award of damages, as I touched on earlier, where they later develop another dust-related condition from the same exposure. This builds on the current approach for certain asbestos-related and silica-related conditions. As I remarked upon earlier, sometimes these conditions can take a long time to develop and secondary conditions can continue. The gaps in the law meant that often those people who contracted secondary conditions fell through the gaps and were not compensated. This will improve that situation. Secondly, the reforms address a historical gap in access to common-law damages for workers exposed between 12 November 1997 and 20 October 1999. These amendments help ensure compensation reflects the full circumstances of that exposure. Thirdly, the bill will also remove the limitation period for claims relating to dust exposure during the same period but again recognises that dust-related conditions may take many, many years to emerge. Finally, the bill will remove prelitigation processes for common-law damages claims for dust-related conditions, supporting a more direct pathway to the Supreme Court. Taken together, these reforms will create a more coherent framework across Victorian legislation, enabling workers to have better access to the compensation claims framework.

I also want to touch on some of the comments Mr Welch and Mr Limbrick made, which I can summarise neatly as about concern around union officials having access to records and who these people are and what they might do with these records and the like and remarking on what happened in the construction sector. Might I add that there are many, many unions who represent many, many workers. Having worked for the nurses union just before coming into this place, I can say I have never worked with a more professional bunch of people. They are dedicated to their work and furthering the interests of nurses in our hospital system and in our aged care system. It is of course not surprising that we see attempts by the opposition and perhaps Mr Limbrick to cast a net and cast aspersions over all people who work in the mighty union movement. I have worked with a number of unions and spent a long time advocating for workers, and I have always found, for the most part, people to be professional and respectful and absolutely dedicated to the cause of making sure that workers, when they go to work, can come home safely and are not subject to exploitation and abuse.

Mr Welch and Mr Limbrick may not be aware, but statutory right-of-entry powers allowing union officials and inspectors to enter premises and inspect wage records have existed in Victoria for over 120 years. Maybe a little bit of history might have gone down well for those opposite. There is a long history going back to 1896. I remember this from when I was a young union official. This is a very old piece of legislation. Minister Stitt, who is sitting in front of me, might remember this as well. The Factories and Shops Act of 1896 used to allow – we are all shaking our heads and going, 'Yes, I remember that' –

Ingrid Stitt interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Yes, we are showing our age and our collective knowledge of many, many years. If you added together all the collective knowledge of the prior union officials in this place it would be probably over 100 years. Certainly, this was introduced to allow inspectors a broad statutory right to inspect workplaces, check time books and enforce the early wages boards' minimum wage determinations. It was about making sure that workers were not being ripped off. Then we had powers under the 1904 Conciliation and Arbitration Act: formal rights for registered trade union officials to enter workplaces and inspect time and wage records. 1904 is a long time ago. These are not new powers. It should not come as a shock or surprise to anybody. Then of course we had the

mid-20th-century Victorian wages boards' determinations. State-based conciliation and arbitration awards routinely included explicit right-of-entry clauses. Accredited union representatives were legally granted access to inspect time and wage book records et cetera. Then of course we skip right forward to 2004 and the Occupational Health and Safety Act in Victoria. Victoria reinstated state-level statutory right-of-entry powers specifically for health and safety representatives – authorised representatives of registered employee organisations, so accredited health and safety representatives – to inspect workplaces.

Today the right to inspect wage and employment records in Victoria is primarily governed by part 3-4 of the Fair Work Act 2009. Union officials have to give notice before they enter. There is a lot of consternation on the other side about this, but what we know and understand is the reason why union officials actually need to have access to investigate concern about health and safety breaches, alleged health and safety breaches and the like is because we want to make sure that workers are not being ripped off and that their health and safety is not being compromised in some way. As I said, these powers have existed for some time. They are not new powers. Again, it is important that union officials can have access in order for some of them to put provisional improvement notices on things where it is imminently dangerous or inherently dangerous. I would say if you are doing nothing wrong, you have got nothing to worry about. The contributions of Mr Welch and Mr Limbrick about this being dangerous and these people are going to be running around – it is completely ridiculous. I thought we had moved on from the fearmongering that goes along with those sorts of views.

As a union official I have sat down with employers across the table and talked about health and safety incidences where we have been able to agree on the employer making improvements to the workplace so that people are not injured. For example, one of the last things that I did was when a nurse was seriously injured at work and had her arm broken. That employer was able to sit down and talk to them about how we could make improvements. The opportunity for me to access that workplace was there because of the framework that allowed me to enter, through a right-of-entry permit. I was able to gain access to that workplace and have a very frank conversation with that employer, and we were able to work out, through those discussions, how workplace safety could be improved. There is nothing wrong with that, but sometimes employers resist those attempts to have those conversations. And that is where a union official exercising those powers has every right to, and they should continue to, given the long history that I have just outlined.

This bill, as I said, does a number of things that will help. There are stronger integrity and accountability measures. The powers will come with appropriate safeguards. It gives clear protections against coercion and misuse of information; prevents inappropriate online publication of material; protects privacy; safeguards sensitive information; and strengthens confidence in the occupational health and safety framework. It is everybody's business – employers, unions, workers – to make sure every worker who goes to work every day can come home safe and uninjured. I have just gone through some of the changes that arise from the recommendations of the Legal and Social Issues Committee, because they go to directly supporting workers and families who may have suffered as a consequence of very serious workplace injuries.

This bill does present a practical package of reforms. It will improve workplace safety, strengthen the integrity of Victoria's occupational health and safety system, reduce unnecessary red tape and provide greater certainty for employers and workers alike. Again, it delivers on the government's commitment to ensuring Victoria remains both one of the safest places in the world to work and one of the best places to do business. These are sensible and balanced reforms that workers support and employers also support, and they will protect the long-term sustainability of the WorkCover and TAC schemes. I might leave my remarks and my contribution there. I recommend the amendments and the amendment of the bill to the house.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (16:58): I rise to make a contribution on the Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026, which makes amendments to several bills encompassing Victoria's workers compensation and occupational

health and safety framework. It enables self-insured employers to use regulated surety bonds as an alternative to bank guarantees. Currently, self-insured employers must provide bank guarantees to ensure workers compensation liabilities can be met if the employer becomes insolvent. Surety bonds provide greater flexibility and liquidity for employers while preserving protections for workers if their liabilities are transferred to the WorkCover scheme. It makes several governance and administrative changes relating to the chair of WorkSafe Victoria and other operational matters.

The bill implements reforms stemming from Eugene White's independent review of employee representatives, which considered whether the powers, functions and support provided to authorised representatives of registered employee organisations and health and safety representatives under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 are still effective in terms of delivering improved health and safety outcomes for workers. That review made 17 recommendations to improve the effectiveness of employee representation, but unfortunately only four of those are acquitted in this bill. The bill improves the ability of health and safety representatives to identify and resolve OH&S matters, enabling them to inspect and make copies of documents relevant to alleged contraventions of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, a topic I will return to shortly. The operation of existing privacy, secrecy or confidentiality provisions under other laws will still continue.

It also gives health and safety reps greater authority to investigate breaches when found onsite and to provide a notice of suspected contravention. It enhances certain administrative functions for multi-employer designated work groups on sites where multiple employers operate side by side. Unions are supportive of these reforms. They have long advocated for better access to information and stronger powers to help workers raise safety concerns before injuries occur.

The bill introduces offences relating to coercion in respect to nomination and election of health and safety reps, restricts the misuse of information obtained through occupational health and safety powers and prohibits the live streaming or publication of photographs and recordings obtained in the course of exercising those powers. We welcome these changes, and we commend the government for bringing this bill before the Parliament.

The bill, however, does not fully implement the recommendations of the *Independent Review of Employee Representatives* report, particularly around access to workplace documents relevant to suspected contraventions. We have some amendments which will strengthen and authorise representatives' power to inspect documents. I ask that these amendments be circulated now. The amendments firstly clarify that electronic records and documents can be accessed rather than being restricted to documents that are actually physically located on the site. This will broaden access to documents relevant to suspected contraventions so representatives can more effectively investigate safety concerns and ensure that employers cannot avoid compliance with an authorised representative's request for documents simply because that information is stored digitally or offsite rather than in hard-copy form. This makes perfect sense, because I am sure people have heard that there is actually now a greater reliance on digital documents in the modern workplace – I know; surprise, surprise – yet suddenly they become privileged simply because they are electronic. This is a deliberate oversight and one that the government is well aware of. Despite government assertions to the contrary by the minister, recommendation 9 of the independent review recommended:

> That the Victorian Government amend the OHS Act to:
>
> - require an employer to allow an HSR or ARREO to inspect and make copies of documents relevant to a suspected contravention that are:
> - kept at the workplace or are accessible from a computer at the workplace
> - not kept at the workplace, subject to notice given during work hours at least twenty-four hours but no more than fourteen days before entry …

The amendments also establish the right of authorised representatives to require employers to produce relevant workplace documents and create an obligation on the employer to provide access when requested. This mandate is entirely consistent with Mr White's recommendations.

The OH&S act still maintains the protection that an authorised representative may only do things reasonable for the purposes of inquiring into a suspected contravention, and in the case of a dispute, either the employer or the representative may call to arrange a WorkSafe inspector's attendance, so employers retain their protection. Listening to Mr Limbrick's assertion – and I am sorry, I missed Mr Welch's contribution in total, but I believe they were in common – I would go so far as to suggest that it is panic-mongering to make the assertion that this bill or these amendments should not go ahead because of alleged corruption in the construction division of the CFMEU. That division makes up a small percentage of the construction workforce, which in turn makes up a small percentage of the overall workforce. To suggest that because there is alleged corruption by a small number of people – and it is alleged – these protections should not apply to all workers, including workers that are not in unions, and that is the majority of workers, and let us recognise that many health and safety reps are not actually in unions, to suggest that because of that tiny question, though it is a current and very important question, no-one should have these protections, is outrageous, especially given this vision that has been painted of a CFMEU construction division health and safety rep coming in unannounced and rampaging through a company's IT system. The reality is a request is required in advance and it needs to define what is being sought. Most importantly, if either the health and safety rep or the employer are concerned about the circumstances of that request, either can request that an inspector be present. That is the reality – that is the law – and to pretend that this is opening up some Wild West frontier is, frankly, outrageous and insulting to the community's intelligence.

Our amendments merely enliven recommendation 9 and bring Victoria into line with the existing Commonwealth work health and safety laws. We have heard from the minister and others this preposterous notion that there may be 'unforeseen circumstances'. That federal legislation has been in place for some time; unforeseen circumstances have had the opportunity to be seen. To suggest that that is not the case is, I am afraid, gratuitous. In that context, we suggest that there is nothing mysterious or unknown or dangerous about extending this right to electronic records. This is a simple change and one that the government should have brought itself or at least should have agreed to after discussions with a range of stakeholders, including Trades Hall. I would indicate that we are also supporting the amendment being moved by Mr Puglielli to broaden the provisions for the award of damages to injured workers with certain dust-related conditions to ensure that these workers have fair and efficient access to compensation.

The bill also clarifies that neither the TAC nor WorkSafe is liable to fund specialist disability accommodation under the NDIS, resolving what the government describes as an unintended overlap in the legislation. As an aside, the government's handling of the transition of disability supports from the federal NDIS scheme to the states has been, frankly, a shambles. It has been incredibly stressful for parents and carers of people with a disability, who have been largely left in the dark about how the changes to the scheme will impact them. They are exhausted, they are overwhelmed by these proposed changes and will most certainly be the ones filling the gap left by the reduction in services – but I do digress. That said, the bill seeks to introduce positive changes to worker safety and representation. As I said, we will be supporting this bill and our amendments will serve to strengthen this bill. I commend both to the chamber.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:10): Thank you very much for the opportunity to rise today and speak on the Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026. We are making sure Victorian workplaces are safe while at the same time making it easier for Victorian businesses to operate and grow. This is a highly practical piece of legislation. It updates our occupational health and safety laws, it gives self-insurers new financial options, it corrects technical errors in our transport and accident compensation schemes and it includes incredibly important house amendments for workers suffering from dust diseases.

I want to focus first, if I can, on the workplace safety reforms. Safety on the job is a fundamental right. To make sure worksites stay safe we rely heavily on health and safety representatives, or HSRs, and on authorised representatives of registered employee organisations, known as ARREOs. Following

the independent review led by Mr Eugene White, we are putting in place reforms to ensure that these representatives have the tools they need to do their work properly. Currently the law allows safety representatives to physically inspect a workplace, but we know that modern workplace hazards are not always physical. Hazards like bullying, unmanageable workloads and harassment often leave their evidence in policies, risk assessments and written procedures. That is why this bill explicitly gives HSRs and ARREOs the power to inspect and make copies of documents related to a suspected safety breach. This gives them the practical ability to identify risks and resolve health and safety issues with employers before someone actually gets hurt. We are also fixing an unnecessary administrative burden. Right now if an authorised representative enters a construction site to investigate a specific safety issue and, while there, they spot a completely separate, dangerous safety hazard, they are legally required to leave the premises, issue a brand new notice and then re-enter the site to investigate it. Safety should never be delayed by paperwork. This bill fixes that, allowing authorised representatives to look into a newly identified safety hazard during the exact same visit, as long as they issue a new notice of suspected contravention.

While we are ensuring these representatives have the powers that they need, we are also making sure those powers are used with absolute integrity. We know that safety representatives can obtain highly sensitive confidential information during their inspection. This bill strengthens the safeguards against the misuse of said information. We are making it an explicit ground for disqualification for a health and safety representative to intentionally use, disclose or provide material for a purpose that is not reasonably connected to their safety role. We are expressly prohibiting these representatives from publishing sensitive workplace information online. We have heard reports of workplace information, photographs and recordings being live streamed or posted on social media. Posting this kind of content online has the potential to cause substantial harm to the privacy of individuals and does nothing to resolve a genuine safety dispute. If you are an authorised representative who breaches this prohibition, you will face penalties. This reform ensures that safety powers are used strictly to keep workers safe.

To further protect the integrity of the system we are introducing new coercion powers and offences. We have heard allegations of intimidating behaviour on some worksites, including pressure being applied to dictate how safety representatives use their powers or intimidation tactics used to control safety elections. This bill introduces a broad coercion offence covering all these matters under parts 7 and 8 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004. If you attempt to threaten, intimidate or coerce someone in relation to a safety election or the exercise of a safety power, you will face significant penalties: up to 500 penalty units for an individual and up to 2500 penalty units for a body corporate. Workplaces must be safe, and the people elected to protect this safety must be able to operate entirely free from intimidation. I will just declare to the chamber that I was once an elected representative of my workplace. This is an amendment that I feel very strongly about, and I am very pleased to see it contained in the bill before us.

To support the prompt resolution of disputes, this bill also gives WorkSafe Victoria inspectors the power to make binding decisions on unresolved matters when negotiating safety groups on sites with multiple employers. Previously inspectors could only offer guidance for these shared sites, leaving workers on large projects without the same access to binding dispute resolution as a single-employer workplace. We are also requiring that provisional improvement notices be issued in a WorkSafe-approved format. This ensures clarity and supports the digitisation of safety reporting across the state.

I want to come now to work that I was particularly pleased to see, and that is some house amendments that have been incorporated into the bill – amendments that go directly to how we support Victorians facing unimaginable tragedy. For workers suffering from occupational dust-related conditions, the legal framework historically failed to recognise how these diseases progress. The worker exposed to dangerous dust might be diagnosed with one condition today only to develop a completely separate, terminal condition years later from that exact same exposure. This bill extends existing arrangements to allow workers with dust-related conditions to seek a second award of damages if they later develop another condition. It also addresses a historical gap in access to common-law damages for workers

exposed between 12 November 1997 and the 20 October 1999. We are removing the limitation period for claims relating to dust exposure during that time, ensuring workers are not locked out of justice simply because the disease took decades to appear. We are also removing prelitigation processes for these claims, supporting a much more direct pathway to the Supreme Court for dying workers who do not have the time to wait. Having begun my union career working in dust diseases, I need to say that seeing a worker wait and wait and wait for justice from the courts is a tragedy compounded by tragedy, and I am so pleased to see any measures that bring justice to these workers more quickly. Of course I spent four years in workplace health and safety, and that was a quite a formative time in my life. So can I take a moment to acknowledge the extraordinary leadership of Bernie Banton, who was an inspiration to me over that period and showed me great kindness.

Can I just say I had the privilege of being called up quite last minute to the Legal and Social Issues Committee for the Transport Accident Commission inquiry, and I must confess I did not know too much about the system. Going into that, I saw evidence very clearly of the way we treated orphaned children that was just not acceptable. I am certainly very happy to see the house amendments before us contained in this bill that deliver fairness for children impacted by fatal road trauma. We are increasing the payments provided by the Transport Accident Commission to children orphaned by transport accident who are in the care of a guardian, and we are extending the education allowance to all children who have lost a parent on our roads. This guarantees equitable financial support for every child who suffers this profound loss, regardless of their family structure. This is a response to the committee's work, and can I thank the members of the community that came along and presented that evidence.

Further to issues around road safety, we have strengthened our sentencing practices for workplace deaths. Following a review by the Sentencing Advisory Council, this bill creates a framework for courts to formally consider impact statements from affected persons such as bereaved family members in safety sentencing proceedings. When a worker dies on the job, their family deserves to have their voice heard in court. We are also significantly increasing maximum penalties for reckless endangerment, ensuring that the punishment reflects the crime when an employer gambles with a worker's life. I commend that on behalf of my cousin James Watt, who died on the job, on the road, in 2017 by a reckless employer who thought that his safety could be gambled with, and unfortunately on that day his life was lost. I honour him.

I would like to take this moment to acknowledge Mr Berger, who joined me this year at the truck drivers memorial, where we had a chance to come together and honour all those whose lives have been lost on our roads. It is true that the opportunity to speak up on behalf of our bereaved family members was something that was not afforded our family, but I wish that those in the future have those opportunities afforded now by the bill before us, which I am so pleased to see.

We are strengthening protections for workers and supporting Victorian businesses. I want to talk about self-insurers and non-WorkCover employers. The current requirements to ensure that their compensation liabilities are exclusively through bank guarantees is a really highly restrictive practice. The bank guarantee requires a really massive cash deposit, tying up capital that could otherwise be actively used, and this bill allows these employers to use surety bonds as an alternative. It is a straightforward win for productivity, and a surety bond does not require a cash deposit. By accepting surety bonds, we are freeing up vital cash flow for major employers. If you are a large manufacturer, instead of having your capital sit idly in a bank to satisfy a guarantee you can use those funds to hire more staff, upgrade your machinery, hopefully upgrade your safety and expand your operations. To ensure that the WorkCover scheme remains financially secure, we are mandating that any surety bond issued must be regulated by the Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority, or APRA, and meet strict credit rating requirements set up in the ministerial directive.

The bill also, I will just say quickly, contains technical amendments to the Transport Accident Act 1986, the Accident Compensation Act 1985 and the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013. To address what Mr Ettershank spoke to earlier, the unintended drafting

issue regarding specialist disability accommodation, I think Mr Ettershank actually covered those remarks and I am sure others have, and I do thank them for that contribution. I would also say that there are some administrative improvements, and the bill aligns the appointment, resignation and pay arrangements for the WorkSafe board chair with those of the WorkSafe board directors, ensuring that these terms are set by the responsible minister. We are also streamlining the process for setting the fees and costs payable to members of medical panels, moving this to a ministerial gazettal process to cut unnecessary red tape and align with the Wrongs Act 1958.

This bill protects the integrity of our occupational health and safety system. It gives our safety representatives the tools they need, while enforcing the strict accountability that Victorians expect; it frees up capital for our major employers to invest in growth; and it ensures that our compensation scheme remains sustainable and focused on its true purpose. This is a bill, despite having many different elements, that speaks to Labor values and workers' experiences – like me and my family losing a loved one through a tragedy in a workplace accident or in fact the everyday experience of my life when I was in my late 20s working with people suffering from dust diseases, as a workplace health and safety representative and also as somebody who saw firsthand the actual debilitating life of somebody suffering a dust disease. There are elements of this bill that I am enormously proud of, and it is true that only Labor is the party that will always stand with the working people of Victoria.

This I believe may be my final bill contribution of this 60th Parliament, and so it is only fitting that I stand up here and speak to a bill that speaks so much to my lived experience, so much to my values and so much to the issues that very much affect me. I want to thank the union movement for championing all of these reforms, which very much make a difference in the lives of working people. It is true that it was only the union that could be trusted to come to the side of my family during some tragedies and some hardships, whether they were safety issues on site, the loss of my cousin or in fact when my mum's arm got caught in a machine in a factory that should have absolutely done some necessary safety upgrades and did not. These bills make actual lives change, and I cannot commend the bill enough. I thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to something that is so deeply felt.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:25): I rise to speak on this bill also. I am going to start by saying if this bill is not split, then the coalition will have absolutely no choice but to reject the whole thing. The reason for that is because of the unions' right of entry and what this gives them.

I just want to start off by saying both Ms Terpstra and Mr Ettershank – well, actually they said different things. Ms Terpstra called our concerns 'fearmongering' and Mr Ettershank 'panic-mongering'. If that is the truth, then why is it that your boss Premier Carroll is calling a royal commission? Why is he calling a royal commission? I am going to tell you why he is calling a royal commission. It is because it is quite well known that it was literally union reps on worksites that had women trapped in areas while they smoked ice in their faces. Had this been the law a year ago, had this bill been an act in February, that exact same union rep would have had access to the women's addresses and whatever they wanted. It says this in the bill brief. I will get it. Actually I will just read the clause of concern of the bill, clause 22. That got a yawn there from Mr Ettershank. It shows his interest and respect in this matter. It says that it provides that health and safety representatives have an express power to inspect and copy or take extracts from any document at the workplace – any document.

Let me tell you what happened on these Big Build sites and why we are having a royal commission – not that it has got many teeth. It is because there was criminal infiltration on many worksites. Outlaw motorcycle gangs, organised crime figures and drug traffickers gained access to these major sites, particularly, it is well known, through OH&S reps. These OH&S reps were used to house prisoners, domestic violence abusers and bikies. That is why you are having a royal commission. To say that somehow we are fearmongering about this access is very duplicitous, and it does not actually line up with the key policy that Premier Carroll brought in as soon as he became the Premier of this state.

David Ettershank interjected.

Renee HEATH: I will pick up on your interjection there, Mr Ettershank. He said, 'What about the other 99 per cent of the workforce?' This is about protections. I tell you what, I care about that lady that was held in a confined space by somebody who had just got out of prison for domestic abuse. You know what, she might not be the 99, she is the one, Mr Ettershank, and I tell you what, she is worth protecting whether you think she is or not. Had this law been enforced earlier this year, those OH&S abusers – the people that were being used in those positions, the criminals, the people that were in jail – would have had access to whatever they wanted. To say that is fearmongering is dishonest, I believe. It is completely detached from reality, and it does not even acknowledge the very policy that has become the star policy in the current Premier's government – the government Ms Terpstra belong to. I just wanted to raise that.

Here are some other things that were happening: illegal activities, workplaces used for drug distribution and union-tied workers engaged in ghost shifts. There were other rorts uncovered – extreme misconduct. There was widespread use of strippers – taxpayer-funded strippers on worksites – often organised by OH&S workers. Mr Ettershank is continually rolling his eyes. It is nothing new; we have put up with it for four years. But why are we having a royal commission if that is not the case? It is the case. Those people were contractors forced to bow to union demands. There were reports of coercive control. These are the people, had this law been in force, that would have had access to documents. That is why Premier Carroll has commissioned and established a state royal commission to investigate this. If you think that our concern about those union officials – the corrupt ones, not the good ones – having access to absolutely any document they want is unwarranted, well, I think that says more about you than it says about us.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:31): I rise to speak on the Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026. Let me start by thanking my friend in the other place the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC for introducing this legislation and for his ongoing work to improve safety for workers across Victoria. Today I speak in support of this bill, as it represents an important step forward in improving the effectiveness and the equity of the workplace compensation system here in Victoria. The way I see it, one of the key roles that we have as parliamentarians in this place is to ensure that all Victorians are able to go about their lives in the knowledge that everything is being done to ensure their safety. Chief amongst these responsibilities is ensuring that all people are able to go to work every day and come back home in good health and uninjured.

The role of workplace safety is of absolute importance. No worker should be subjected to unsafe conditions. Workers should also be able to go to work with the knowledge that, should an unfortunate injury happen in the workplace, their interests will be protected and advanced. When people are at work, they should be able to have confidence that their employer is doing everything necessary to keep them safe, that regulators have the necessary powers to intervene when needed and that if something goes wrong, there are systems in place to compensate and protect them. I am extremely happy to be part of a government that not only understands this responsibility but takes it seriously. With that being said, the bill before us today represents another step forward in making sure workers in this great state have that stability.

This bill makes several amendments to previous workplace laws here in Victoria. The first major amendment that I will discuss revolves around the financial guarantee requirements for businesses in Victoria that are not covered under the WorkCover arrangements, specifically amendments to the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013. These amendments will make it so the employers financial guarantee requirements are able to be met by surety bonds, in addition to the current system of accepting bank guarantees. Those businesses who are self-insurers should need to provide some level of financial guarantee underwriting liability for their workers. This helps provide stability to the whole system of workplace safety. This also ensures that, should these firms experience financial instability and are thus unable to pay out any insurance claims, WorkCover is not subsidising

them. This has the effect of granting more options for employers to meet their obligations to WorkSafe Victoria in the event that the employer defaults.

Making these changes has a number of advantages for the broader Victorian public. For one, it is creating a system that is more time- and cost-effective for businesses that are forgoing WorkCover. These changes also create additional liquidity for these enterprises, which in turn allows for greater capacity to meet unexpected costs or engage in capital investment. Critically, though, these amendments do not change the underlying obligation for employers to provide financial security. This creates stability and confidence in the workplace insurance scheme. This in turn leads to a system that better serves the Victorian public. This, I believe, represents a sensible addition to the current WorkCover system.

The second part of the bill addresses some of the recommendations made by the White review into employee representatives. This review by Mr Eugene White was started a number of years ago to look into the system of employee representatives and their role here in the state of Victoria. Employee representatives play an important role in ensuring ongoing workplace safety in Victoria's workplaces therefore making sure that the system of employee representatives is working well and is in the interests of the broader Victorian public. In passing this bill, four of the 17 recommendations will be acquitted in full, and it will further acquit three of them in part. The status of the remaining recommendations will be determined at a time after these changes have had a chance to be reviewed. The effect of implementing this review will be that the ability of the employee representatives to look out for the safety of the employees is strengthened. In addition, there will also be sensible limitations placed on employee representatives to avoid abuses of power.

Another component of the system that is covered by this bill and the amendments that it makes is occupational health and safety. Occupational health and safety is another core component of ensuring worker safety. These standards are how our Victorian workers are kept safe when they go into work every day. Those people who enforce these standards have the capacity to shape and save lives by ensuring that businesses follow the codes and standards that apply to them. The people who do this critical work need to have the backing to be able to investigate any potential breaches that may occur when they occur. This is how we protect workers. It has long been the commitment of successive Labor governments to improve the systems in place that maintain occupational health and safety. This commitment can be seen in the pieces of legislation that Labor governments have advanced in this place and the other place across the hall.

This bill before us today is a continuation of the long-running commitment that Labor governments made. This bill will amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 to enable health and safety representatives or other authorised representatives to look at and, if necessary, make copies of documents that may pertain to a contravention. Additionally, the requirement of the authorised representative to investigate only in respect of the contravention that they had originally been called out for will be gotten rid of. This means that these representatives will be able to pursue and investigate any other suspected breach that they identify, so long as the notice of suspected contravention is issued. These are the two sensible changes that the current laws will benefit from having in the pursuit of better occupational health and safety standards here in Victoria. In turn, it will protect lives and protect livelihoods.

Given the new powers are being granted to the authorised representatives of health and safety, it is important that all Victorians know that these representatives are acting in a way that is responsible. In this bill there are recommendations to strengthen various rules and regulations around the integrity of the individual being discussed. Integrity is an important issue that is on the minds of a lot of Victorians right now. A few months ago the Premier made a commitment regarding integrity and how this government will operate. The truth is that integrity in governance goes beyond just what happens at the highest levels. In fact there is a tremendous, innate ability for individuals acting as employee representatives to impact on the lives and livelihoods of the employees and employers that interact with them. Therefore it can be argued that it is increasingly important to ensure integrity at this level.

That is what this legislation does, by ensuring that all employee representatives are held to a high standard.

On top of these large changes are numerous changes that are small but are no less significant. Unfortunately, I do not have the time to go over them all; however, taken together they contribute to the important work being done to ensure integrity in all facets of public life here in Victoria. These changes basically will make the rules around sharing information gathered during the inspections stricter, and they will implicitly outlaw coercion in the health and safety systems. With this, Victorians should be assured that this system is working as intended without any bad behaviour or rorting, and if and when it occurs, it will be dealt with appropriately.

Additionally, in this bill there are a number of small improvements being made to the process of occupational health and safety. These changes have been proposed to support the delivery of more effective and consistent outcomes for occupational health and safety. They will support the speedy resolution of matters relating to health and safety. Lastly, they will help modernise the way that the provisional improvement notices are given.

Finally, this bill makes important changes to the wording of certain legislation to ensure that there is no confusion in how legislation is interpreted. This is specifically in relation to liability requirements around specialist disability accommodation. In 2024 this Labor government made a necessary change to strengthen the tenancy rights and protections for people living in specialist disability housing. This was a good and important change that protected some of the most vulnerable people in our state. However, in making this change there was some unfortunate overlap in the wording of various pieces of legislation. This happens, and it is unfortunate due to this confusion that that can occur, but this should not undercut the good work that was done by the changes introduced in the original bill, nor should it be used to say that this legislation was not worthy. The mix-up in the wording implied that the Transport Accident Commission was liable to fund specialist disability housing, when that indeed should not be apparent from the intention of the original bill. This bill will amend the act to eliminate this oversight and prevent any unintended consequences that flow from it. Sometimes this is needed, and I want to thank the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC for ensuring that this oversight was addressed in a timely manner, before there were any major adverse consequences.

The changes that I have just outlined are, on their own, small changes. However, taken together they represent meaningful changes in the workplace, insurance and health and safety systems here in Victoria – changes that no doubt will be positive for the overall system. These changes make it easier for employers to meet their obligations while supporting the changes recommended in the White review. They also strengthen the abilities and the integrity of workplace health and safety officers, leading to greater protection of both the employees and the employers. Importantly, they improve the efficiency of the system and amend unfortunate drafting errors that were present in the legislation. Simply put, this is a good bill that works to improve the conditions and the safety of workers throughout Victoria.

These changes are also a part of the broader efforts that this Labor government has engaged in to improve the workplace protections that Victorians have. One of the most significant of these recent changes has been the introduction of workplace protection orders. What the Carroll Labor government recognises is that no worker should be going to work with a fear that they will be assaulted or harassed. That is why the Carroll Labor government has announced these new protection orders. Under this new system, those who assault or harass workers can face jail time or be banned from attending premises that they acted against. For me this is particularly impactful in the field of transport. The amount of people in the transport industry that have horror stories about how customers have treated them is outrageous. Those who work in the transport industry are some of the most important people in our workforce. They have the responsibility of moving us and our stuff around. Not a single transport worker should go to work with a fear that they might be assaulted or that they will not come back home the way they left. Every transport worker and indeed every worker, regardless of their station in life, deserves to be treated with respect and with dignity.

The Carroll Labor government remains committed to making that a reality. For too long there was a type of harm that workers could be exposed to during their employment that was not considered as part of their workplace health and safety. Obviously, physical threats at the workplace should be treated with the gravity they deserve. However, it used to be the case that psychological impacts that someone could be exposed to at the workplace would not be considered matters of health and safety. It was this Labor government that changed that, because all workers deserve to be safe in their environment, and that means a safe physical and mental environment.

One of the main topics of this legislation is the WorkCover system. This is a proud Labor reform introduced by the Cain government back in the 1980s. The fact is that Victorian workers not only need but deserve a fit-for-purpose and efficient workplace compensation scheme. Throughout the history of this state only Labor governments have delivered this, but over time we have worked to build on it, making a better and stronger service for workers. In my opinion it is up there with Medicare and superannuation and crucially more important reforms that Labor governments have delivered.

The Carroll Labor government will always stand with workers and ensure that they remain safe in the workplace. I think that this commitment can be seen in the legislation that is before us today as well as the legislation passed a few months and years before. We will also always work to ensure that the system in which businesses and workers have to navigate is efficient, responsive and as effective as possible. In passing this bill, we will continue to work with successive governments to deliver better and safer outcomes for workers. Therefore I commend the bill to the chamber.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (17:44): I rise to give some additional comments from the Greens in relation to this bill. I will confine my contribution mainly to the amendments that the Greens will be seeking to move to the bill. Those amendments are in Mr Puglielli's name, and I ask that they be circulated now. Broadly, the Greens amendments to this bill strengthen fair and efficient access to compensation for victims of dust-related diseases. Workers with these conditions currently face multiple overlapping time limits. This is confusing and expensive, and it forces people to pursue claims before they know how serious their condition will become. It is also complex, given the long period of time that can elapse between exposure and the development of a condition. We want to encourage workers to get screened and diagnosed as early as possible to ensure their best health outcomes, and the exemption from time limits allows and encourages that.

The house amendments do remove time limits. However, they only remove time limits for the specific black hole period. The whole point of removing time limits is to simplify the system. However, a partial exemption just adds another layer of complexity to an already complicated regime. Policy developed with WorkSafe Victoria already routinely waives time limits, but a time limit defence remains available to manufacturers, who can and do rely on it. Without the full exemption, many workers will still be forced to pursue their claims prematurely, risking significant undercompensation for what can be progressive and permanent diseases, so the Greens are proposing a full exemption from time limits for those with dust-related conditions.

Secondly, when it comes to streamlined prelitigation processes, we want to see broadened access to streamlined, faster and simpler prelitigation processes so that all dust disease sufferers can bypass the time-consuming serious injury application process and defer the question of serious injury to trial. We also want to ensure that the transitional provisions that allow the implementation of the more streamlined prelitigation process are drafted to be retrospective for all cases that had not been heard by a court or had a settlement agreement reached – but some specific diseases have been carved out. Only specified diseases are given under the broader retrospective commencement under the transitional provisions. Our amendments stick to the definition of 'serious dust-related condition', thereby allowing the bill to apply to all workers with a dust-related condition that have not yet had their case heard by a court or agreed to a settlement. This will remove the limiting specified diseases, and thus the transitional provisions will apply to all serious dust-related conditions. This change is important, as it ensures that the beneficial transition arrangement applies to all workers with a dust disease, not just those whose cases have not yet commenced, and will not be limited to certain

categories. Finally, our amendments insert a statutory review after 12 months to ensure that the dust-related disease provisions are working as intended. I will conclude my comments on the bill there.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (17:48): I rise to speak in support of the Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026. The bill makes practical improvements to Victoria's workers compensation framework for injured workers, and the bill supports Victoria's reputation as an incredibly safe place for workers. It is a reputation that has been worked on over decades, and there is always more to do to ensure the safety of workers. The bill responds to findings of the independent review of employee representatives, led by respected barrister Mr Eugene White. It strengthens the ability of health and safety representatives to identify and resolve workplace safety issues, while ensuring powers are exercised appropriately and responsibly.

To clarify its existing policy intent, specialist disability accommodation is specially designed housing for people with extreme functional impairment or very high support needs, such as homes with wheelchair access, hoists or automated doors. The TAC and WorkSafe Victoria are not generally liable to fund accommodation costs like utilities, food and personal items; these are daily living expenses that would have been incurred regardless of a transport accident or workplace injury or illness. However, a consequential amendment in 2024 unintentionally created ambiguity regarding the funding of accommodation costs associated with SDA dwellings, even though this is a daily living expense that TAC and WorkSafe only fund in very limited circumstances. To rectify this, the bill amends the definition of 'supported accommodation' in TAC and WorkSafe legislation to remove the reference to 'SDA dwelling' that was unintentionally inserted in 2024. The amendments restore the intended legal position that these schemes are not intended to fund daily living expenses, such as SDA accommodation costs, and aligns with current practice. This does not affect current WorkSafe or TAC clients' access to SDA through the NDIS.

The bill enables health and safety representatives, HSRs, and authorised representatives to inspect and copy documents relevant to suspected OH&S contraventions and allows authorised representatives to investigate additional suspected contraventions identified during a workplace visit, reducing unnecessary administrative barriers. It gives WorkSafe inspectors authority to make binding determinations in multi-employer designated work group negotiations and supports digitisation and consistency by requiring provisional improvement notices to be issued in a WorkSafe-approved format. It removes references to specialist disability accommodation from supported accommodation definitions in relevant legislation and restores the original policy position, avoids unintended liabilities for TAC and WorkSafe and clarifies existing operational arrangements regarding daily living contributions for TAC clients after hospital discharge. It aligns arrangements for the appointment, remuneration and resignation of the WorkSafe board chair with those for WorkSafe board directors and streamlines arrangements for setting medical panel fees and costs payable to members for workers compensation referrals. It is also about improving the operation of Victoria's workplace safety, workers compensation and transport accident schemes. It is an important balance between reducing unnecessary red tape, protecting workers and strengthening the integrity of our regulatory frameworks.

I want to get to the amendments within the bill, but before I do that, I just want to touch again on the importance of correcting the unintended drafting consequences from earlier legislation that restore the longstanding policy approach that accommodation costs are generally personal living expenses rather than compensable costs. The amendments provide certainty and avoid costly legal ambiguity. This bill is a practical package of reforms that improves workplace safety, strengthens the integrity of Victoria's occupational health and safety system, reduces unnecessary red tape and provides greater certainty for employers and workers alike. It delivers on this government's commitment to ensure Victoria remains one of the safest places in the world to work. These are sensible, balanced reforms that support workers, support employers and protect the long-term sustainability of the WorkCover and TAC schemes. This government will always back reforms that improve safety, support productivity and deliver better outcomes for Victorian workers and employers.

Moving on to the house amendments, they make several amendments to the Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026 to increase financial support for children affected by fatal road trauma; restore and expand compensation and common-law rights for workers with dust-related conditions; and improve sentencing outcomes for occupational health and safety, OH&S, offences.

Firstly, the house amendment will increase the support the TAC provides for children that have lost a parent due to road trauma. In particular, the house amendment will increase the payments to children orphaned by a transport accident and in the care of a guardian and extend the education allowance to all children who have lost a parent in a transport accident. This provides equitable financial support for every child who loses a parent in a transport accident, regardless of the nature of the parental or guardianship relationship in which they live. This responds to recommendation 6 of the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into claims made through the Transport Accident Commission report, which recommended the government review surviving spouse and legal guardian payments in situations where a child is orphaned and a new guardian is appointed. The Victorian government will continue to consider opportunities to support the fair and equitable treatment of all family types.

On the amendments for workers with occupational dust-related conditions, these reforms are intended to ensure workers with dust-related conditions are treated more fairly and consistently and in a way that reflects the nature of these diseases. Dust-related conditions can develop over long periods and worsen over time, and a worker may first be diagnosed with one condition before later developing another separate condition arising from the same occupational exposure. The law should recognise this.

Firstly, the bill extends arrangements to allow workers with dust-related conditions to seek a second award of damages when they later develop another dust-related condition from the same exposure. This builds on the current approach for certain asbestos-related and silica-related conditions. Secondly, the reforms address a historical gap in access to common-law damages for workers exposed between 12 November 1997 and 20 October 1999. These amendments help ensure compensation reflects the full circumstances of that exposure. Thirdly, the bill will also remove the limitation period for claims relating to dust exposure during that same period, recognising that dust-related conditions may take years to emerge. Finally, the bill will remove prelitigation processes for common-law damages claims for dust-related conditions, supporting a more direct pathway to the Supreme Court. Taken together, these reforms will create a more coherent framework across Victorian legislation.

Relating to the sentencing of OH&S offences, the house amendment will create a framework for courts to consider impact statements from affected persons, such as bereaved family members and others, in OH&S sentencing proceedings; repeal improvement project orders; rename and expand health and safety undertakings; increase maximum penalties; significantly increase maximum penalties for reckless endangerment; and introduce a new offence within section 32 which applies to conventions of a health and safety duty and is not limited by the 'at a workplace' element. These amendments will improve the ability of persons affected by workplace incidents to participate fully and meaningfully in sentencing proceedings for OH&S offences and strengthen practices.

You can hear that this bill does many important things that those on this side stand up to support. There are a lot of people in here to support this bill as it goes through. Those on that side do not support it. We know why – because they are anti-union and they have economic policies that want to drive down workers' wages. Those opposite lack values, but we know what does bind them together, and that is trying to drive down the wages of working people. We know that that is what drives them, and that is what drives the people that back them. Members on this side, day in and day out, work together with shared values to support communities, to support families, to support workers to have incomes and to make sure those incomes support the communities where they live. While those opposite want to pull this bill apart, we will stand here and speak to it. Dr Heath has just come back. She stood there and wanted to talk down unions. And if a bank –

Renee Heath: On a point of order, President, Mr McIntosh is misleading the house. It offends the standing orders if he is not factual, and I would ask him to withdraw.

The PRESIDENT: It is a debate, and there are no rulings around second-reading speeches.

Tom McINTOSH: We see organisations across Victoria – whether they be banks or whether they be sports organisations – and when the people within them step out of line, those organisations need to be corrected. But you do not throw the whole lot out, and that is exactly what the Liberal–Nationals will do if they have the chance. In alliance with One Nation, they will go after the organisations and the people that represent working people so they can cut the wages of working people, just like they will cut the services to working people and just like they will cut the services that communities depend on. It is very hard to identify values on that side, but if there is one thing it comes back to – *(Time expired)*

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:00): I move:

That debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Business interrupted pursuant to resolution of Council earlier this day.

Members

Harriet Shing

Valedictory statement

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria) (18:00): I rise at the outset to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land upon which we meet today. We are on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung country, and I pay my respects to elders past and present, and I would also like to acknowledge any and all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander leaders or emerging leaders who have joined us here today. It always was and it always will be Aboriginal land.

You may know me from such classics as 'Why say it in 15 words when 600 will do?', 'Please, for the love of God, could somebody work out how to turn her off at the mains' and 'Is there any chance you could bring the plane into land, because we would all quite like to go home?' But over 12 years that is yet to happen in any way that would show that I have listened to instructions.

In this building there are many, many bookcases, shelves and cupboards, and they are filled with leather-bound books, in corridors where not many people go. These books are the public record of our debates, our votes, our issues and the priorities of communities across the state and around Australia. I will put to one side the fact that the vast majority of these books contain contributions by straight, white, middle-aged men of landed gentry for a moment and note the diversity of our Parliament and just how far it has come. When we have sat late or overnight over the years, I have had the opportunity to find a volume and a chair and to read about history, and history matters. Our history as a government matters, and it is not something that we should ignore or turn away from. No government is perfect, but no government gets better for being defined exclusively by what has not worked or what should not be discussed.

I am not good at nuance at the best of times, but on this I am clear: who we are now is built on the foundations of who we have been and where we have been. And good government, in my view, can be defined by deeds and by words, by what we have built, in every sense of the term. Take, for instance, infrastructure. It is a really big word, and it can mean just about anything depending on who you ask. To my mind infrastructure is best described as an enabler, as connective tissue for our cities and our communities, for our families and for their opportunities. It is not a unique investment; it is the scaffolding by which we improve our own daily lives, movements and opportunities and those of our children and grandchildren, the work to recognise and respond to climate change, to deliver more and better public transport, new road networks, wastewater and sewerage connections, hospitals, schools

and utilities such as the desalination plant – and everybody knows how much I love to talk about the desalination plant, which is now responsible for more than a quarter of every single glass of water that comes out of our taps across the grid. Infrastructure, when it all boils down to it, is enduring and necessary to meet the changing needs of our hotter, drier, more densely populated state with an ageing demographic.

Growth is inevitable, but good growth is a choice. And the last 12 years have shown us that it is possible to deliver both infrastructure and services, to build hospitals and then to staff them, to build a Metro Tunnel and then add over a thousand services to enable people to get around and to connect in ways that save time and improve convenience and that, in turn, reduce disadvantage and the long-term costs of living. History matters, and I am so proud of our history in delivering infrastructure across the entire city, across the entire state. Level crossings removed, hospitals built, new and upgraded schools to meet demand, new TAFE campuses, new and upgraded rail and additional services; this is what we have built. And it deserves recognition, because it is valued and valuable and will continue to be, long after our time in this place is set out in a volume that sits on a shelf in a corridor of this building where not many people go.

To everyone who has worked on the infrastructure, who continues to work on it even today and will continue to deliver it: you should be proud of what you are building, of your own contribution and of what we are building together. And to everyone in government over these past 12 years: be proud of what you have delivered, of your hard work. It matters, and it will continue to matter. We have so much to be proud of. To ensure we can reflect on it with clear eyes and fair words, our history is important, and I am so proud to have been a part of it: renewable energy and battery storage; a ban on unconventional gas extraction in Victoria, now enshrined in the constitution; the SEC and thousands of jobs for workers in renewable energy; medicinal cannabis for young families and patients just like Cooper; hundreds of new and upgraded schools; in Gippsland, new specialist schools, primary and secondary schools, kinders and early learning centres across growing communities; safe access zones for people seeking abortion care; voluntary assisted dying. In this regard, I want to acknowledge Dying with Dignity Victoria, Go Gentle and others, Jane Morris, the late Nia Sims and so many people who have contributed to a better debate on free will and on dying well.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence and the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System – extensive law reform and billions of dollars in funding, not done cynically for headlines or media opportunities but for meaningful and practical improvement of the services and supports to vulnerable people every day: victim-survivors of intimate partner violence, coercive control and horrors that kill more women in Australia than anything else, and people living with diagnosed or undiagnosed mental illness.

The apologies for historical convictions for homosexuality; to members of the stolen generation; to victims and survivors of institutional child sexual abuse; to the people, parents, children and families who suffered such tragedy as a result of forced adoption. As actions matter, words matter too. And as our future matters, history does too.

In the blink of an eye that I have been in this place I have been honoured, humbled, challenged and kept under the pressure – appropriately so – of responsibility in a range of different ways, and at all times I have done my best. In this regard I have lent my voice to more than $2 billion in funding for the Latrobe Valley's transition from coal-fired power to renewable energy and the end of native timber harvesting in Victoria – the painful inevitability of this change, a government response shaped and informed by conversations in kitchens and lounge rooms, on factory floors and in shops and town halls, informed by grief, anger, frustration and uncertainty and the desire for communities to find control over the future. This is long-term change, and it demands decades of commitment. Affected communities across rural and regional Victoria deserve no less. The programs to address challenges and disadvantage, often arising intergenerationally, faced by young people, including across eastern Victoria – food insecurity, violence, addiction and abuse – and the challenge of helping people to stay

in school, to find a home and a job and the differences that can be made and sustained with positive intervention.

I note the heartbreak that continues as recovery efforts go on from natural disaster. In that regard, I note the heartbreak of the Bunyip fires and the Black Summer fires that burnt a million hectares across eastern Victoria, razed homes and buildings, took lives, destroyed fence lines and roads and stock and wildlife. The grief of recovery is known so well by so many, including the extraordinary leadership of Andrew Crisp, who stewarded thousands of people through times of their greatest need. The floods which inundated large parts of the state in October 2022, cut towns off, turned roads into twisted ribbons and waterways into raging torrents that buckled bridges. Too much water and then not enough. Droughts and feed shortages, while farmers destocked and hoped for the best. The welcome sound of trucks arriving on hay runs from around Victoria and across Australia, while we still waited and hoped and crossed our fingers for rain.

The pandemic, for which there was no playbook. With hindsight being 20/20, it is all too easy to talk about what we should have done and what we could have done. In this regard, we did the best that we could, and it took the whole state and everyone coming together to ensure that we could keep people, families, businesses and communities with the best measure of support that could be made available.

The milk price crash overnight left dairy farmers with enormous crippling debts and no way forward. Their intestinal fortitude and sustenance were delivered in large part because of the communities to which they belong.

The Yoorrook Justice Commission and treaty have been a profound experience for me to witness and to participate in. Over the hours of my appearance both on country and in talking about housing, it was as much as anything a conversation about history, about actions but also, fundamentally, about words.

I want to acknowledge the work that happens across housing – that fundamental, important need that people deserve access to – and the teams that help people every single day in the ways that provide help and care and dignity, people like Deb Di Natale, who works across the Council to Homeless Persons, making sure, again, that people are met where they are at in all things and in all ways. The delivery of thousands of new social housing homes from the middle of Melbourne right out to our borders has given homes within communities and homes for their occupants to be proud of a real opportunity to continue gathering momentum and pace.

In the field of water, catchment management authorities and water corporations are at the heart of their communities. Around kitchen tables, in scout halls and on riverbanks we have met with, talked with and listened to communities about incident control, about relief centres and about some of the most complex policy areas that exist anywhere in Australia. Work continues to celebrate and support our precious waterways and their flora and fauna and to resurface and revegetate our creeks and to support our Ramsar wetlands.

Regional development, including the $2 billion regional fund that pivoted us from the cost of the Commonwealth Games events into homes and community and sporting facilities that will continue to stand the test of time – again, it is as much about what we do with change as the change itself.

I also acknowledge the work that has gone on to make sure that the Building and Plumbing Commission can deliver the safety, security and certainty that people want and deserve when making the biggest purchase of their lives. Home builders and buyers being left out of pocket with empty hearts and empty wallets is something that has been an all too frequent occurrence. Anna and her team are ensuring that this changes and this stops.

The Suburban Rail Loop: you have seen me brandish a business case in this place on many an occasion. I have tabled it on multiple occasions, and I am proud of it. I am proud of this project that will be used by our children and their children and their children. Tunnel-boring machines are in the ground building Australia's largest infrastructure project, and this progress will continue, as it should,

because future generations deserve the benefit of connections and investments that sustain opportunities. And this is something we should be proud of.

Workplace safety and occupational health and safety, protecting workers from exposure from everything from asbestos to engineered stone dust; nurse-to-patient ratios; industrial manslaughter; protection from wage theft and consequences for employers who do the wrong thing; the Labour Hire Authority; protection for workers in retail and hospitality from violence; the rights of workers to be represented by a union; family violence leave in public sector agreements; support for gender pay equity; and portable long service leave are some of the examples of the very things that have defined the government that I have been so proud to be part of.

Back in 2017 we had a plebiscite – it was not actually; it was a postal ballot. It asked one simple question: whether people like me should have the right to marry in the same way that people who are straight had the right to marry. When the result of that postal ballot was declared, and Premier Daniel Andrews, alongside Australia's first equality minister, Martin Foley, went to the front steps of Parliament to meet with rainbow families and to celebrate an outcome that needed to happen, that did happen and that has led inexorably to words mattering and meaning something in the creation of history, they asked me to join them. That was a moment of fundamental importance to me, because for so long I stood in this place and I bared myself to the world and I begged and I asked to be accepted for who I am. And with that resolved, we were finally given the opportunity to be as happy or, pending divorce proceedings, as miserable as everybody else.

We also have long-awaited inclusion in the census, IVF and adoption law reforms for LGBTIQA+ people, amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, intersex reforms, banning of those devastating conversion and suppression practices, the Safe Schools program and Pride in Ageing. I also organised and paid for what I think is the only drag story time ever to have occurred in this Parliament, and I did that after libraries around the state received so many threats against staff and the public that they cancelled events. I did it because signals and symbols of safety are important, because words matter and visibility matters. All of these things are examples of the work we have done together, history that deserves recognition and respect and work that matters for those who are no longer here and for those who, because of the changes brought about by so many extraordinary people, will grow up and live without the stigma, violence or discrimination that has come before them.

With the time that I have on my feet today, I also want to talk about something that I have not spoken about publicly before and that I hope will help a conversation to perhaps continue with kindness and with interest. I have always been a bit unusual – cue ripple of laughter here – in more than a handful of ways, and it is not just a case of being, as described in the *Age* in what I consider to be the greatest compliment I have ever received in my working life, 'a serious policy wonk'. When I was diagnosed with autism early in my parliamentary career, a lot of things started to make sense to me about why so many things did not easily make sense to me and why I found myself overwhelmed at various points by a range of different things that many people do not think twice about. I really did not know what to do with it, so I channelled it into asking as many questions as I could – and that is, as we all know, a lot of questions – about how policies and decisions could be better if neurological differences were accommodated not as a fleeting gesture but in a genuine, inclusive and meaningful way. It has been really hard at times to navigate this publicly whilst doing my level best to give the impression that I have had no specific need for my needs to be understood or accommodated. Telling people has been difficult, so right now is quite a confronting moment for me, and it has been really exhausting – so exhausting that in many instances it has actually just been easier, at least in the short term, not to say anything at all.

To those people who have been there for me, including when from time to time I have found myself overwhelmed and at or beyond my limits: thank you. To those people who have made small, but to me incredibly important, adjustments without fuss or fanfare, from changing lighting to managing last-minute changes to plans and understanding my reputation for taking just about everything literally and my endless questions based in curiosity and a desire to understand evidence, merits and difficulties:

thank you. I do not make it easy. Your accommodations made a huge difference in many instances and also enabled me to complete my days in one piece. You have made me feel less of an oddity, more certain, less of an outlier and valued for the things I can do, and that has meant the world. To those people and organisations, including Different Journeys with Mel Spencer and organisations like Yellow Ladybugs, who by their very existence have made it easier because they – you – have gotten it: thank you. I hope that my advocacy behind the scenes for inclusion has had an effect and that what I am saying more loudly here, now, in this place about my neurodivergence and my experiences will continue to have an impact for others.

On my way out I hope that in the space I will leave for another person to make their own mark this conversation might continue to build on the easier access to ADHD diagnostic pathways that we are making available through our GP networks to make it easier and more affordable for neurodivergent people and their families to access diagnostic and support services, programs, opportunities and care; to be afforded the dignity that everybody, without exception, deserves; and to be met where they are, for who they are and as they are.

It is time for thankyous to colleagues and friends; it is a bit of a shout-out. At the outset, I want to thank and extend my respect and friendship to Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan. I understand that they are watching today. I want to say thank you for the opportunity to serve in your governments. Thank you for the opportunity to make a contribution. Thank you for allowing me to take up space, to be listened to and, in turn, to listen to the views of others. Premier Carroll, I note that you are also here in the gallery today. Thank you so much for the opportunity to be part of a team that will take us through to November.

To Jaclyn Symes, who I am not looking at now, it has been a real joy to serve with you from the very beginning. There is an incredibly naive photo of the two of us standing on the floor of this place looking up toward the gallery on our very first day of school. We have aged about 600 years since then. We have tested each other's thinking, we have laughed ourselves silly, we have ugly cried and we have come up with a sort of shorthand language that usually only evolves between twins or prisoners serving very long sentences in adjacent cells.

To Shaun – President Leane – you are one of the best people I know. Shaun is full of humour and asides, but Shaun is also the reason why this Parliament's kitchens were deployed to make 1.8 million meals to serve to people in need, beginning during the pandemic and continuing after that time. What you might also not know is that Shaun and I wrote *Sky Rail: The Musical* in our shared parliamentary office. It is a work of braggadocios genius in the style of *South Park,* which in its off-off-off-Broadway debut will almost certainly feature Hugh Jackman in the role of David Davis. He is clearly at rehearsal now.

To my dear friend Gayle Tierney, I worked hard to make you love me; I am not sure if I succeeded. But Gayle, you have seen around a quarter of a million Victorians access free TAFE. This shows not only steel in your spine but a heart that is bigger than your electorate. Thank you for putting up with me for so long. Ryan Batchelor, you are the only person I know who pretends to be interested in how I have learned to identify commonly occurring venomous snakes and who does not think it is unusual that every joke has to be explained at least six times and that even then I will not find it funny. Thank you for your friendship and for your smarts. Jordan Crugnale, thank you for your care, creativity, friendship and absolute unwavering sense of principle.

To others, I would be here for so long that you would also be begging me to turn off the mains, so I am not going to go into extensive detail. Thank you to Steve Dimopoulos, Sonya Kilkenny, Lisa Neville, Lily D'Ambrosio, James Merlino, Martin Foley, Martin Pakula, the class of 2014 and the government, which under Premier Ben Carroll's leadership in November will take us into a hugely important and bright future.

Thank you to Jessie McCrone, who demonstrated unassailable patience in allowing me to talk ad nauseam about the finer points of water regulation and policy whilst never actually ever drinking any water herself. Thank you to Brendan Donohue for teaching me the importance of the full stop – advice which I am afraid I almost never followed. To the staff I have worked with over the years, I am fiercely proud of you. I am proud to have worked alongside you. Thank you for challenging my thinking, helping me to be better and indulging my love for random trivia and lowbrow reality television.

Thank you to my electorate office staff: Tonnie, Anita, Val, Rhonda, Jim, Tom, Kiz, Oscar, Stephanie, Michael, Cai and the wonderful Bec and Lisa. Thank you to the ministerial staff headed up by Matt Dawson and my dear friend and colleague Lindsay Rayner. Thank you to Matt Broderick, Grace, Elle, Dan, Emma, Laura, Phoebe, Penny, Chelsea, Claire, Mike, Liam, Aidan, Dani, Eliza, Kai, Maddie, Clare, Keagan, Luke, Karen, Cat, Vincent, Jennie, Jocelyn, Georgia – this is sounding like *Romper Room* when you look to see when your name is coming up at the end – Antoinette, Walter, Nicole, Sam, Nevada, Srishti, Sinead, Ana, Flynn, Alex, Michaela, Lloyd, Kate, Nathan and Lucy.

Thank you to those organisations and community groups who have been at the heart of security, of Pride, of safety and of opportunity: Joe Ball; Brenda Appleton; Caitlin Grigsby; Janet Jukes; Kate Graham; Anthony Rodaughan, one of the most positive and influential principals I have ever met, from Kurnai College in Morwell; John and Sue Anderson; Marg and Bert Williamson; Angus and Stephanie Hume; the Australian Services Union and Trades Hall; Alison and the late great John Parker; Vicki Hamilton from GARDS; the Ladder Step Up program and staff; catchment management authorities and water teams; and the unions who have worked so hard on transition in timber and coal. Thank you to volunteers, from those wildlife rescue organisations who taught me better practices in pouch-checking techniques to the many food banks and neighbourhood houses that sustain and support communities across eastern Victoria quietly and with determination and great respect.

Thank you to the departmental secretaries and teams and to the parliamentary teams. To the clerks, Anne and Richard and Sally in particular: I am really sorry for being so insufferable about *Rulings from the Chair* and who said what in the House of Lords back in 1894. To the attendants, the incredible library staff, security, catering, table office staff and committee support staff: thank you. To the Hansard team in particular: thank you for making me sound more coherent in writing than I have ever sounded when I have been on my feet and for your grin-and-bear-it approach to sentences that have failed to feature a full stop for well over a page. I have seen a couple of you wince on occasion when it is late and I have lost all respect for grammar, and I do not blame you – full stop. For that I am really sorry – full stop, full stop, full stop.

To those members from the crossbench, Nationals and Liberals across the parliaments I have served in since 2014, who I quite like and, dare I say it, even respect: thank you.

Renee Heath interjected.

Harriet SHING: Oh, Renee, that was a bit of a laugh there. It is almost like you do not believe me. I will not name you, because it will not do my reputation any good and it certainly will not help yours, but you know who you are. I appreciate your friendship and your support and often robust conversation and debate over many years. Except for you, Danny O'Brien and Wayne Farnham, two men who you could not tell apart if you walked in the other direction from them at dusk – I do not care if your good names tank; let it be known that I reckon you are all right, with the caveat that in no way does this opinion about either of you amount to any sort of character reference – I am not about to start now – or pre-election endorsement. I am not sure if I will miss David Davis, but I have no doubt that in the remaining 630 years of his time in this place he might almost certainly come to miss me.

Lastly, thank you to my family and friends. To my family of origin, specifically my brothers Tim and Chris, who are watching this online, our late brother Patrick and, as of a fortnight ago, our late sister Genevieve – the next chapter begins, my brothers, and I am determined to spend more of it with both

of you. And to my late parents, for being the soil I grew in for so many years, specifically my beautiful, humble dad, who is known to many of you. Over the years he would sometimes wonder out loud how it was that I had ended up with a microphone and on the public record when I seemed to have had an in-built megaphone, air horn and full buffet of opinions bestowed upon me from the day that I could talk. For clarity, I just want to be very, very unequivocal: not everything at a buffet is going to be fit for consumption. That Dad is not here for the end of this chapter as he was at the beginning and for the many hours he sat bemused and frequently unimpressed with this place and what we get up to here when we have been at less than our best hurts my heart. His was an approach of honour, kindness, curiosity, hard work and rigour, and perhaps on a good day I may yet be an apple who fell not too far from the tree.

To my friends, and you know who you are: thank you. How lucky I am to share so many wonderful things with you. A specific shout-out to Jennie McKenzie, my fierce, hilarious, kind, outspoken, principled and ever-present friend. Thank you for being far and away the most Scottish person I know, and long may our 15-year text message conversation continue. To Emma: it is such good history we have. There is such a long list of things that we have to tick off, and our epic road trip is waiting. I cannot wait.

To my family of choice, Ros and Bruce, kind and supportive, who have wrapped me quietly in acceptance, care and laughter and helped me to understand where and how gentle is best: thank you.

To Lissie, my person: you are brilliant, principled, patient and incomparable. You are funnier, smarter and taller than I will ever be. Thank you for being the keel of our family, the one whose company I love above all others. I am sorry that our animals love me more than they love you.

I am finishing this chapter having given everything I have, and I have so much gratitude for the experience, for the opportunity to contribute with every bit of my will and energy and for the people who have shown me by example the qualities I admire most: in holding themselves fearless and steadfast, and for all the right reasons; in the character they have shown when nobody has been watching, those people who do not seek out the limelight or the middle of every photograph; and in the lessons that kindness, authenticity and vulnerability are at the very heart of the best of leaders, the best of people. Just as meaningfully, there is opportunity everywhere, so I am also grateful for those experiences and people who helped me work out the qualities and things in politics that are not for me.

I have given everything I have to this work. I came here to apply myself, to know what I was building. I think, not always but hopefully, I have done what I set out to do: I have built something; I have laid my hand on it and identified it as hopefully part of an arc that bends toward justice. Now someone else will take this spot, this opportunity – that is as it should be – and I wish them strength, honour and kindness in all that they do too.

Members applauded.

Sitting suspended 6:33 pm until 7:33 pm.

Bills

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Lizzie Blandthorn:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (19:33): I rise to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. The Premier stood up on his first day in the job and told Victorians that integrity would not be optional. Yet when we actually look at this bill as currently drafted – when we look beyond the rhetoric and examine what it would allow IBAC to investigate and, importantly, what it would prevent IBAC from investigating – we see that

integrity remains very much optional under this Labor government. This might be a new Premier, but this is the same Labor government. It is a continuation of the governments of Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan, with the same instinct to talk about integrity when it is politically convenient but resist genuine scrutiny when that scrutiny gets a little too close to home.

For years IBAC has been asking for stronger powers, integrity experts have been calling for stronger powers and the Liberals and Nationals have been calling for stronger powers, and frankly, Victorians who have watched scandal after scandal after scandal unfold deserve an anti-corruption commission with the power to follow the money and get to the truth. I moved a similar IBAC amendment bill in this place this year, back in March, and every single Labor MP on that side of the chamber voted against it. Mr Batchelor even said:

> Taking a couple of amendments here and there to try and do justice to the complexity of the adequacy of IBAC's legislative framework I think is an approach and a response that is being driven by a political moment, rather than being driven by a desire to achieve workable, long-lasting and effective reform.

Mr Galea described my bill as 'a half-baked affair focused on being seen to do something more than to achieve good reform through effective, considered legislation'.

John Berger: Well, he got that right.

Evan MULHOLLAND: If it was considered legislation, the government would not be scrambling to consider amendments from the chamber at the last minute. I will just note that, for your reference, Mr Berger. And of course Ms Ermacora referred to the 'so-called' follow-the-money power and said:

> Entities like Victoria Police and the Labour Hire Authority are far better placed to investigate and deal with allegations of criminality and industry-specific misconduct.

That was not all. She even went on to say:

> You do not reform something as complex as our integrity system with a change here and a change there and call it a day.

Forgive me if I do not believe this government for a second on integrity or rooting out corruption when this is what they had to say just a few months ago. Labor says it is giving IBAC new powers, but at the same time it is deliberately preventing those powers from being used to revisit matters that IBAC has previously dismissed, completed or referred elsewhere. You do not ask the people responsible for the crime scene to determine what can and cannot be investigated.

This bill introduces what are commonly described as follow-the-money powers. Those powers are important because they allow IBAC to pursue information held by third parties, something that has been a significant limitation in investigations involving contractors, subcontractors and other organisations dealing with government. The bill also broadens the relevant threshold so that IBAC's investigative powers can extend beyond the commission of an offence to serious disciplinary matters. We support those changes because this is something that we have been calling for and indeed attempted to legislate earlier this year but was blocked by the Victorian Labor Party.

But here is the problem: after 12 long years of Labor government, after years of integrity scandals and serious allegations involving billions of dollars of taxpayer-funded infrastructure projects, Labor has drawn a line through the past. The government has specifically blocked retrospectivity for matters IBAC has already investigated, dismissed or referred to another body. This means that matters may have previously been dismissed because IBAC did not possess the very powers this bill now gives it, yet once those powers exist, IBAC will still be prohibited from using them. How can that possibly be justified? The government want to stand up and say, 'Look at us; we've strengthened IBAC,' but at the same time they have inserted provisions saying, 'Just don't look backwards.'

You had the former Premier – and I know they were all embarrassed by it; that is why they got rid of her – brandishing to the media and briefing the media on a 2024 letter referring serious criminal allegations of corruption to IBAC. She was briefing it earlier this year to the media, getting them all

to report on it, only for IBAC itself to take an unprecedented and extraordinary step of releasing the letter it sent back to Ms Allan, the Premier, about six weeks later. They advised the Premier that they did not have the follow-the-money powers to investigate those allegations of corruption and would very much like those follow-the-money powers so they could properly consider the matters referred to in the former Premier's letter. How embarrassing for those opposite, who claim to be all about integrity now, to have sat there and watched the former Premier brandish that letter only to be publicly refuted in an unprecedented way by the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission.

This is the great contradiction at the heart of this bill. Clause 8 could hardly be clearer: proposed section 200(3) provides that nothing in the relevant provisions permits IBAC to reopen a complaint or notification that it dismissed or referred elsewhere before the commencement or an investigation that it completed before the commencement. Nothing permits IBAC to reopen them. That matters, because there is a very important distinction between IBAC deciding an allegation has no merit and IBAC being unable to investigate an allegation because the law did not give it the powers it required to do so at the time. Under Labor's bill both can effectively end up in the same basket. If IBAC received an allegation, determined it did not possess the necessary powers and referred that allegation elsewhere, it simply cannot come back, once the Parliament finally gives it those powers, and investigate the matter properly. That is not the comprehensive strengthening of IBAC Victorians were promised.

We have seen precisely why that matters, with the allegations occurring around Labor's Big Build. The former Premier referred allegations concerning corruption on major projects to IBAC, and IBAC subsequently advised it did not have the powers required to investigate. Under this legislation matters dealt with in that way may now be prevented from being reopened by using IBAC's newly expanded powers. The government points to the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria as though it resolves every single problem. It does not. The royal commission has terms of reference. There have been other matters referred to IBAC over the last 12 years that fall outside of those terms of reference – I think those opposite know that too – and those matters deserve proper scrutiny as well. I refer to the government's budget lotto deal that went to IBAC. That matter does not simply become part of the construction royal commission just because the government has now established one. There are questions around other decisions, other contracts and other conduct that have been referred to our integrity agencies over the life of this government. Why would Parliament give IBAC stronger powers in 2026 but tell it that when it comes to matters raised in 2025, 2024, 2023 or earlier those powers cannot be used?

This is why the Liberals and Nationals will move amendments. Let me be clear from the outset: we support giving IBAC stronger powers. In March this year I introduced the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026 to this very chamber. That bill gave IBAC enhanced follow-the-money powers. It passed the chamber, which represented the will of this house. Yet when it reached the Assembly, Labor would not even allow it for first reading. We will not be lectured to by the Labor Party on strengthening IBAC. We sought to give IBAC these powers months ago. What we will do now is seek to improve the government's bill so that IBAC receives powers that are meaningful, powers that can actually be used and powers that give Victorians confidence that allegations of corruption can be pursued wherever the evidence leads.

Our first amendment will make the legislation fully retrospective: if IBAC previously received the matter but could not investigate it, because it lacked the appropriate powers, it should be able to reconsider that matter once Parliament gives it those powers. That is common sense. Victorians would find it extraordinary if Parliament passed legislation that acknowledged that IBAC's previous powers were inadequate but simultaneously prohibited IBAC from revisiting cases where that inadequacy may have prevented a proper investigation. We should not be legislating blind spots into our anti-corruption framework. I note the government have been dragged kicking and screaming into possibly moving their own amendment in this respect, after the Special Minister of State went out there and said that these are much rather matters for the royal commission. I think the will of this chamber has shown the government up and dragged them to a much more sensible position than what they really

wanted in their heart of hearts, because what they really wanted was a media release and press statements about being seen to do something but leaving a great big trail of cover-up in their tracks so that IBAC would be hamstrung from investigating this government's own record on corruption.

Our second amendment deals with the timely reporting of IBAC investigations. Victorians saw what occurred with Operation Richmond: that investigation commenced years before the final report was eventually tabled following prolonged proceedings and delays. There must of course remain proper procedural fairness; people affected by an IBAC report must retain their legal rights and courts must retain their jurisdiction to consider legitimate applications brought before them. Nobody is proposing otherwise. There also needs to be a clear statement from this Parliament that IBAC reports should be finalised and tabled fast and as promptly as the law reasonably allows. Do not think I have forgotten the government briefing by the Premier's private office and others about our attempts to move a private members bill on this. Mr Davis moved a private members bill and debated a private members bill on this, and my colleague in the other place Mr Newbury attempted to move a private members bill on this. This government scoffed at it. This government cannot recognise a reasonable idea. In fact they are almost allergic to a reasonable idea until they suddenly come to the table and recognise there is a problem. An anti-corruption report cannot become trapped indefinitely in a procedural merry-go-round, and our amendment establishes that legislative expectation while preserving the proper role and independence of the courts. When judges consider a matter relating to the release of IBAC reports, Parliament's intention should be clear: procedural fairness matters, legal rights matter, but unnecessary delay should not become a mechanism through which public accountability is frustrated. The government seem to have been dragged kicking and screaming into this, but as I said, I can recall the briefing they were doing about our bill on fast tabling.

Our third amendment relates to public examinations. The government's approach is that examinations should be held in private; we do not support that presumption. There will obviously be circumstances where privacy is necessary to protect investigations, witnesses or other legitimate interests, but Parliament should not start from the proposition that secrecy is automatically preferable when our anti-corruption commission undertakes examinations. Public confidence in integrity institutions depends in part upon transparency. When hearings can appropriately occur publicly, IBAC should have the capacity to conduct them publicly without the law placing an unnecessary thumb on the scales towards secrecy. Our amendment would repeal that provision, consistent with the approach we have taken in legislation before this Parliament previously – again, laws that were opposed by those opposite. The government seems to have been dragged kicking and screaming on this one. We will wait and see what happens in the committee stage. But it does show that, up until now – as the government is dragged on at least three out of four of our amendments – integrity has been kind of optional under this Premier. It does show in how much they have resisted stronger laws to beef up IBAC and our integrity framework and institutions. It does show that integrity has been optional under this government.

Our fourth amendment deals with public interest immunity and in my view addresses another significant weakness in the present system. Under the current framework a minister or former minister may claim public interest immunity in relation to certain material sought by IBAC. In practical terms, IBAC may come asking for a document and be told that the document attracts public interest immunity because it involves cabinet material. There are legitimate reasons why sensitive government information receives legal protection, and nobody disputes that matters involving national security, law enforcement operations and genuinely sensitive information require appropriate safeguards. But a blanket ability to prevent an integrity agency from accessing material simply because a minister, former minister or former Premier invokes public interest immunity creates an obvious problem. If IBAC is investigating serious allegations involving government decision-making, there needs to be an appropriate mechanism through which claims of immunity can be examined rather than simply operating as the end of the matter. That is what our amendment seeks to address.

The sticking point I think is our calls to stop Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan from using privilege as a way not to cooperate with IBAC or a royal commission. Ben Carroll wants to leave the former premiers with the power not to cooperate. If Mr Carroll refuses to remove the immunity, he will be ensuring that Ms Allan and Mr Andrews have a cover-up power to not provide information. His utterances in his first press conference that he is not Daniel Andrews and that he is not Jacinta Allan will be just words. He would be, if he refuses our amendment, running a protection racket for Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan. That is what he would be doing if he does not agree to our amendment. This is a sensible amendment that we think is in the public interest and in Victoria's interest. I reckon if you asked Victorians – and those opposite might want to do it on the weekend when they are knocking on doors – whether they think Daniel Andrews or Jacinta Allan deserve public interest immunity at IBAC or a royal commission, I do not think they would agree with you.

Lee Tarlamis: On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Davis is continually interjecting when he is out of his place. He has been here long enough to know that that is not within the standing orders, and I ask you to ask him to refrain from doing that.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): I ask Mr Davis, if he wishes to interject, to be seated in his place.

David Davis: I am only standing, Acting President, because I have an injured leg.

Lee Tarlamis: Further to that, Acting President, if he is not in his place, he can refrain from interjecting, which is disorderly and not within the standing orders anyway.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): I ask Mr Mulholland to continue.

Evan MULHOLLAND: If Victoria establishes a royal commission specifically to investigate alleged corruption, criminality and misconduct associated with major public infrastructure, that commission should be able to obtain the information required to establish what has occurred. That applies regardless of whether the person holding the information is a current minister, a former minister or a former Premier. No individual should be above proper scrutiny simply because of the office that they once held. The purpose of our integrity system is to allow independent bodies to follow evidence where it leads. That should apply equally to the current government, former governments, ministers, former ministers, public servants, contractors, unions, companies and anyone else whose conduct properly falls within the jurisdiction of our integrity agencies.

Over recent years allegations have emerged of concerning conduct on major Victorian infrastructure projects, including allegations involving ghost shifts, false sign-offs, improper payments, labour hire arrangements and other misconduct. Other misconduct was referred to previously by Dr Heath in regard to workplace health and safety reps, who as we saw through the thorough investigative journalism of Nick McKenzie, were being used as a proxy to house bikies, to house people that had just come out of prison in Queensland and to house domestic abusers. These are the people who were the workplace health and safety reps on construction sites under this government. These are the kinds of things that should be investigated. But under the current government's set of laws, you could have all sorts of improper conduct on the North East Link exposed in a quarterly report or a report to Treasury, but if that goes to cabinet for noting, that entire swathe of evidence about the government's knowledge of allegations on the North East Link would be protected from a royal commission. We do not know what has gone to cabinet, but we would suspect that some of this has gone to cabinet, just like the government's shameful, secret public transport tax went to cabinet for noting. The Premier and most of the other ministers had never read it –

Members interjecting.

Ryan Batchelor: On a point of order –

Evan MULHOLLAND: I was making a comparison.

Ryan Batchelor: Acting President, Mr Davis appears to be continuing to defy your ruling for him to remain silent if he is going to be standing in the chamber.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): I ask Mr Mulholland to continue unassisted.

Evan MULHOLLAND: As I was saying, the secret public transport tax went to cabinet. I know none of them obviously read their cabinet papers or are well briefed on them, but it is quite clear that many other matters could have gone to cabinet and are not going to be able to be investigated by IBAC. These allegations should be properly investigated on their merits by the appropriate independent bodies.

Politicians write laws that prevent independent agencies from properly examining them. A number of matters have already been referred to IBAC. The question therefore becomes very simple: once IBAC receives stronger powers will it actually be allowed to use them in relation to those matters? Under the bill as drafted there are circumstances where the answer is no. That is the issue for Parliament to fix. The government says the royal commission will deal with construction matters, but the royal commission will not answer every integrity question raised over the last 12 years of this Labor government. It does not encompass every referral to IBAC. It does not encompass every government contract. It does not encompass every decision involving taxpayer money. It does not encompass every allegation concerning the conduct of ministers, departments, agencies or government-owned entities. Of course we saw lots of briefings where the director-general of the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority and other public servants were warning the former Premier and ministers about allegations of corruption on taxpayer-funded projects. There were allegations of corruption on the Hurstbridge line upgrade, where we saw some pretty awful instances of both corruption and allegations of abuse and violence. There were awful allegations of abuse on the North East Link and on the Footscray Hospital build – terrifying incidents of abuse and corruption we have seen on construction sites across our state.

If Parliament accepts that IBAC needs stronger laws and powers today, we must confront the obvious question about what happens to allegations that could not properly be investigated yesterday because IBAC did not possess those powers. The government could have introduced legislation straightaway giving IBAC comprehensive follow-the-money powers, ensuring those powers applied to past matters, strengthening transparency around examinations and reporting and removing unnecessary barriers to preventing the commission from obtaining relevant information. Instead Labor has brought forward a bill containing worthwhile powers but surrounded them with restrictions that diminish their effectiveness.

We will support the strengthening of IBAC's powers. We will also seek to amend this legislation, because simply giving IBAC more powers on paper is not enough. Those powers need to work in practice. They need to apply where allegations have previously fallen through gaps in IBAC's legislation. They need to allow our anti-corruption commission to look backwards as well as forwards. They need to ensure reports are not unnecessarily trapped for years before Victorians can see them. They need to preserve IBAC's capacity to conduct public examinations where appropriate and they need to ensure that claims of public interest immunity cannot operate as an automatic barrier. That is the integrity framework Victorians deserve. And after 12 years of Labor, which has faced one integrity controversy after another, this bill is certainly needed and should be supported.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (20:03): I am very pleased to rise to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026, which makes two incredibly important changes to IBAC's legislative framework. Firstly, it expands the definitions of 'public officer' and 'public body' and inserts definitions of 'associated entity' and 'third-party contractor' to effectively expand IBAC's jurisdiction to allow it to follow the money and to investigate circumstances where there are allegations of alleged corrupt conduct in the performance of a public

function undertaken by a third party but funded by government. Secondly, it amends the definition of 'corrupt conduct' to replace the requirement that that conduct constitute a relevant offence, and at a lower threshold that the conduct constitute any offence and at the lower threshold that the conduct constitute a serious disciplinary matter, to allow IBAC to investigate a broader range of integrity-related matters, and to insert some transitional provisions in the bill.

The bill implements two critical recommendations – one being arguably the most important – from the Integrity and Oversight Committee's report into the adequacy of the legislative framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission that was tabled in December of last year, which the government responded to in June indicating its support for a range of recommendations. The new Premier, upon coming to office, made it a priority of his, along with a range of other integrity-related matters, to not only establish a royal commission into the construction sector here in Victoria but do a range of other things, including this bill, which is to introduce follow-the-dollar powers sooner than was previously articulated as government policy, but also to bring forward the changes to amend the definition of 'corrupt conduct' and then the bill, which we will debate later, to create the office of the special prosecutor – all components of this government's integrity agenda under the Premier Ben Carroll setting a new direction for integrity here in Victoria. They have been very important steps that have, frankly, left the opposition floundering to understand what they can possibly say. But I will get a bit more into what the opposition's contribution is. I want to go to the substance of these matters and why they are important.

As a member of the Integrity and Oversight Committee for the last four years and someone who worked very closely with many across the chamber – including the late Dr Tim Read, who was the chair of the committee – to formulate the recommendations in this report that this bill implements some of, I know we did extensive investigations and we heard detailed submissions and lots of evidence. I think it was very clear that the framework that IBAC had been operating under since it was established by the former Liberal government in 2012 and operationally commenced in 2013 did constrain its ability to function effectively. This government, the Labor government, made a couple of tranches of changes to try and fix some of those issues, particularly the introduction of the amendments relating to misconduct in public office that were implemented in 2019.

The committee recommended a series of amendments to improve IBAC's operations. The follow-the-money powers, as they are colloquially termed, are amendments to definitions of 'public officer' and 'public body' that, importantly, will allow IBAC's jurisdiction to go beyond those circumstances where a public officer or public body is involved in the conduct – so either the conduct of that public body or the conduct of a third party towards a public body or towards a public officer. It has been that nexus which has acted as a limitation on the jurisdiction of IBAC.

There are many circumstances – yes, in the construction sector – where head contractors contract with government and then implement a series of subcontracting arrangements, but it is not exclusively the construction sector where these new provisions will have effect. It, for example, could also be the conduct of those in the broader community and social care sector who are engaged by the government to deliver services on behalf of the Victorian people. Their conduct will now be able to be investigated by IBAC, but also those who are involved, say, in the professional services sector – a consulting firm, for example, undertaking work on behalf of the government – will have their conduct able to be scrutinised by IBAC as a result of the changes that this bill brings about. Yes, it will, importantly, apply to the way that contracting and subcontracting work in the construction sector, but it will also be much broader than just that, across a whole range of government services. I think those matters should, in the course of this debate, be mentioned. They are not the focus, but they are the consequences of the amendments, particularly on follow-the-money, that we have got here today.

The second, but I think the most critical, amendment is the definition of 'corrupt conduct' that this bill provides and its removal of the requirement for the conduct to constitute a relevant offence, which was a big curtailment of IBAC's capacity to make findings of corrupt conduct and to properly and thoroughly investigate a range of matters on which, in other jurisdictions, similar bodies are not so

constrained. It does, I think, make the most significant change to Victoria's corruption powers since the establishment of IBAC, its commencement as a body in 2012 and the commencement of its investigative functions in 2013. It means that conduct that is not a crime but which is a serious breach of a relevant code of conduct – whether that be the public sector code of conduct, the ministerial code of conduct or the members of Parliament code of conduct in the standards that we have – will now be capable of being scrutinised by IBAC, and the range of very significant powers that IBAC has, its significant coercive powers as an investigatory body, will be able to be brought to bear on those instances of misconduct. That is a real paradigm shift for corruption investigation in Victoria, and it is one that the Integrity and Oversight Committee, in its December report, recommended. As a member of that committee, I supported that report and I supported those recommendations, and I support the bill before us today.

There are a range of transitional provisions in the bill that seek to ensure that the application of these new provisions and the expansion of IBAC's jurisdiction are able to be applied to conduct that occurred prior to its commencement – in fact right back to the commencement of IBAC itself. There has been, unfortunately – and I do not know whether it was wilful or accidental – some misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the effect of those transitional provisions and an attempt to muddy the water a little bit about what their effect will be, but the government's intention has been very, very clear.

In quoting from the amendment bill in and of itself, members would be well served by reading the principal act in conjunction with the amendment bill to understand the totality of IBAC's powers with respect to its own decision-making that it has to undertake. If you look particularly at the operation of section 60 of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, you need to actually read the bill and the act together to get a holistic understanding of what IBAC's powers and decision-making framework and matrix really will be to make the determinations that it has to make about investigations that it launches and the overarching determination about its decision-making in launching investigations that ultimately should be in the public interest. There has been, I think, some confusion about those issues. The government is certainly working to ensure that its intent is clarified and that it is very, very clear about what it is that we are seeking to do.

I think members will be well served by reading the bill and the act together to actually understand how the law might operate. As I said, those matters are being worked through, and the government is not going to allow misinterpretation to derail what is a very clear intention with respect to the ability of this bill to cast back and look at conduct that may have occurred as far back as 2013. There may well be members of this Parliament who have an interest in understanding what IBAC's powers are to investigate improper conduct that occurred as far back as 2013 and 2014. There may well be a series of matters and decisions that were undertaken in 2013 and 2014, for example, in relation to the settling of legal action in the Ventnor matter, a matter in which the previous planning minister, the member for Bulleen – when he was the planning minister in 2011 – made some dubious planning decisions and then in 2013 had to go and settle through a court case. The motivation for that settlement was borne out in some material that was tabled in 2018 that seemed to suggest that his motivation in seeking that settlement was one that was driven by politics and not by law. There may be other matters as far back as 2013 that need to be examined, and I am pleased that this bill will enable that to occur should IBAC determine that it should be the case.

There are a couple of other things I will say. We are not going to take lectures from Mr Mulholland about the application of legislative detail on this bill or others. Mr Mulholland could not answer some pretty simple questions I in particular asked him when he moved a private members bill in this place a couple of months ago. When I asked him when the operative provisions would commence, he could not give me an answer. He stuttered, he stammered and he could not actually give me an answer. I am not particularly convinced that he is across the detail here, so I am not going to be taking lectures from him about how these provisions might operate.

There are a couple of other things I just want to say more broadly and genuinely in the spirit of what I think is an exceptionally complex area of public law that needs to be addressed seriously. Following these amendments, there is going to be unresolved and unfinished business with respect to IBAC's police oversight jurisdiction that is going to need ongoing monitoring and attention. The expansion of IBAC's public sector jurisdiction should not have an impact on its police oversight functions, and we need to make sure that it does not. I put that firmly on the public record.

The other thing is that I think we need to be very clear and clarify the application of this bill, particularly with respect to the privileges of the Parliament. There was some interesting commentary during Operation Richmond from IBAC itself about how IBAC, as an arm of the executive and an instrument of executive government, treats and deals with the privileges of the Parliament and parliamentarians. Given the expansion of 'corrupt conduct' to include serious disciplinary matters and potential breaches of our standards of conduct as members of Parliament, I think we should give further consideration and thought to how those two matters intersect, because there may well be things that occur in this chamber – in the negotiation of legislation, for example – that members want to think about in terms of how IBAC and its new powers and expanded jurisdiction might operate. They are complex, but they need further discussion. They are two matters, I think, that we need to think further about and have further consideration of, probably in the next Parliament. This is a very important bill. I support it, and I commend it to the house.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (20:18): I am very pleased to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. The main aims of this bill are to empower IBAC to follow the money and to amend the definition of 'corrupt conduct', both of which have been so ably covered by my colleague Mr Batchelor. The Carroll Labor government has made a commitment to enable IBAC to follow the money. This legislation will do just that. It will do so by enabling IBAC to investigate suspected corrupt conduct by third-party and private subcontractors where there is a connection between that conduct and the performance of a public function funded by government. The bill also acts on the commitment to broaden the definition of 'corrupt conduct'. In doing so, it will enable IBAC to deal with a broader range of criminal conduct and other behaviours that may compromise integrity. These reforms work in parallel with other integrity-strengthening reforms. Together with the measures we are taking in relation to the royal commission and special prosecutor, this represents a holistic and comprehensive response to allegations of misconduct on government-funded construction sites.

If we just take a moment to have a look at the follow-the-money provisions, this bill focuses firstly on our commitment to enabling IBAC to follow the money. The prevention of corruption on our building sites does not just stop at the front gate – I know that is farming language, but there are gates behind the front gate. We need to apply the same scrutiny to subcontractors, labour hire firms and procurement chains. We need IBAC to have the tools to follow that trail, so this bill enables IBAC to investigate corrupt conduct down the chain of contractors and third parties.

These reforms allow for any connection between the alleged corrupt conduct and the performance of a public function funded by a government to be investigated. That connection matters. It protects against overreach while ensuring that IBAC can more deeply pursue any real concerns affecting government projects. To do this, the bill will amend the definitions of 'public body' and 'public officer' in the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 to include reference to 'associated entities', drawing on the definition in the Audit Act 1994. These changes provide IBAC with powers comparable to the Victorian Auditor-General, in line with the recommendation of the Integrity and Oversight Committee.

If we have a look at the definition now of 'corrupt conduct', this bill also broadens that definition. The IBAC Commissioner has publicly stated that this definition should be amended, and we are acting on that advice. Currently the conduct must constitute a 'relevant offence' – and I say that in inverted

commas – before IBAC can commence an investigation. The definition of a 'relevant offence' in the IBAC act is:

(a) an indictable offence …

…

(i) attempt to pervert the course of justice;

(ii) bribery of a public official;

(iii) perverting the course of justice;

(iv) misconduct in public office …

This limits IBAC from investigating other behaviours that may compromise integrity but are not a criminal offence. So 'corrupt conduct' will now mean conduct that would constitute either a criminal offence or a serious disciplinary matter. A 'serious disciplinary matter' is defined as:

(a) serious misconduct …

(b) any other matter that constitutes or may constitute grounds for –

(i) termination of employment, appointment or engagement –

so whatever the legal language is for the role that you are in –

…

(ii) a significant employment, appointment or contractual penalty …

(c) a serious contravention of –

(i) the Code of Conduct …

that applies to members of Parliament or local government councillors.

When we introduce the notion of 'follow the money' and we redefine and broaden the definition of 'corruption', we have a much stronger capability to follow the trail of money further down the line. How effective will this be? The provisions in this bill are backed by Victoria's integrity agencies. IBAC and Integrity Oversight Victoria, IOV, have been consulted on the bill and are broadly supportive of these reforms. IBAC is currently working through implementation planning, as the reforms are proposed to commence on the day after royal assent.

These reforms implement the key recommendations of the Integrity and Oversight Committee. I just want to take a moment to express appreciation for the work of the Integrity and Oversight Committee, which has a range of members from across parties who have worked very hard during this term on a range of things, not least of which was the establishment of the PIC, the parliamentary integrity commission. The committees that work in this place play a really important role for Victorians. Sometimes in this chamber here at 8:30 at night it is really hard to imagine that these changes – even as my colleague Harriet Shing mentioned in her valedictory – with the full stops, the commas and the details actually have an effect, but they do. This committee has done a power of work in this four-year term, and I want to express my appreciation but also the appreciation of everybody here for the work that that group has done.

The IOC, the Integrity and Oversight Committee, made 31 recommendations with respect to IBAC's legislative framework. As someone that has worked on committees, 31 recommendations – that is a lot of work to come to that point. Mr Limbrick knows that. Mr Welch knows that. Everybody here who has been on a committee knows how much work that involves. The government response supports 21 of those recommendations in principle and places eight of them under review. Central to the government's response is the creation of a time-limited expert reference group. This will be chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety, with members including IBAC, the Victorian Ombudsman, Integrity Oversight Victoria and Victoria Police. I think this committee will be very valuable. It is extremely important not to have overlap and extremely important not to have politicisation, and this group of experts, with each of them coming from a different perspective –

a perspective from each of the integrity entities – will provide a powerful contribution and accountability for each other. This expert reference group will continue to work on implementation of the remaining recommendations, ensuring that Victoria's integrity framework operates cohesively and without unintended consequences. How logical is that? Who would have thunk that talking to each other might actually strengthen what is being done?

Our reforms to IBAC will work alongside the royal commission and the special prosecutor. The terms of reference of the royal commission are broad and expansive. Nothing is off limits. It is wrong to say this royal commission has limits; it has none. By its very nature, the royal commission will be able to look forward, look back and look at the present. The royal commission can look into the conduct of the CFMEU, construction companies, labour hire firms, consortia and criminal actors on Victoria's major projects, and it can examine the role of government, the executive, government departments and delivery agencies in overseeing the projects. Crucially, the terms of reference make it a matter for the commissioner to decide whose actions and whose knowledge are relevant to the matters under investigation – not government, not the Premier and certainly not the opposition. It is concerning, what we have heard the opposition wanting to predetermine who gets called by the commissioner. That is called politicisation of an independent process. The commissioner should decide based on the terms of reference. The commissioner will choose who to call as a witness. It is important that the royal commissioner is not hobbled by a political agenda from any political party, anybody in government or anybody in opposition.

This bill ensures that if the royal commission uncovers misconduct, IBAC has the powers to pursue it. We are not waiting for the commission to finish and then asking, 'What do we do now?' We are acting now. These powers will be operational within weeks, not years. These reforms give IBAC the powers that it needs immediately. But we know there is more to do. We will continue working on a second tranche of reform, in line with our response to the independent oversight committee and in close consultation with the expert reference group.

The bill before us delivers on the commitments made by Ben Carroll, our Premier. It empowers IBAC to follow the money and it broadens the definition of 'corrupt conduct'. These reforms complement the work of the royal commission and special prosecutor. They provide a holistic and comprehensive response to allegations of misconduct on government-funded construction projects. Victorians deserve integrity in their construction industry. They deserve to know that corruption will be pursued wherever it leads. This bill gives IBAC the tools to make that a reality, and I commend the bill to the house.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:33): I also would like to say a few words on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. The Libertarian Party went to the last election with one of our policies being, as I think the slogan for it was, to 'Give IBAC more teeth'. This bill does actually do that, so I am hardly in a position to oppose it. But I will temper that statement by providing a bit of context around that.

During the last term of Parliament my main concerns around IBAC were actually around its police oversight function. We had lots of people come to us during the pandemic who complained that they put in a complaint to IBAC and then IBAC had come back to them and said that they had referred the matter on to the police and the police had investigated themselves. It seemed very inadequate, let us put it that way. If this bill today was setting up a dedicated police oversight function separate from IBAC, I would be very supportive of it. But that is actually not what we are talking about today. What we are talking about today is less about the police oversight function and more about IBAC's ability to investigate corruption. I would say that despite my enthusiasm for IBAC in the last term of Parliament, I am less enthused now.

However, this bill does address two issues around IBAC and its capabilities. Despite my scepticism, and I have concerns about these powers, I do feel that they will give an ability to IBAC to investigate and follow corruption that it does not currently have. The main thing that this bill does is around adding what they call 'follow-the-money powers'. Effectively one of the problems with IBAC at the moment

is its jurisdiction ends at the interface between government and the private sector, so it basically ends at the procurement phase. Much of the activity that we have seen with corruption in this state certainly extends to things in the private sector through contracting agencies, through third-party private sector companies, through unions and through many other organisations that would be beyond the jurisdiction of IBAC at the moment. Certainly I think it is a big problem that it cannot go beyond that interface of procurement, and this bill does address that.

That is a good thing I think, although I do have concerns that many of IBAC's powers are, let us say, far less than what would be considered normal due process powers. I note that many people are concerned about some of the powers that IBAC has that essentially bypass due process in many cases. Some of their coercive powers are very extreme, and I hope that they are used sensibly and effectively. Nevertheless I am still sceptical and concerned about these powers that they have already, and I am concerned about those powers being extended beyond the jurisdiction that they already have. It is certainly the case that I do not feel they can investigate and get to the bottom of much of this corruption without this type of power. If they cannot go beyond the public sector, then they really cannot get to the bottom of this. We have seen cases where companies themselves have rorted Big Build construction contracts. I know a lot of the talk has been about unions, but it is not exclusively unions that are doing this. There was at least one case of a Swedish company that got into trouble for overcharging things, and Lord knows how many other things have gone unnoticed, which is a concern.

Of course we know about union corruption, at least within the CFMEU, and potentially other unions, although we do not yet know; we will have to wait and see what the royal commission comes back with. But I am also concerned that these job sites are mostly controlled by private sector companies. I think that if corruption is happening on these sites, it should not just be about the unions. I know lots of people in the Labor Party seem to think that many of us on the other side have an obsession with unions – I certainly do not. I am not anti union at all; in fact I think unions are an essential part of a free society. But I am concerned that these unions were operating in a corrupt manner, and we are meant to believe that these multinational companies – some of them were public companies that had to report to various stock markets and had boards of directors – somehow had no processes or controls to notice any of this stuff, and they just did not see or notice any of it. I think that is something that has not been investigated properly, the role of these contracting companies and what they have or have not seen or noticed. If they have not noticed things, then they obviously have not been looking with their eyes open.

The other thing that this bill does is expand the definition of 'corrupt conduct'. I have a few more concerns about this than the follow-the-money powers. Expanding the definition to include workplace misconduct, councillor code breaches or ministerial code breaches – I am concerned about this. I will remain open-minded. It is not enough of a concern for me to oppose it, but I am concerned that IBAC could end up as the de facto HR manager here. When we are talking about workplace misconduct, could we end up in a situation where normal workplace disputes end up getting escalated to IBAC? I am concerned about how that may play out in the field. Nevertheless there are a number of scenarios that probably could and should have been investigated by IBAC, but they could not because they did not meet the definition of 'corrupt conduct'. Maybe they should have been investigated. So on balance, I will give that some leeway. But I still have concerns about trivial things being escalated to IBAC. I know IBAC has to deal with many trivial reports that are given to it all the time; it has to triage them and figure out what is actually worth investigating and what it has the resources to investigate and that sort of thing. I am sure it is a big job already. I am concerned that this will make it a far, far bigger job. Every time someone in the workplace does something that someone else does not like, they might get reported to IBAC, which sort of concerns me. But there are many things that probably should have been investigated that IBAC were unable to investigate because they did not have the powers to do that. After this bill is passed, they will have the power to do that.

I think that the Integrity and Oversight Committee will play a crucial role in monitoring how this bill actually plays out in the field, because as I said, I think there are many concerns here about how this

may work in reality. The Integrity and Oversight Committee will need to be on their game to watch that we do not get IBAC flooded with trivial complaints or we do not get IBAC running down rabbit holes that are not going to lead anywhere, because Victorians, especially Victorian taxpayers, are very concerned about what they are seeing. They are very concerned about the money that has been wasted. They do not know how much – there have been numbers thrown around of $15 billion. I do not know whether that is the right number or not. I do know that corruption exists in Victoria. I do know that organised crime is very, very powerful and a formidable opponent.

I do not envy the government actually having to go up against organised crime in this state. Organised crime is very nimble, very able. One of the things that Premier Carroll was talking about was his new tobacco licensing thing and how they have shut down a few stores and stuff, but organised crime moved to a home delivery model months ago. I have spoken many times in here about how you could walk just a few hundred metres from Parliament and you could buy illegal products wherever you wanted. You cannot buy them anymore because they are all home delivery now. Organised crime has decided that they are going to shift to a different model. So anyone that you bust from this point on clearly is not part of whoever the dominant organised crime network is at the moment.

For some reason, organised crime seems to be able to advertise at will on social media. I get tobacco and vapes advertisements all the time in my social media feed, probably because I search for these things. But nevertheless they are obviously spending large amounts of money on social media to advertise these illegal products. I have noticed a number of other illegal products being sold, not just tobacco and not just vapes. I have also seen illegal black market cannabis, which the government could have solved by legalising cannabis, but they refuse to do that. The question is not whether there is a cannabis market. The question is whether it is a regulated, legal market or whether it is controlled by organised crime. For some reason, the government thinks that organised crime controlling this market is a better thing. I disagree. The opposition seems to think that as well. Despite their big chest-thumping about organised crime, they do not seem to want to undermine any of their markets, when they could with the stroke of a pen. In fact if the opposition today said that their policy was to legalise cannabis and undermine a billion-dollar market for organised crime in Victoria, it would flip. It would be legalised within minutes because the government could not oppose it at that point, and I am sure maybe even the Liberal Party would become more popular. Maybe there are a few cannabis consumers that are partial to the Liberal Party, apart from their position on cannabis. Who knows?

I have also noticed a number of other illegal products that they are selling at the moment. There seem to be a lot of these weird injectable peptides and stuff, and Lord knows what is going to happen with that down the track. It is probably not a good thing, I imagine, having unregulated injectable drugs that do God knows what being sold to people, but they seem to be selling them with impunity as well, and the government seems to have no control.

As I said before, organised crime is so sophisticated that they have actually anticipated how the government might deal with tobacco regulation by setting up distribution centres. If you try and order illegal tobacco or vapes in Victoria online, they come from Brisbane, because Victoria Police has no jurisdiction in Queensland, and if you order them in Queensland, guess what, they come from Victoria. That is sort of how it works at the moment, and that will work for a while until Victoria and Queensland police come to some sort of agreement to investigate each other's jurisdictions. For the moment it will buy them some time until they move to whatever model is next. They seem to be at least one step – probably two steps – ahead of the government.

As I have said many times, the only way that the government is going to deal with these things is not through enforcement but through undermining the incentives that deal with these things. This is another problem with this bill: it totally ignores the incentives that the government has set up in the construction sector, which I have spoken about many times in this place. It ignores the fact that organised crime has used the government's own diversity policies as a vector for infiltration and corruption. The government says with its social procurement policies that you need to have a gender equality action plan and you need to have all these things about how you are going to employ

Aboriginal people. Of course organised crime is only too happy to oblige and provide this workforce diversity for you, and that is exactly what it does. I do not think that anyone that supported the gender equality bill in the last term of Parliament, including me, thought that this was going to be the outcome of it, but actually that is sort of what has happened. It has turned into a nightmare. We need to rethink the procurement policies from scratch. I hope that the opposition will maybe say something about procurement policies and what they are going to do with them if they are lucky enough to become the government, because ultimately many of the vectors for infiltration that we have seen in the construction sector are a direct result of government procurement policies, and many of these vectors could be undermined by better procurement policies.

What IBAC are doing is mopping up the after-effects; they are mopping up the criminality that is a result of government policy. What we need to be looking at is the government policy that incentivises it, not the mopping up. If we are focused on this forever, we will never, ever fix organised crime in this state. Organised crime is a huge problem. Corruption is a huge problem. Anyone that denies it is denying reality. It is everywhere, and we will not fix it through enforcement alone. We will only fix this through facing the reality that the incentives that we have created – that the government has created and that Parliament has created – have actually backfired and caused a lot of this corruption, or at least allowed it. We need to soberly ask ourselves: did these things that we have done – the social procurement policies, for example – actually achieve the goals that we wanted, or have they done something else entirely? I think the answer is obvious.

Clearly the royal commission will be looking at this. I will probably be looking at making a submission myself to the royal commission. We will see where they end up. I hope that they do get to the bottom of this, but I really hope that the royal commission do look at the role of government policy in incentivising organised crime, because if we do not look at that, we will always be just doing a clean-up and will never, ever fix the problem.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:50): I move:

That debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Lizzie Blandthorn:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (20:51): I rise to speak to the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. What would Victorians expect when they hear that there is a bill before this Parliament to establish a special prosecutor? I think they would reasonably expect that the bill would create both the office of the special prosecutor and the powers to go with it. That is not what this bill does. This bill creates the office of special prosecutor, but it does not provide the prosecutorial powers that you would expect a special prosecutor to have. The government has admitted that those additional powers and functions will come later, in a second tranche of this legislation. We have a bill before us that creates a special prosecutor without prosecutorial powers, and only this Labor government could manage that. The government creates the office and creates the position, but Victorians will then have to wait another six months – if this government is re-elected in November – for another bill with additional powers and functions: information sharing, investigation and prosecutorial powers. I put to the chamber at the outset that we are establishing a special prosecutor who cannot prosecute. The only way a bill like this could possibly have made its way through the government process without somebody asking, 'Shouldn't the special prosecutor actually have prosecutorial powers?' is because somebody said, 'We need to do something before the election.' This is what it looks like, and this is where we are at today.

You do not have to take my word for it. The minister's own second-reading speech says those prosecutorial powers will not be enabled until early 2027. How can it be that we are creating the office of special prosecutor now but the powers that might make that office actually meaningful will not be enabled for another six months? The government has rushed to establish the position, presumably a funded position, without giving the position the basic powers Victorians would assume would come with the title. It is there in the name: a special prosecutor should be able to prosecute, but under this bill they cannot. It is another example of Labor's approach to integrity: create the office, put out the media release, hold the press conference and say that something should be done. Premier Ben Carroll had, I believe, a couple of hours between when he knifed Jacinta Allan and when he held his press conference to consider the idea of a special prosecutor – if we take his word for it that he was not planning to roll Jacinta Allan for months. He had a few hours, and so he made this statement not actually having a plan. This kind of legislation is the end result of a line for the media rather than detailed policy work on what can be achieved through the Parliament.

There are serious questions that need to be answered about how this legislation has been handled. The member for Brighton Mr Newbury raised one of those matters in the other place. During the bill briefing Mr Newbury asked what I think is reasonable: how much will the special prosecutor cost? He was told by the Premier's private office that he would be provided with a funding envelope and a figure for the cost. He then asked a very specific follow-up question: would that figure be provided before the bill was debated? He was given what he described as an ironclad commitment that it would be. And what happened? He received an email saying that the special prosecutor would be funded, which of course was not the question. A clear commitment was given by the Premier's office about the cost of this office, and that commitment was not met – so much for integrity not being optional. Even the office of the Premier cannot keep their own commitments. On a bill dealing with integrity, you would think a commitment from the Premier's office would mean something. But we have learned from this Premier that despite saying integrity is not optional, his actions prove that they are. We still do not know how much the special prosecutor will cost. We do not know what the funding envelope will be. What we know, because the minister has told us, is that the special prosecutor will not initially have prosecutorial powers.

There is another concern with the bill, and it aligns closely with the concern we raised in relation to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026, and that issue is of public interest immunity. The member for Brighton circulated an amendment in the other place seeking to remove the immunity that applies to the royal commission, just as an amendment will be pursued in relation to an IBAC investigation. Public interest immunity or executive privilege or Crown privilege, as it also has been referred to, allows a minister, former minister, Premier or former Premier to claim privilege over information or documents that they may hold. The amendment in relation to IBAC legislation sought to remove the privilege from the context of IBAC legislation. The amendment to this bill seeks to remove it in relation to the royal commission, because this bill deals with the Inquiries Act 2014. I do not think many Victorians would believe that it is reasonable that a minister, former minister, Premier or former Premier could simply refuse to provide information or documents to a royal commission. I do not think many Victorians would even know that this immunity exists. Under the current act a former Premier such as Daniel Andrews could simply refuse to provide certain information or documents to a royal commissioner on the basis of that privilege. There is no requirement to provide some detailed explanation. They can simply say no.

Here is where the debate becomes particularly interesting. Following the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants, this Labor government committed to removing that immunity by May of 2022. That was the government's response to that royal commission's recommendations. That was four years ago. I note that governments often make big statements about responses to royal commissions or reviews and never follow through on them, but in the government response to that royal commission, it agreed that it would remove that public interest immunity by May of 2022. Do you think that that happened? It did not. The government committed, and that commitment remains to this day on the Victorian government website. It was meant to have been delivered by May of 2022.

Who was the Premier at the time? Daniel Andrews. This might go some way to explaining why this commitment has never been delivered, but some might ask whether anyone in the executive government would really use this immunity. The last person to use public interest immunity was of course then Premier Daniel Andrews. After the government had committed to removing the immunity, Daniel Andrews used executive privilege in relation to the Commonwealth Games. He did not wait for a particular request. He did not wait to see what document or information might be sought. He claim(sed the privilege over the issue before the request was even made. I do not think that would surprise many Victorians at all. That is why this amendment matters. The amendment I am moving on behalf of the Liberals and Nationals is entirely consistent with the commitment that this Labor government – this government – made five years ago and said it would implement four years ago. The government has a very simple choice right now: it can vote for an amendment that is consistent with its own public commitment that still remains on the Victorian government website, or it can vote against it. That is the choice that this government faces. The choice of a government that says integrity is not optional is also a choice for the government keeping its own commitment that it made in response to another very serious royal commission. If Labor votes against it, Victorians are entitled to ask why this government wants ministers, former ministers, premiers and former premiers to retain the ability to say no when a royal commission comes asking for information. Why else would you want the immunity to remain in the Inquiries Act?

The Liberals and Nationals do have a clear view: when IBAC, our chief anti-corruption agency, comes asking for information or if a royal commission comes asking for information, a former minister or a former Premier who holds that information and knowledge of what they are asking should provide it. This is not a frivolous proposition. I understand that public interest immunity can have a role in other circumstances. But what we are dealing with is the chief integrity agency or a royal commission, and I do not think Victorians would regard it as reasonable for a minister, former minister, Premier or former Premier to simply say no. This is why we pursued this issue in relation to IBAC and why we are pursuing it again in relation to this legislation. In those circumstances, the privilege effectively allows information to be hidden from an integrity body. I presume this is why the Labor government itself has committed to removing it, and on that point I agree with it: it should not exist in those circumstances. And so it should, by its own commitment given on its own website right now and its own commitment given to a previous royal commission, support our amendment.

We are debating this legislation because every Victorian has seen the extraordinary allegations of corruption surrounding Victoria's Big Build. We have seen what has been described as perhaps the worst corruption scandal in Australia's history, with at least $15 billion worth of corruption involved, according to eminent corruption integrity expert Geoffrey Watson SC. Like this bill and like the IBAC legislation that is before the Parliament, this is the action of a government that knows it has finally been caught. It has taken a very long time to get here, and although the action is finally being taken, too much of that action remains hollow.

We will not oppose this legislation, but it is worth remembering how rushed this bill is. The minister admitted in the second-reading speech that the special prosecutor will not have prosecutorial powers for what could be at least six months. Can you believe that? Six months. Setting up an office so you can go to the election and say you set up this office and special prosecutor, yet you are not giving it the actual powers. It is like this government is going to an election promising the Victorian people a car and not actually putting the engine in the car before they sell it to them. That is what this government is doing. We are creating a special prosecutor without prosecutorial powers, which is the legislative equivalent of a pub with no beer.

I acknowledge that the bill enables information sharing. It establishes the office and allows information sharing, including with the royal commission. The Premier himself has said the special prosecutor is being established to enable prosecutorial action, yet the bill establishing the office does not give the office that power, and that tells you about the hollowness of Labor's response to corruption on the Big Build. And when it comes to corruption on the Big Build, there are a number of matters that need to

be put on the record. We know from public reports and the work of journalists, particularly Nick McKenzie, that the government had known for a long time about corruption allegations on government worksites. We know there were warnings in early 2022, and we know the former Premier, who at the time was Minister for Transport Infrastructure with responsibility for this project, was warned about labour hire firm Marda Dandhi, and those matters have been raised publicly in this chamber. We also know that allegations were put to the now Attorney-General during a meeting on a Big Build site. These were very senior ministers in this government who had specific serious allegations put to them, including allegations concerning behaviour and criminal activity.

If somebody approaches a minister and says that very serious criminal conduct is occurring on a government worksite for which the minister has responsibility, Victorians would rightly expect something to be done. So when the Attorney-General was asked about allegations that had been put to her, she initially suggested publicly that those allegations had been referred to police. She was later forced to clarify that this was not correct. Those allegations had not been referred by the Attorney-General to police, they had been passed on internally, and this was significant because the then Premier Jacinta Allan had made clear that her expectation was that allegations of criminal behaviour would be referred to police.

I remember speaking about allegations of criminal coercion and corruption that had been put to me, and I remember several members of those opposite, including Minister Shing, yelling across the chamber as to whether I had reported those allegations of coercion and corruption to the appropriate authorities. In fact I had. The then Minister for Transport Infrastructure had already put out a statement in that regard, because the concerns that we put to the government were of such serious nature. So while lecturing the opposition about whether or not we had referred serious matters, it had ministers like the Attorney-General not actually properly referring matters for investigation. Indeed I had to have about a year-and-a-half-long fight in VCAT to obtain documents about the North East Link, which showed that the assembly of the tunnel-boring machines was significantly delayed because of untoward CFMEU activity and also that the CFMEU were preventing surveyors from accessing the North East Link. None of this would have come out unless we had fought the government in VCAT, something it would have spent a lot of money on lawyers trying to keep secret. But it goes to the attitude of this 12-year-old government – it would rather hide these things under the carpet than have to acknowledge that there is something wrong and has been something wrong.

We also know that many of these allegations were put to the former Premier, Jacinta Allan, when she was the responsible minister. She later wrote to IBAC about those investigations, although she wrote to IBAC in July 2024, almost two years after those allegations were first raised with her. IBAC responded three months later, in October of that year, saying it did not have the powers to investigate what had been referred to it and that the matters had been referred to police. You would think a senior minister or the Premier receiving that response would have done something about it.

Victorians did not learn about that response from IBAC until this year. We found that out after the former Premier had received a response saying IBAC could not investigate those matters. That referral matters, because as the Premier has said, the special prosecutor, the royal commission and the IBAC legislation are intertwined. Yet the former Premier's referral to IBAC cannot be investigated by IBAC under the legislation that was introduced earlier, because of the way it retrospectively operates, other than where it relates to something new. You would think that if the current Premier wrote to an agency and said, 'Here is a former referral. I would like you to investigate it,' then the agency would have the power to do so. And of course it does not.

I hope this Parliament takes the opportunity to strengthen IBAC. Perhaps given more time, this bill could have actually provided the special prosecutor with prosecutorial powers. That might be an idea. Given how rushed this legislation has been, apparently there was not enough time to draft those provisions. One thing we can do now is deal with the ability of members of the executive to claim privilege and refuse to provide that information to the royal commission. That is what my amendment seeks to do, and I will ask for my amendments to be circulated. No, you have not got them. Okay.

They are working hard at the printing press, I think. I thank the parliamentary staff for their work. There must be a lot of amendments, as there were a lot of amendments laid out in the lower house as well on these bills.

This is what Victorians would expect. I say again that position is entirely consistent with the commitment that this Labor government made itself. I invite the speakers of the government after me and the minister to explain why they would oppose an amendment that seeks to complete a government response to another royal commission that still appears on the Victorian government website as government policy. Why would it seek to oppose an amendment as simple as that? When it comes to integrity, this Labor government's response is always hollow, and this bill is another example. The minister has admitted in their speech that this legislation does not provide the basic prosecutorial powers that Victorians would expect a special prosecutor to possess, and those powers will not come for another six months. We will not oppose the bill – we support the creation of the office – but we will not pretend that establishing a special prosecutor without prosecutorial powers represents a complete response, because it does not. Victorians deserve better than another integrity announcement that creates the appearance of action while the substance is pushed off until later. I will leave my remarks there.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (21:15): I am very pleased to rise to speak on the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026, a bill that makes two incredibly important amendments to the Inquiries Act 2014, principally to establish the office of the special prosecutor to work in co-operation and conjunction with the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria – the construction royal commission, which is slightly easier to say. It will be an office that will work with that royal commission to enable issues or evidence about conduct that arises out of the course of the commission's proceedings to be furthered to a prosecution and dealt with in a criminal context or other related prosecutorial fora. The bill also amends the Inquiries Act to make quite an important, enduring change to the act in relation to the powers of royal commissions – to strengthen their powers – to require information to be given to them rather than merely compelling the appearance of witnesses or compelling the production of documents.

The bill is a key element of what the Premier said very clearly and early on was the hallmark of his new direction on integrity matters here in Victoria. His first act was to announce that we would be setting up a royal commission into the construction sector, and he did it. He said he was going to legislate to create a special prosecutor, and this bill does that. He also said that he would bring forward a bill to give IBAC follow-the-money powers. We are dealing with that bill as well in this week of the Parliament, and we had a debate and contributions on that immediately prior to this. So it is very clear that this government takes integrity very, very seriously. We take it seriously, and we are acting. The royal commission itself has been set up, a commissioner appointed, letters patent issued, and the commission's hearings and proceedings are going to start tomorrow. I am sure those of us that are not caught up in the proceedings of the chamber will be able to join in and watch on the live stream, as all and any Victorians who have got an interest in these matters will be. That royal commission is there because of the actions of this Premier – and we should be very, very clear about that.

The bill today is about creating the office of the special prosecutor to enable it to be established alongside the establishment of the royal commission so that it can get set up and hit the ground running, dealing with the evidence that arises in the course of the royal commission and enabling that evidence to be referred off to appropriate authorities to enable prosecution. Why is this important? I think fundamentally why it is important that we have a prosecutorial office standing alongside the royal commission is in part related to the fundamental purpose of a royal commission itself. Royal commissions by their nature are investigatory bodies. They have got significant powers to compel witnesses, to abrogate certain privileges and to make findings and recommendations. But royal commissions cannot find someone guilty of a crime; only a court can do that.

A royal commission is a body established with an executive purpose – an investigatory purpose, not a judicial purpose. It is not a chapter III court empowered to make findings of guilt in criminal matters in an Australian context. The royal commission cannot find someone guilty of a crime. So if, as we should be, we are interested in finding people who are alleged to have committed criminal offences, where evidence has been collected in the course of the royal commission that gives reasonable grounds to suspect that a relevant criminal offence may have been committed, those people should be prosecuted. A royal commission cannot do that. That is why we need someone to take forward those prosecutions into a court so that the courts can make findings of criminal conduct on the guilt or otherwise of people who are alleged to have undertaken certain criminal behaviours that the royal commission uncovers. That is why we need this body set up now, because the way that royal commissions historically have operated – not exclusively but generally – is that royal commissions have set up, gathered their evidence, conducted their hearings, written their report, made findings, published a report and then referred these matters over to prosecutors, which means that there can be significant delays in the bringing of prosecutions until after a royal commission process has concluded.

What this bill does is get the office of the special prosecutor up and running at the same time as the royal commission, which means that there can be a continuing dialogue and information sharing. What this bill does to facilitate the sharing of relevant information between the royal commission and other bodies is to use the office of the special prosecutor as a vehicle to get that done so that we are not waiting and so that criminals are not remaining free from possible criminal sanction, even though their conduct may be scrutinised, investigated and have reports made on it by the royal commission. It is a very important body, a royal commission, but it cannot find someone guilty of a crime. Only a court can do that. To bring criminal charges before a court at the same time that the royal commission is operating is exactly what the office of the special prosecutor is designed to do.

The government's commitments in relation to furnishing the special prosecutor with its range of powers have been divided into two tranches. The first tranche is to get the body set up, get its information-sharing provisions enacted and enable it to commence its work, because we do not want to wait. The opposition may want us to wait. For some reason the opposition may want there to be no action taken until later – I do not know, but that might be the reason why. What we want to see is the royal commission and the office of the special prosecutor working side by side, establishing their mechanisms, establishing their ways of working and allowing the special prosecutor to pass relevant information from the royal commission to relevant bodies to enable matters to be further considered. There is a high degree of legal technicality that arises – particularly in getting evidence that is collected by royal commissions using powers and using evidentiary standards – that is different to that which applies in court proceedings.

What we do not want to see are any of the resulting criminal prosecutions not being sound, so the second tranche of legislation that the government intends to bring with respect to the special prosecutor will be carefully considered and legally sound and will make sure that any of the prosecutorial functions that this office undertakes are done, to the extent that it is possible, so as to enable it to withstand the sort of scrutiny that one might expect to come in the course of criminal proceedings. That is why the government is adopting this approach. Let us get it started; let us get it working. Let us get its operating processes and protocols working alongside the new royal commission – its staff, its commissioner and its exceptionally broad remit – so that it can start getting ready. Then with the second tranche of legislation we will make sure that we have got the legal provisions watertight so that the prosecutions, the criminal charges and hopefully the criminal convictions that arise out of the work of this royal commission are watertight and legally sound. That is the approach the government is taking. That is what this bill is seeking to deliver.

The other important change that this bill makes is to ensure that there are new enduring powers in the Inquiries Act 2014 for bodies such as royal commissions or other boards of inquiry now and in the future to be able to request information and witness statements out of individuals. Currently the provisions that exist in the Victorian law can only require the production of documents and require

witnesses to be compelled to give evidence. Often what makes a royal commission's task easier is seeking witnesses to provide written statements to it. Similar provisions to these apply in other jurisdictions, notably at the Commonwealth level, and have been used to great effect, particularly in the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme. The enduring change that we make here today is a very important additional power for all royal commissions now and into the future to enable them to do their job more effectively.

The Liberal Party seems, in the course of this debate and others, to be finding every reason why they do not support what the government is doing with the broad and expansive powers we have given to our royal commission. What the Liberal Party clearly want to do is try and nobble and hobble that royal commission from doing its job properly. That is why they have been so critical. That is why they have been trying to put their thumbs on the scales of justice in determining what the royal commission does and who it looks at. This government does not want to constrain the royal commission to only look at certain people. We do not want to constrain the royal commission in the way that the Liberal Party does, so that it could not do its job properly. What you see today and what you see tonight is yet another example of the Liberal Party talking down the very institutions, the very offices, the very roles and functions that are necessary to ensure that those who have committed crimes that this royal commission will uncover get brought to justice, and that if criminal charges are brought, those charges stick. That is why this government is doing this job properly. The other lot have a completely different approach. They are a joke.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (21:27): I am very pleased to follow my colleague Mr Batchelor, and I 100 per cent agree with the sentiment expressed. A number of my remarks will go to exactly the independence of the three institutions that are being put in place to investigate. This bill is part of Ben Carroll's commitment to integrity and the Labor government's commitment to integrity, and it does two very important things. It creates the office of special prosecutor to work alongside the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria and it gives the royal commission the power to compel the production of information and witness statements. It is part of what we are doing to fulfil our commitment to acting on allegations of crime, corruption and misconduct on government-funded major construction projects in Victoria.

The Premier's first act after assuming office was to call a royal commission. Victorians deserve to know if organised crime has found its way onto our building sites, and if so, who allowed it to happen and how we make sure it never happens again. The royal commission established on 20 August 2026 will give Victorians those answers. The commission's terms of reference are broad and expansive. Its objectives are to identify the nature and extent of corruption, criminal conduct or serious misconduct relating to any major public and civil infrastructure projects in Victoria and to support the government to prevent future corruption, criminal conduct or serious misconduct and rebuild trust in the integrity of the major construction sector. It is also to instigate referrals to Victoria Police, IBAC, regulatory and licensing authorities and other relevant bodies by working cooperatively with a special prosecutor.

It is this last point that the bill particularly relates to: it creates an office of special prosecutor. The office is a dedicated resource specifically for the royal commission. A royal commission is an investigative body; it is not a court. It does not have regulatory or legislative powers. It cannot charge or prosecute anyone. It can compel evidence and make findings, but it cannot put people before a court. That is why we are establishing an office of the special prosecutor, so that if wrongdoing is uncovered, that wrongdoing is investigated and pursued and people face the consequences.

All royal commissions already have the power to refer matters to law enforcement agencies, but we are strengthening that power with a specialist, dedicated and embedded resource in a special prosecutor, and they will work in real time as evidence of crime and misconduct is uncovered. This will streamline the process of action being taken where corruption, criminal conduct or serious misconduct is identified, as defined in the bill debated previously.

The special prosecutor will be appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Premier following consultation with the commissioner. They will be independent. The bill clearly states that they are not subject to the direction or control of the Premier or any other minister. I might just repeat that: the special prosecutor is not subject to the direction or control of the Premier or any other minister. This is critical to public confidence in that office and that role. They can only be removed from office on grounds such as misconduct or neglect of duty, so they are truly independent.

The job of the special prosecutor is to work in conjunction with the royal commission to refer information to the relevant authorities. That might be Victoria Police. It might be IBAC. It might be another regulatory or licensing authority. It might be here in Victoria, interstate or at the Commonwealth level. The special prosecutor and the royal commission will also be able to share information between themselves, including any information obtained by the commission from Victoria Police, IBAC and other regulatory and licensing authorities.

I do not know how you can run this down. And I agree with Mr Batchelor: it is really important that we let the independent regulators, the independent investigators and the independent enforcement agencies get on with their work without, as Mr Batchelor said, putting a thumb on the scales of justice. The strength of our IBAC reforms, the royal commission and the special prosecutor functions is their independence. As Victorians, as a Parliament and as a government we should be vigilant against the use of these independent entities for any other purpose and for any political purpose in particular. Any specific direction of individuals or targeting of individuals or unions or other entities is inappropriate. We have had a clue in this chamber this afternoon. We have already heard the opposition in this chamber this evening conflating the CFMEU with all unions and making sweeping accusations about unionism, unions and therefore union members in general. That is a clue to the kind of thinking we have from those opposite.

We should all take care not to fall for this trap based on preconceived ideologies or opinions or for political gain. Independence is not always comfortable, but it is the right thing for all of us. Independent inquiry may by its nature not please everyone. The value of our royal commission and our IBAC reforms and our special prosecutor is their independence and therefore their ability to strengthen accountability over our public spending. What follows is the strengthening of our democracy. I will leave my contribution there and conclude by saying that I heartily endorse this piece of legislation. It is extremely important and forms part of the trio of reforms that we are putting in place at the moment.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (21:36): I rise to make a contribution on this bill, the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. This bill is part of the Carroll government's commitment to integrity and to acting on allegations of crime, corruption and misconduct on government-funded major construction projects in Victoria. The Premier's first act after assuming office was to call a royal commission into crime and misconduct in Victoria's construction industry. Victorians deserve to know how organised crime found its way onto our building sites, who allowed it to happen and how we make sure it never happens again.

The royal commission was established on 20 August 2026, and it will give Victorians those answers. The commission's terms of reference are broad and expansive, and the commission will be funded with a budget of $50 million. It has been asked to report within 12 months. The objectives of the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria, as set out in the terms of reference, state that the commission will, among other things, identify the nature and extent of corruption, criminal conduct or serious misconduct relating to any major public and civil infrastructure projects in Victoria. It will support the government to prevent future corruption, criminal conduct or serious misconduct and rebuild trust in the integrity of the major construction sector. It will also instigate referrals to Victoria Police, IBAC, regulatory and licensing authorities and other relevant bodies by working cooperatively with a special prosecutor. The bill will provide important new resources and powers to the royal commission. It will create the office of special prosecutor to work alongside the commission to refer individuals to authorities for prosecution

or regulatory action. It will also provide the commission with new powers to compel the production of information and witness statements, not just documents or attendance to give evidence at hearings.

The bill creates an office of special prosecutor for the first time in Victoria. The office is a dedicated resource specifically for the major construction projects royal commission. It is important to acknowledge that a royal commission does not have the power to charge or prosecute anyone. It is an investigatory body only. It can compel evidence and make findings, but it cannot put people before a court. That is why we are establishing an office of special prosecutor, so that when wrongdoing is uncovered it is investigated and it is pursued and people face consequences. The Inquiries Act 2014 already enables a royal commission to refer information to law enforcement agencies, but this bill will provide the major construction projects royal commission with a specialist, dedicated and embedded resource to work in real time as evidence of crime and misconduct is uncovered. The appointment of a special prosecutor will streamline appropriate action being taken by relevant bodies where corruption, criminal conduct and serious misconduct is identified. With that, I might conclude my remarks, and I commend the bill to the house.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (21:40): I move:

That debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Jaclyn Symes:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Instruction to committee

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger) (21:41): I have considered the amendments on sheet JS102C circulated by Ms Symes, and in my view they are not within the scope of the bill. Therefore an instruction motion pursuant to standing order 14.11 is required.

In addition, the amendments on sheet AP91C circulated by Mr Puglielli are not in scope. However, amendments 1 to 6, 8 to 16, 18, 19 and 21 on that sheet are sufficiently covered by the wording of Ms Symes's instruction motion and can be considered if the motion is agreed to.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (21:42): I move:

That it be an instruction to the committee that they have the power to consider amendments and new clauses to amend:

(1) the Accident Compensation Act 1985:

(a) to provide for claims for damages related to employment between 12 November 1997 and 20 October 1999; and

(b) to make further provision for the award of provisional and subsequent damages to injured workers with serious dust-related conditions; and

(c) in relation to commencing certain proceedings related to serious dust-related conditions without complying with certain requirements; and

(2) the Dangerous Goods Transport Act 2026 in relation to reckless endangerment offences; and

(3) the Limitation of Actions Act 1958 to remove a limitation period for certain actions; and

(4) the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026:

(a) in relation to reckless endangerment offences; and

(b) to provide for health and safety orders and related matters; and

(c) to provide for the use of impact statements in certain proceedings; and

(5) the Transport Accident Act 1986 in relation to certain benefits for children; and

(6) the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013:

(a) to make further provision for the award of provisional and subsequent damages to injured workers with serious dust-related conditions; and

(b) in relation to commencing certain proceedings related to serious dust-related conditions without complying with certain requirements.

Motion agreed to.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger) (21:43): The outstanding amendments 7, 17 and 20 on sheet AP91C circulated by Mr Puglielli are not covered by the instruction motion moved by Ms Symes and notice of the instruction motion has been given to enable their consideration. Mr Puglielli has advised that he will not seek leave to proceed with these amendments.

Mr Welch has given notice of a motion to be moved in the committee to divide the bill. Therefore an instruction motion pursuant to standing order 14.11 is required.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (21:44): I move:

That it be an instruction to the committee that:

(1) they have the power to consider a motion to be moved by me prior to the commencement of the consideration of clause 1 of the bill to divide the bill into two bills, with short titles of:

(a) Workplace Legislation Amendment (Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026;

(b) Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Representative Powers) Bill 2026; and

(2) if the motion is agreed to, the committee consider and report the bills to the Council separately.

Motion agreed to.

Committed.

Committee

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The house has passed an instruction motion empowering the committee to consider a motion to divide the bill to be moved by Mr Welch prior to the consideration of clause 1. I therefore call on Mr Welch to move his motion.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (21:47): I move:

That the Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026 be divided into two Bills as follows:

(a) A **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026** being the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026** with the following changes:

(i) Long title as follows:

"A Bill for an Act to amend the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013** in relation to guarantees and supported accommodation, the **Accident Compensation Act 1985** in relation to supported accommodation, the **Transport Accident Act 1986** in relation to supported accommodation, the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004** in relation to coercive conduct and to make consequential amendments to the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026** and for other purposes.";

(ii) Short title as follows:

"**Workplace Legislation Amendment (Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026**";

(iii) Heading to Part 1;

(iv) Clause 1 as follows:

"**1 Purposes**

The main purposes of this Act are –

(a) to amend the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013** –

(i) to make further provision for guarantees obtained for the purposes of that Act; and

(ii) in relation to supported accommodation; and

(b) to amend the **Accident Compensation Act 1985** in relation to supported accommodation; and

(c) to amend the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004** to prohibit coercive conduct; and

(d) to amend the **Transport Accident Act 1986** in relation to supported accommodation; and

(e) to make consequential amendments to the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026**; and

(f) to make other miscellaneous and technical amendments to those Acts.";

(v) Clause 2;

(vi) Heading to Part 2;

(vii) Heading to Division 1 of Part 2;

(viii) Clauses 3 to 9;

(ix) Heading to Division 2 of Part 2;

(x) Clause 10;

(xi) Clause 11 as follows:

'**11 New section 630 inserted**

After section 629 of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 insert** –

"**630 Transitional provision – Workplace Legislation Amendment (Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**

(1) The definition in section 223(1) of ***supported accommodation***, as amended by Division 2 of Part 2 of the amending Act, applies and is taken to have always applied in respect of a liability for compensation payable under section 224 to a person who resides in supported accommodation on or after 1 July 2024.

(2) In this section –

amending Act means the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**.".';

(xii) Clauses 12 and 13;

(xiii) Heading to Part 3;

(xiv) Clause 14;

(xv) Clause 15 as follows:

'**15 New Division 20 of Part IX inserted**

After Division 19 of Part IX of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985 insert** –

"**Division 20 – Workplace Legislation Amendment (Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**

401 Supported accommodation

(1) The definition in section 99AAA(1) of ***supported accommodation***, as amended by Part 3 of the amending Act, applies and is taken to have always applied in respect of a liability for compensation payable under section 99 to a person who resides in supported accommodation on or after 1 July 2024.

(2) In this section –

amending Act means the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**.”.’;

(xvi) Heading to Part 4;

(xvii) Clauses 16 and 17;

(xviii) Clause 18 as follows:

‘**18 New Division 15 of Part 11 inserted**

After Division 14 of Part 11 of the **Transport Accident Act 1986 insert** –

“**Division 15 – Workplace Legislation Amendment (Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**

235 Supported accommodation

(1) The definition of ***supported accommodation***, as amended by Part 4 of the amending Act, applies and is taken to have always applied in respect of a liability for compensation payable under section 60 to a person who resides in supported accommodation on or after 1 July 2024.

(2) In this section –

amending Act means the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**.”.’;

(xix) Heading to Part 5;

(xx) Heading to Division 1 of Part 5;

(xxi) Clauses 19 and 20;

(xxii) Clause 21 as follows:

‘**21 Disqualification of health and safety representatives**

(1) For section 56(1)(d) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 substitute** –

“(d) intentionally used, disclosed or provided to another person, for a purpose not reasonably connected with the exercise of a power under this Part –

(i) photographs or measurements taken or sketches or recordings made in the exercise of a power under section 58(1)(ab); or

(ii) any other information the health and safety representative acquired from an employer in the exercise of a power under this Part;

(e) published or caused to be published, for a purpose not reasonably connected with the exercise of a power under this Part, any information referred to in paragraph (d);

(f) published online or caused to be published online any information referred to in paragraph (d).”.

(2) After section 56(3) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 insert** –

“(4) In this section –

publish has the same meaning as in section 91;

publish online has the same meaning as in section 91.”.’;

(xxiii) Clause 22 of the Bill omitted.

(xxiv) Clause 23 renumbered 22 as follows:

‘**22 New section 58A inserted**

After section 58 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 insert** –

“**58A Health and safety representative must not publish certain information online**

(1) A health and safety representative for a designated work group must not publish online or cause to be published online any of the following information –

(a) photographs or measurements taken or sketches or recordings made in the exercise of a power under section 58(1)(ab);

(b) any other information the health and safety representative acquired from an employer in the exercise of a power under this Part.

Note

See section 56(1)(f).

(2) In this section –

publish online has the same meaning as in section 91.”.’;

(xxv) Clause 24 renumbered 23;

(xxvi) Clause 25 of the Bill omitted;

(xxvii) Clause 26 renumbered 24 as follows:

‘**24 Section 88 amended**

For section 88(2) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 substitute** –

“(2) A notice given under subsection (1) must –

(a) be in writing in the form approved by the Authority; and

(b) include a description of the suspected contravention.”.’;

(xxviii) Clause 27 of the Bill omitted;

(xxix) Clause 28 renumbered 25 as follows:

‘**25 Offences by authorised representatives**

(1) For section 91(ca) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 substitute** –

“(ca) intentionally use, disclose or provide to another person, for a purpose not reasonably connected with the exercise of a power under this Part, photographs or measurements taken or sketches or recordings made in the exercise of a power under section 89(1)(ba); or

(cb) publish or cause to be published, for a purpose not reasonably connected with the exercise of a power under this Part, any information referred to in paragraph (c) or (ca); or

(cc) publish online or cause to be published online any information referred to in paragraph (c) or (ca); or”.

(2) At the end of section 91 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 insert** –

“(2) In this section –

publish means to disseminate or provide access to the public or a section of the public by any means, including by –

(a) publication in a book, newspaper, magazine or other written publication; or

(b) broadcast by radio or television or on the Internet; or

(c) public exhibition; or

(d) electronic communication (including social media);

publish online means to disseminate or provide access to the public or a section of the public by –

(a) broadcast on the Internet; or

(b) electronic communication (including social media).”.’;

(xxx) Clauses 29 and 30 renumbered 26 and 27;

(xxxi) Heading to Division 2 of Part 5;

(xxxii) Clauses 31 to 33 renumbered 28 to 30;

(xxxiii) Clause 34 renumbered 31 as follows:

'31 New section 99A inserted

After section 99 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026 insert** –

'99A Health and safety representative must not publish information online

In section 58A(1)(b) of the Principal Act, for "Part" **substitute** "Chapter".';

(xxxiv) Clauses 35 to 37 renumbered 32 to 34;

(xxxv) Heading to Part 6;

(xxxvi) Clause 38 renumbered 35;

(b) An **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Representative Powers) Bill 2026** being the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026** with the following changes:

(i) Long title as follows:

"A Bill for an Act to amend the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004** in relation to the powers of representatives and to make consequential amendments to the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026** and for other purposes.";

(ii) Short title as follows:

"**Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Representative Powers) Bill 2026**";

(iii) Heading to Part 1;

(iv) Clause 1 as follows:

"**1 Purposes**

The main purposes of this Act are –

(a) to amend the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004** to make further provision for the powers of authorised representatives and health and safety representatives; and

(b) to make consequential amendments to the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026**; and

(c) to make other miscellaneous and technical amendments to those Acts.";

(v) Clause 2 as follows:

"**2 Commencement**

(1) Subject to subsection (2), the provisions of this Act come into operation on a day or days to be proclaimed.

(2) If a provision of this Act does not come into operation before 10 September 2027, it comes into operation on that day.";

(vi) Heading to Part 2 of the Bill omitted;

(vii) Heading to Division 1 of Part 2 of the Bill omitted;

(viii) Clauses 3 to 9 of the Bill omitted;

(ix) Heading to Division 2 of Part 2 of the Bill omitted;

(x) Clauses 10 to 13 of the Bill omitted;

(xi) Heading to Part 3 of the Bill omitted;

(xii) Clauses 14 and 15 of the Bill omitted;

(xiii) Heading to Part 4 of the Bill omitted;

(xiv) Clauses 16 to 18 of the Bill omitted;

(xv) Heading to Part 5 renumbered 2;

(xvi) Heading to Division 1 of Part 5 of the Bill omitted;

(xvii) Clauses 19 and 20 of the Bill omitted;

(xviii) Clause 21 renumbered 3 as follows:

'**3 Disqualification of health and safety representatives**

(1) After section 56(1)(c) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 insert** –

"(ca) intentionally used, disclosed or provided to another person, for a purpose not reasonably connected with the exercise of a power under this Part, copies or extracts of documents made or taken in the exercise of a power under section 58(1)(ac);".';

(xix) Clause 22 renumbered 4;

(xx) Clause 23 renumbered 5 as follows:

'**5 New section 58B inserted**

Before section 59 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 insert** –

"**58B Health and safety representative must not publish copies or extracts of documents online**

(1) A health and safety representative for a designated work group must not publish online or cause to be published online any copies or extracts of documents made or taken in the exercise of a power under section 58(1)(ac).

(2) In this section –

publish online means to disseminate or provide access to the public or a section of the public by –

(a) broadcast on the Internet; or

(b) electronic communication (including social media).".';

(xxi) Clause 24 of the Bill omitted;

(xxii) Clause 25 renumbered 6;

(xxiii) Clause 26 renumbered 7 as follows:

'**7 Section 88 amended**

(1) For the heading to section 88 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 substitute** –

"**Notice of entry and enquiry into suspected contravention**".

(2) After section 88(2) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 insert** –

"(3) An authorised representative who enters a place under section 87 and identifies another suspected contravention at the place must, before enquiring into the suspected contravention, take all reasonable steps to give notice of the suspected contravention in accordance with subsection (1).".';

(xxxiv) Clause 27 renumbered 8;

(xxxv) Clause 28 renumbered 9 as follows:

'**9 Offences by authorised representatives**

(1) After section 91(ca) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 insert** –

"(cab) intentionally use, disclose or provide to another person, for a purpose not reasonably connected with the exercise of a power under this Part, copies or extracts of documents made or taken in the exercise of a power under section 89(1)(bb); or".

(2) In section 91(cb) and (cc) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004**, for "paragraph (c) or (ca)" **substitute** "paragraph (c), (ca) or (cab)".';

(xxvi) Clauses 29 and 30 of the Bill omitted;

(xxvii) Heading to Division 2 of Part 5 of the Bill omitted;

(xxviii) Heading to Part 3 as follows:

"**Part 3 – Amendment of Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026**";

(xxix) Clauses 31 and 32 omitted;

(xxx) Clause 33 renumbered 10 as follows:

'**10 New section 97AA inserted**

After section 97 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026 insert** –

'**97AA Disqualification of health and safety representatives**

In section 56(1)(c) and (ca) of the Principal Act, for "Part" (wherever occurring) **substitute** "Chapter".';

(xxxi) Clause 34 of the Bill omitted;

(xxxii) Clause 35 renumbered 11 as follows:

'**11 Offences by authorised representatives**

In section 133 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026**, after "(ca)" insert ", (cab)".';

(xxxiii) Clauses 36 and 37 of the Bill omitted;

(xxiv) Heading to Part 6 renumbered 4;

(xxv) Clause 38 renumbered 12.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (13): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (21): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Katherine Copsey, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion negatived.

Clause 1 (21:54)

Richard WELCH: I would just like to start with some questions around the expanded representative powers and access to documents. Under the provisions of the bill, a representative can examine any documents or can have access to any documents. There is no limit on the number of documents or the range of documents, at least not prescribed. I just want to clarify: do those documents include HR records?

Jaclyn SYMES: Thank you, Mr Welch, for having given me a bit of a heads-up that this is a theme that you are keen to explore in the committee. I have had the opportunity to review these provisions of the bill and seek some advice. I might take some time to just run through a few things that I think will help our conversation on this topic. At the outset, providing the ability for health and safety representatives (HSRs) and authorised representatives of registered employee organisations (ARREOs) to access documents is not new. That is clarifying that that is okay, because that is what currently exists. What is new is the ability to copy those documents. However, in reality, given modern practices with smartphones and the like, we think this type of thing is probably happening anyway. It is a further clarification to put beyond doubt that in that role, to facilitate your work, you can inspect documents, even though it is currently practised – and the ability to formally obtain copies.

You asked about the specific types of documents that people can access, and I think I have had some inquiries around privacy concerns and the like. As I said, the power for HSRs and ARREOs to make copies of documents and the subsequent use of those copies does not displace existing privacy, secrecy or confidentiality provisions under other laws. Such provisions apply unless expressly displaced, and the bill does not expressly displace any of those laws. In particular, if we think about medical information, that cannot be provided without the employee's express consent unless the information is in a form that does not identify the employee or from which the employee's identity cannot be

reasonably ascertained. In practice, an employer may refuse to disclose a document to a HSR or ARREO without necessary consent on the basis that it contains sensitive information and disclosure may breach relevant privacy, secrecy or confidentiality laws. On your specific reference to HR records and the like in relation to somebody's pay, address or identity, it may be relevant to be not provided if it would be at odds with other laws and issues of privacy and the like. For example, an employer may decide not to share a document or to provide a redacted version if it contains confidential health information, other types of private information or information subject to privacy, secrecy or any contractual confidentiality obligations – so in terms of the employee's contract of employment, for example, particularly their pay or the amount of leave they have and that kind of stuff. WorkSafe Victoria will update its non-statutory guidance to reflect these changes that are in the bill.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Minister. That is a very, very helpful answer and does help narrow down the scope of the questions to some degree. I could go either way here. I could start talking about some other specific kinds of documents – I might reserve the right to go back to that – but I will ask you this question. In refusing to provide the document under the provisions you just explained – that they consider it sensitive – what is the procedure for that? There does not seem to be a procedure that says how. Is that done verbally? Is that done in writing? How do they actually refuse? I ask because the bill is quite explicit in saying that the representative has right of access.

Jaclyn SYMES: As I indicated in my overarching introduction to this topic, the powers do not differ from existing access to information in any material way. Existing provisions already allow ARREOs to inspect any plant, substance or other thing at the place to support their inquiry into a suspected contravention. WorkSafe currently already interprets this to include documents. The bill expressly clarifies that ARREOs may inspect and make copies of documents relevant to a suspected contravention. The amendment provides greater certainty to ARREOs and employers about the types of materials ARREOs can access to exercise their powers, better understand risks and support timely resolution of occupational health and safety issues to the benefit of all workers. It has to be reasonable for the purposes of inquiring into the suspected contravention.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

Jaclyn SYMES: Pursuant to standing order 4.08, I declare the sitting to be extended by up to 1 hour.

I think what would also be relevant, Mr Welch, to your question, is that the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OH&S act) includes pathways to address the misuse of HSR and ARREO powers. An employer can contact WorkSafe and seek assistance, including advice, or request that an inspector attend the workplace where there is a dispute of concern about the exercise of powers. When an employer and a representative are arguing potentially over what would be a relevant document or not, they can seek the intervention of WorkSafe.

Richard WELCH: Unless I missed the very first part, because I was trying to find something, I am still not sure that as the investigation is underway and the representative requests to see a document – is the owner of the document entitled to refuse it there and then on the spot?

Jaclyn SYMES: It has to be in relation to the inquiry. The right to access certain health and safety information relates to actual potential hazards arising from an employer's undertaking, plant or substances used for that undertaking and the health and safety of members of the HSR in the designated work group. There is no change to the access that currently exists; it is just a clarification. In relation to whether an employer can refuse access – it can in the way that I articulated before in terms of that it has to be relevant. They could argue that it is not. It cannot breach existing privacy rights or medical or personal information, but it can provide access to redacted information. I hope that answers your question.

Richard WELCH: The only missing piece in this is who determines it is relevant, because the employer may say, 'It's not relevant,' and the representative may say, 'I think it is relevant.' Who determines that?

Jaclyn SYMES: I think I was getting there before with the ability to have an inspector come and deal with these types of disputes. For example, if the employer refuses to allow an ARREO to take a copy of a relevant document, the ARREO may request WorkSafe arrange for an inspector to attend and inquire into the matter under section 89(3) of the OH&S act. Likewise, the employer has an equivalent right under section 89(3) of the OH&S act to request the attendance of an inspector if they consider there are issues with the ARREO's actions in relation to the documents.

Richard WELCH: Given that they may be looking at commercially sensitive documents in some cases, does the person undertaking the inquiry and requesting access to those documents need to declare a conflict of interest if one may exist?

Jaclyn SYMES: I think at the outset, Mr Welch, it is important to note that, as I said, this is an existing practice of access to documents. I sought advice on the most common exercise of this particular practice. It includes requests for documents such as health and safety policies and procedures, risk assessments, workload assessments, incident-related records and the like. It is not really the type of information that you are referring to in relation to –

Richard WELCH: But there is no limit to the documents.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, there is. It has to be related to health and safety information relating to actual or potential hazards arising from the employer's undertaking, plant or substances used for the undertaking – the health and safety of members of the HSR at the designated work group. For your example of commercial-in-confidence contracts and the like, I fail to see how that is going to fall into the types of circumstances that are really about making sure that policies, procedures and safety measures have been conducted and complied with.

Richard WELCH: In the explanatory memorandum it says under clause 22:

> … provides that a health and safety representative has an express power to inspect and copy or take extracts from any document at the workplace, subject to the limitations at section 58(2).

Jaclyn SYMES: Maybe read 58(2).

Richard WELCH: I will have to read 58(2) I think.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Minister?

Jaclyn SYMES: There was no question.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Was there a question, Mr Welch?

Richard WELCH: I accept the minister's answer, actually.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Well, the minister needs to give the answer on the record.

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Welch referred to limitations that are currently within the bill.

Richard WELCH: Minister, how many cases in the past five years have been identified where the existing powers were inadequate?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have that information, Mr Welch, and I am not sure there would be a determination that would be collated in a dataset that would give you an accurate reflection on that. But this was the result of a review and feedback from people that operate in the system, so the reason it needs clarifying is because it is not clear.

Richard WELCH: Is there a scenario where the documents may be subject to legal privilege, and under inspection is the privilege automatically lost even if the document turns out to be relevant or marginally relevant to the investigation?

Jaclyn SYMES: Again, if there are reasons documents should not be inspected, then there are provisions to mount that case. There are safeguards to prevent an authorised rep from misusing information that is obtained, which may pick up on the example that you have put. But again, the examples that you are reflecting on – legal privilege, commercial in confidence – are things that we are very familiar with. They are not expected to be a feature of this regime. Let me ask if the box knows of any examples where there are currently legal privilege cases, because I think it is a hypothetical.

The box advises that in their experience it is something that would rarely arise. However, there are protections in place in relation to use of information, particularly if it was relevant for a later court case, for example.

Richard WELCH: Sorry, Minister, I could not hear you.

Jaclyn SYMES: My advice is that it is not a common occurrence that we would fall into legal privilege matters. There are, as I said, safeguards in relation to the use of information. Employers that might be concerned about a future court action, for example, can seek advice in relation to legal privilege matters and could refuse on those grounds. That would probably warrant the inspection or advice of WorkSafe. But again, the advice is that this is not a common occurrence. It comes back to that the documents that are more likely to be subject to this type of access, given it already exists, are health and safety policies, procedure, risk assessments, workload assessments – basically documents that are directly related to the safety of a workplace.

Richard WELCH: Okay. So on behalf of employers I am taking from that that there is a mechanism and a process by which they can decline to reveal a document and then there will be a third party, the WorkSafe inspector, who will make a determination as to whether that refusal is justified or acceptable.

Jaclyn SYMES: Again, I explained that there are rights for both parties. I take it that you have sought advice, particularly for employers. Employers may decide not to share a document or to provide a redacted version if it contains confidential information or other issues that would not be directly relevant to the purpose of occupational health and safety matters. WorkSafe do not provide a formal determination, but they can come and provide advice, and there are different steps that currently exist, particularly in relation to the Magistrates' Court, looking at entry permits and the like.

Richard WELCH: I am sorry; I know said I was not going to labour anything, but I think it is important to have clarity for businesses: is there recourse other than the Magistrates' Court to say that we contest the relevance of a document or we contest the sensitivity of a document therefore we do not want to disclose it? Other than going to the Magistrates' Court, how do they contest it?

Jaclyn SYMES: This bill does not change the existing practice now. At the moment, there are agreements between employers and HSRs and ARREOs in relation to accessing and viewing documents. This is simply formalising and clarifying that existing practice and there is no change except, as I had indicated, the WorkSafe inspectors' power to provide advice on OH&S matters. That usually resolves a lot of the disputes.

Richard WELCH: The government says there are penalties for misuse of information. How many prosecutions or enforcement actions have occurred under the existing misuse provisions?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have that information on me. Again I can ask the minister's office to provide you with the information, perhaps through another forum, but I do not have that information. The data that you have asked for, I am not even sure it will be collated in that particular way, just from having a bit of knowledge about how court data is compiled.

Richard WELCH: If the data is misused, who specifically will be prosecuted? Is it the individual or the organisation they are representing? Who gets prosecuted?

Jaclyn SYMES: For HSRs who contravene prohibitions – a prohibition on publishing different things, for example – employers can apply to the Magistrates' Court for orders disqualifying the HSR. There are a number of steps that could be taken for the misuse of information or the publishing of information et cetera.

Richard WELCH: So it is the individual who did the disclosing, as opposed to the organisation that they did it on behalf of?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not want to reflect on any particular matters, but you can apply to disqualify a HSR. There may be the opportunity for a HSR to argue they were acting under direct instructions, as an example. Again we are getting into hypotheticals, but the avenue is the Magistrates' Court.

Richard WELCH: If the misuse creates commercial damage, will the offended party be able to pursue compensation?

Jaclyn SYMES: In relation to contraventions of provisions, I will give you an example, because you have just said 'misuse of information' and some of the information I have in front of me is in relation to unauthorised publishing online and the like. For example, a registered employee organisation who contravened that prohibition would be committing an offence under section 91 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, with a maximum penalty of 60 penalty units. Obviously, that is a penalty, not a civil action. In relation to civil actions, there are also different offences, such as coercion. The bill goes through a number of offences for misuse of information, with penalties attached. There are safeguards on the misuse of information as well. Section 91 of the act refers to intentional use disclosure of information for a person not reasonably connected with the exercise of the powers. Existing safeguards include possibilities of disqualification if they used information. You can also take action for breach of privacy, secrecy and confidentiality laws that might apply. In relation to civil activities, it would be a matter for the employer if they had wanted to seek civil damages for a particular matter, but it is hard for me to connect that without knowing what the damages would be.

Richard WELCH: If they wanted to seek compensation through a civil court, nothing prevents them from doing that. The next question then follows on from that. If there is an investigation into misuse of information or data, will the evidence uncovered in that investigation be available to the employer to pursue a compensation claim?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Welch, you are jumping many steps beyond the purposes of this bill. This bill is really about ensuring safe workplaces for workers and employers, making sure that they comply with their obligations to be transparent when there are issues that need to be looked at. As I have said, there are consequences for misuse of information, and you are jumping three steps ahead and are not really asking questions about what the bill is intended to do. You are using quite a narrow prism that you are looking at this legislation through. Coming back to the purposes of this bill and the reason that a particular person or HSR wants to look at information, it is because they are concerned about a health and safety issue. You are jumping to 'Okay, they've asked for it inappropriately. They've got secret information. They're misusing information. Can you get recourse for it?' It is really five steps away from the purposes of this bill. As I said, the examples that you are referring to are just not that common. HSRs take their job very seriously. It is about health and safety. They are not out to get the employer or to act in an inappropriate way that would result in the employer needing to get recourse. It is fundamentally about shoring up our workplaces and making them even safer.

Richard WELCH: No. I think, to be fair, when we make law it is not for the best-case scenario, it is for the worst-case scenario. That is what we should be use-casing it against. That is what we should be measuring it against. We want to make sure there are no unintended consequences, and I am just exploring unintended consequences here. The fact is we are locking in additional powers for people to view documents that could be commercially sensitive or that could cause commercial damage. We

are locking in that power and extending it to health and safety officers, who in the state of Victoria we know have been involved in corruption. We know that. That is why we have got a royal commission going. It is not a hypothetical in that respect at all. It is a genuine scenario. I am not being hypothetical here, I am actually using an existing work case. The scenario I am suggesting is this: if there is an investigation into the misuse of data, will whatever information uncovered in that misuse-of-data investigation be available to the employer?

Jaclyn SYMES: I understand that you are the champion of employers, Mr Welch. You and I have had many of these conversations. But what was wrong in the way you framed your question was saying that this is a fundamental change of existing practice. It is not. There is already recourse for employers who have been wronged by something that you think might happen in the way that you have articulated it. This is all about –

Richard Welch interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: Sorry?

Richard WELCH: Health and safety officers do not have access to the documents like they would under this.

Jaclyn SYMES: No, there is no change.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Through the Chair. This is not a conversation.

Jaclyn SYMES: I thought I clarified this right at the start of our conversation. This is a clarification when it comes to access. At the moment HSRs already access documents. It is happening now. This is not changing that. This is making sure it is very clear that the current practice is picked up in modern legislation. Your line of questioning implies that there is some huge change here. This is literally clarification. The only change is the ability to formally copy documents, which, as I said, given smartphones these days, is probably already happening. It is very important that we update the statute to fit with current practices.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Just a couple from me – I will try and be speedy here. To start more generally, Minister, recommendation 9 of the report into employee representative rights recommends that the government amend the OH&S act to require an employer to allow an HSR or ARREO to inspect and make copies of documents relevant to a suspected contravention. The explanatory memorandum states that this bill is intended to clarify the scope of ARREO's existing powers and support effective investigation of suspected contraventions by ensuring access to relevant documentary material. Do the amendments in this bill ensure access by ARREOs to relevant documentary material?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, subject to the limitations that Mr Welch and I have gone through in relation to privacy, confidentiality, medical records and the like.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: My last two are just about clause 27 specifically. In May 2023 WorkSafe provided advice that the power to inspect any other thing encompasses documents. Given this existing advice, can the minister clarify if clause 27 gives any further powers to ARREOs to inspect or copy documents relevant to a suspected workplace contravention?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I have attempted to make clear, the access to documents is an existing right. It goes without saying that that needed clarification because it was not specifically called out, so I think that that is a good thing. What is new is the ability to copy them. This is all about ensuring that we provide better support to enable them to perform their function.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Just one more, just for the abundance of clarity – I know we are going over a lot of the same ground. Will this bill enable an ARREO to require an employer to allow access to and permit the inspection and copying of documents relevant to a suspected contravention?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Puglielli, your clarification is kind of, I think, from a different perspective, but you are both asking the same question. The changes are about the ability to access. There is no compulsion on an employer. For example, if you are an HSR, it is not like a documents motion or an FOI where you can ask for all relevant documents. You have kind of got to ask for something, and the access should be granted if it is relevant to your work. As I said, the most common requests for documents are in relation to assessments, procedures and policies and to see what has been going on in the workplace if they have got concerns: 'Are you complying with what you're supposed to? Can we have a look at what you're supposed to comply with?' They would not be required to go and do a document search for everything that might be somewhat relevant. You have sort of got to know what to ask for. But again, in custom and practice that is kind of fairly well understood. There is no compulsion on the employer to provide the documents where there are disputes. That is where WorkSafe can help to intervene. And again, to some of Mr Welch's concerns, where the employer has concerns that the documents would disclose something that is not directly relevant to the investigation from a health and safety perspective or would have identifying information, private information et cetera, they would be appropriate reasons to say no or to provide redacted versions.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Minister Symes, I invite you to move your amendment 1, which tests your amendments 12, 17 and 30.

Jaclyn SYMES: We are going to be really clear on what we are doing here along the way. My amendment grouping A on the running sheet, which is called 'Reckless endangerment offences', is in connection to the changes as a result of the Sentencing Advisory Council's work. I think people are familiar with that. Unless people want me to run through it, is everyone happy for me to move that amendment? I just want to be very clear, because there are quite a few amendments. I move:

1. Clause 1, after line 3 insert –

   "(aa) to amend the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004**, the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026** and the **Dangerous Goods Transport Act 2026** in relation to reckless endangerment offences; and".

Aiv PUGLIELLI: The Greens will be supporting this amendment.

Richard WELCH: The Liberals and Nationals will be supporting this amendment.

David ETTERSHANK: Legalise Cannabis will also be supporting this amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Minister, I invite you to move your amendment 2.

Jaclyn SYMES: Let me just take a little bit of time to explain the dust-related diseases amendments. At the outset, I thank the Greens and in particular Mr Puglielli for their constructive engagement in relation to these amendments. What is happening here is that I will be withdrawing amendments 19, 23 and 27. The government will be supporting the Greens amendments 9, 11, 14 and 16. What this effectively does as a package will mean that, in relation to dust-related conditions attributed to occupational dust exposure, there will be a range of amendments that result in a second award of damages for additional diseases related to the same exposure – that is, dust-related diseases. It will restore the common law for that period of 1997 to 1999. It will allow all workers to access a bypass to prelitigation matters in relation to before they go to the Supreme Court.

The Greens amendments, which I am sure Mr Puglielli can speak to, effectively bring in some transitional arrangements so that existing and new arrangements are very clear. If you have got an existing claim or a new claim, it brings in a statutory review and it ensures that the statute of limitations is removed for all dust-related injuries that are attributable to occupational dust exposure. That is the result of the transaction of amendments, so that is the intention. Mr Puglielli, I will just ask if that is your intention as well?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes, well said. I want to thank the government for their constructive approach in relation to this and for recognising the opportunity, before we finish this parliamentary term, to get this right. As the minister has outlined, there is a package of amendments here, and I think the minister has quite succinctly summed up what they are. I thank my colleague Kat Copsey for speaking to it a little bit in the second-reading process as well. I also want to put on record my thanks to the Victorian Trades Hall Council for their engagement and input in relation to these matters. I am in your hands, Deputy President.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Sorry, Mr Puglielli –

Aiv PUGLIELLI: In case it is of assistance, there will be a number of amendments here which, due to procedure, the government will withdraw and I will move, if that makes sense. Looking at the sheet, amendment 2, for example, would be withdrawn and then the one following we would be seeking to move, if that is of benefit to the house.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Are you talking about your own amendments or the government's amendments?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: No, Ms Symes's amendment.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Ms Symes is moving amendment 2 at the moment. She said she was going to withdraw 19, 23 and 27. You are telling me she is withdrawing amendment 2?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Just to explain a bit further, that is correct, except amendment 2 tests Ms Symes's amendment 19. So she would have to withdraw this one as well. That is my understanding.

Jaclyn SYMES: My intention is to withdraw my substantive amendment, which is amendment 19. Amendment 2 is a test for amendment 19, so therefore I will withdraw amendment 2.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

1. Clause 1, page 2, after line 8 insert –

   "(iii) to make further provision for the award of provisional and subsequent damages to injured workers with certain dust-related conditions; and".

Jaclyn SYMES: Consistent with my attempts to concisely say what we are doing, I am supporting Mr Puglielli's amendment.

Richard WELCH: The Liberals and Nationals will be supporting the amendment as well.

Amendment agreed to.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

3. Clause 1, page 2, before line 9 insert –

   "(iv) in relation to commencing certain proceedings related to serious dust-related conditions without complying with certain requirements; and".

As I understand it, this is part of the package in relation to prelitigation processes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: The Greens will be supporting this amendment.

Richard WELCH: We will be supporting this amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Minister, I invite you to move your amendment 4, which tests amendment 24.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

4. Clause 1, page 2, line 11, after "accommodation" insert "and in relation to commencing certain proceedings related to serious dust-related conditions without complying with certain requirements".

I am proceeding with this. It is in relation to the Accident Compensation Act 1985. It mimics the one that we just did, my previous amendment.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: The Greens will be supporting this amendment.

Richard WELCH: The Liberals and Nationals will be supporting this amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: We move to the minister's amendment 5, which tests amendment 22.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

5. Clause 1, page 2, after line 11 insert –

"(ba) to amend the **Accident Compensation Act 1985** to provide for claims for damages related to employment between 12 November 1997 and 20 October 1999; and".

This is amendment 5, which is reinstatement of common-law rights, so again, it is connected to prelitigation processes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: The Greens will be supporting this amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Mr Puglielli, I invite you to move your amendment 5.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

5. Clause 1, page 2, before line 12 insert –

"(bb) to amend the **Accident Compensation Act 1985** to make further provision for the award of provisional and subsequent damages to injured workers with certain dust-related conditions; and".

Richard WELCH: The Liberals and Nationals will be supporting this amendment.

Jaclyn SYMES: Same.

Amendment agreed to.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Minister, I invite you to move your amendment 7, which tests your amendments 14 and 28.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

7. Clause 1, page 2, after line 18 insert –

"(iii) to provide for health and safety orders and related matters; and".

Aiv PUGLIELLI: The Greens will be supporting this amendment.

Richard WELCH: The Liberals and Nationals will be supporting this.

Amendment agreed to.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Minister, I invite you to move your amendment 8, which tests amendments 15 and 29.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

8. Clause 1, page 2, before line 19 insert –

"(iv) to provide for the use of impact statements in certain proceedings; and".

Aiv PUGLIELLI: The Greens will be supporting this amendment.

Richard WELCH: The Liberals and Nationals will be supporting this amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Minister, I invite you to move your amendment 9, which tests amendments 13, 16, 25, 26 and 33.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

9. Clause 1, page 2, line 20, after "accommodation" insert "and certain benefits for children".

Just for the avoidance of doubt, we are on to the TAC amendment now in relation to statutory allowances for children who lose parents as a result of a transport accident regardless of their living circumstances.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: The Greens will be supporting this amendment.

David LIMBRICK: I would like to thank the government for their swift action on this amendment. This is a problem, which was identified in the TAC inquiry, affecting orphan children and their guardians. I think that it was a worthwhile recommendation of the inquiry, and I am happy to see that the government has acted swiftly to rectify this issue.

Richard WELCH: The Liberals and Nationals will be supporting this amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

10. Clause 1, page 2, line 21, after "consequential" insert "and related".

This is a consequential formatting amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Mr Puglielli, I invite you to move your amendment 6, which tests amendment 16.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

6. Clause 1, page 2, after line 23 insert –

"(ea) to amend the **Limitation of Actions Act 1958** to remove the limitation period for certain causes of action for dust-related conditions; and".

Jaclyn SYMES: We are supporting this amendment.

Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to.

Clause 2 (22:46)

Jaclyn SYMES: Consequential. I move:

12. Clause 2, line 27, after "other than" insert "Part 1A,".

Amendment agreed to.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

14. Clause 2, lines 27 and 28, omit "and Part 5" and insert ", Part 5 and Part 5A".

Amendment agreed to.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

15. Clause 2, line 28, before "**)** comes" insert "and Part 5B".

Amendment agreed to.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

13. Clause 2, line 27, after "Part 2" insert ", Division 2 of Part 4".
16. Clause 2, after line 29 insert –

"(1A) Division 2 of Part 4 comes into operation on 1 November 2026.".

These amendments are consequential for the TAC improvements.

Amendments agreed to; amended clause agreed to.

New clauses 2A to 2C (22:47)

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

17. Insert the following New Part after Part 1 –

'**Part 1A – Amendments related to reckless endangerment**

Division 1 – Amendment of Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004

2A Section 32 substituted

For section 32 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 substitute** –

"**32 Conduct that endangers persons at workplaces etc.**

(1) A person must not, without lawful excuse, recklessly engage in conduct that places, or may place, another person who is at a workplace in danger of serious injury, serious illness or death.

Penalty: 10 000 penalty units or 10 years imprisonment or both for a natural person;
50 000 penalty units for a body corporate.

(2) A person must not, without lawful excuse, recklessly engage in conduct that –

(a) constitutes a contravention of a provision of –

(i) Division 2, 3 or 4; or

(ii) this Division (other than subsection (1)); and

(b) places, or may place, another person in danger of serious injury, serious illness or death.

Penalty: 10 000 penalty units or 10 years imprisonment or both for a natural person;
50 000 penalty units for a body corporate.

(3) An offence against subsection (1) or (2) is an indictable offence.

Note

However, the offence may be heard and determined summarily (see section 28 of the **Criminal Procedure Act 2009**).".

Division 2 – Amendment of Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026

2B Conduct in respect of handling of dangerous goods that endangers persons

(1) In section 55 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026**, in proposed section 35D(1) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004**, after "serious injury" **insert** ", serious illness".

(2) In section 55 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026**, for the penalty at the foot of proposed section 35D(1) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 substitute** –

"Penalty: 10 000 penalty units or 10 years imprisonment or both for a natural person;
50 000 penalty units for a body corporate.".

Division 3 – Amendment of Dangerous Goods Transport Act 2026

2C Conduct in respect of transport of dangerous goods that endangers persons

(1) In section 20(1) of the **Dangerous Goods Transport Act 2026**, after "serious injury" **insert** ", serious illness".

(2) For the penalty at the foot of section 20(1) of the **Dangerous Goods Transport Act 2026 substitute** –

"Penalty: 10 000 penalty units or 10 years imprisonment or both for a natural person;

50 000 penalty units for a body corporate.".'.

New clauses agreed to; clauses 3 to 13 agreed to.

New part heading following clause 13 (22:48)

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

18. Insert the following New Part heading to follow clause 13 –

"**Part 2A – Further amendment of Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013**".

New part heading agreed to.

New clauses 13A to 13G (22:48)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

9. Insert the following New Division before Part 3 –

'**Division 1 – Amendments relating to actions for damages**

13A Definitions

In section 356A of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013** –

(a) insert the following definition –

"***serious dust-related condition*** means a condition that is –

(a) a dust-related condition within the meaning of the **Administration and Probate Act 1958**; or

(b) an eligible progressive disease attributable or related to exposure to occupational dust;";

(b) the definition of ***serious silica-related condition*** is repealed;

(c) in the definition of ***subsequent action***, for "silica-related" **substitute** "dust-related".

13B Section 356B amended

(1) In the heading to section 356B of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013**, for "**silica-related**" **substitute** "**dust-related**".

(2) In section 356B of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013**, for "silica-related" (wherever occurring) **substitute** "dust-related".

13C Only one subsequent award of damages permitted

In section 356C of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013**, for "silica-related" (where twice occurring) **substitute** "dust-related".

13D Regard must be had to initial award of damages

In section 356D of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013**, for "silica-related" (where twice occurring) **substitute** "dust-related".

13E Regard must be had to legal costs incurred in initial action

(1) In section 356E(1) of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013**, for "silica-related" (where twice occurring) **substitute** "dust-related".

(2) In section 356E(3)(a)(ii) and (iv) of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013**, for "silica" **substitute** "occupational dust".

13F New section 356G inserted

After section 356F of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 insert** –

"**356G Interaction with Asbestos Diseases Compensation Act 2008**

(1) Despite anything to the contrary in the **Asbestos Diseases Compensation Act 2008**, that Act does not apply to an asbestos-related cause of action that has not been commenced before the commencement of Part 2A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), an asbestos-related cause of action is a cause of action for damages in respect of an asbestos-related condition (within the meaning **Asbestos Diseases Compensation Act 2008**) that is also a serious dust-related condition.".

13G New section 631 inserted

At the end of Part 13 of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 insert** –

"**631 Transitional provisions – Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026 – Actions for damages**

(1) Subdivision 3 of Division 2 of Part 7 as amended by Part 2A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** applies to a cause of action for damages in relation to a serious dust-related condition to which that Subdivision applies commenced on or after the commencement of Part 2A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**.

(2) Subdivision 3 of Division 2 of Part 7 as amended by Part 2A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** applies to a cause of action for damages in relation to a serious dust-related condition commenced before the commencement of Part 2A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** but only if –

(a) the hearing of the action has not commenced before the commencement of Part 2A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**; or

(b) damages have not been awarded or a settlement has not been reached in that action before the commencement of that Part.

(3) Subdivision 3 of Division 2 of Part 7 as amended by Part 2A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** does not apply to a cause of action for damages in relation to a serious dust-related condition commenced before the commencement of Part 2A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** if –

(a) the hearing of the action has commenced before the commencement of Part 2A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**; or

(b) damages have been awarded or a settlement has been reached in that action before the commencement of that Part.".'.

New clauses agreed to.

New clauses 13H to 13J (22:49)

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

20. Insert the following New Division before Part 3 –

'**Division 2 – Commencing proceedings without complying with certain requirements**

13H Heading to Division 3 of Part 7 amended

In the heading to Division 3 of Part 7 of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013**, for "**asbestos-related conditions**" **substitute** "**serious dust-related conditions**".

13I Section 357 amended

(1) In the heading to section 357 of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013**, for "**asbestos-related conditions**" **substitute** "**serious dust-related conditions**".

(2) In section 357(1)(a) of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013**, for "death; or" **substitute** "death.".

(3) Section 357(1)(b) of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013** is **repealed**.

(4) After section 357(1) of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 insert** –

"(1A) This section also applies if a worker may have an entitlement to recover damages in accordance with Division 2 in respect of an injury that is a serious dust-related condition arising out of, or in the course of, or due to the nature of, employment.".

(5) In section 357(4) of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013** –

(a) in paragraph (a), for "subsection (1)(a)" **substitute** "subsection (1)";

(b) in paragraph (b) –

(i) for "subsection (1)(b)" **substitute** "subsection (1A)";

(ii) for "an asbestos-related condition" **substitute** "a serious dust-related condition".

(6) In section 357(7) of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013**, for "the asbestos-related condition" **substitute** "the serious dust-related condition".

(7) For section 357(8) of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 substitute** –

"(8) In this section –

serious dust-related condition means a condition that is –

(a) a dust-related condition within the meaning of the **Administration and Probate Act 1958**; or

(b) an eligible progressive disease attributable or related to exposure to occupational dust.".

13J New section 632 inserted

At the end of Part 13 of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 insert** –

"**632 Transitional provision – Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026 – commencing proceedings without complying with certain requirements**

Section 357 as amended by the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** applies in relation to the commencement of proceedings in accordance with Division 2 of Part 7 on or after the day on which Division 2 of Part 2A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** comes into operation regardless of whether the injury in respect of which those proceedings are to be commenced occurred before that day.".'.

New clauses agreed to.

New clause 13K (22:49)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

11. Insert the following New Division before Part 3 –

'**Division 3 – Review of certain amendments**

13K New section 620C inserted

After section 620B of the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 insert –

"**620C Review of amendments made by Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**

(1) The Minister must cause –

(a) a review to be conducted of the operation and effect, during the review period, of the amendments made to this Act or any other Act by Parts 2A, 3A, 4A and 4B of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**; and

(b) a report of that review to be prepared.

(2) The review is to be undertaken, and the report prepared, by a person chosen by the Minister for that purpose.

(3) In choosing the person to conduct the review and prepare the report, the Minister must consult with each Minister who administers any part of either of the following Acts –

(a) the **Administration and Probate Act 1958**; and

(b) the **Limitation of Actions Act 1958**.

(3) The person chosen to conduct the review must do so in consultation with –

(a) the Minister; and

(b) each Minister who administers any part of an Act referred to in subsection (1)(a) or (b).

(4) The review must examine whether an amendment referred to in subsection (1)(a) has resulted in a provision of an enactment either applying, or not applying, in relation to a person when that ought not to have occurred.

(5) The review must be completed, and the report given to the Minister, within six months after the end of the review period.

(6) The Minister must cause a copy of the report to be laid before each House of the Parliament no later than 14 sitting days after receiving it.

(7) In this section –

review period means the period –

(a) beginning on the day after the day on which the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** receives the Royal Assent; and

(b) ending on the first anniversary of that day.”.’.

Jaclyn SYMES: I think this is the final substantive amendment that completes our package, so I am supporting Mr Puglielli’s amendment.

New clause agreed to; clauses 14 and 15 agreed to.

New part heading following clause 15 (22:50)

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

21. Insert the following New Part heading to follow clause 15 –

“**Part 3A – Further amendment of Accident Compensation Act 1985**”.

New part heading agreed to.

New clauses 15A to 15G (22:50)

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

22. Insert the following New Division before Part 4 –

‘**Division 1 – Claims for damages related to employment between 12 November 1997 and 20 October 1999**

15A Heading to Division 8A of Part IV substituted

For the heading to Division 8A of Part IV of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985 substitute** –

“**Division 8A – Actions in respect of certain injuries arising from certain periods of employment**”.

15B Actions for damages

After section 134AB(2) of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985 insert** –

"(2A) A worker or the dependants of a worker may recover damages in a proceeding in respect of an injury arising out of or in the course of, or due to the nature of, employment on or after 12 November 1997 but before 20 October 1999 if –

(a) the injury is a condition that is –

(i) a dust-related condition within the meaning of the **Administration and Probate Act 1958**; or

(ii) an eligible progressive disease attributable or related to exposure to occupational dust; and

(b) the injury is a serious injury; and

(c) the employment was a significant contributing factor to the injury of the worker.".

15C Actions for damages only in accordance with this Act

After section 134A(2) of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985 insert** –

"(3) Subsection (1) does not prevent the recovery of damages in a proceeding under this Act or the **Wrongs Act 1958**, subject to and in accordance with Division 8A of this Part, in respect of injury to a worker arising out of or in the course of, or due to the nature of, employment on or after 12 November 1997 but before 20 October 1999 if –

(a) the injury is a condition that is –

(i) a dust-related condition within the meaning of the **Administration and Probate Act 1958**; or

(ii) an eligible progressive disease attributable or related to exposure to occupational dust; and

(b) the employment was a significant contributing factor to the injury of the worker.

Note

See section 134AB(2A).

(4) Subsection (3) applies despite any time limit applying to proceedings under Part III of the **Wrongs Act 1958**.".

15D Heading to Division 9B of Part IV amended

In the heading to Division 9B of Part IV of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985**, for "**asbestos-related**" **substitute** "**certain**".

15E Section 135BB amended

(1) For the heading to section 135BB of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985 substitute** –

"**Actions by workers with certain conditions**".

(2) After section 135BB(1) of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985 insert** –

"(1A) This section also applies to a worker who may have an entitlement to recover damages in accordance with section 134AB(2A) in respect of injury arising out of, or in the course of, or due to the nature of, any employment on or after 12 November 1997 but before 20 October 1999.".

15F New section 402 inserted

At the end of Division 20 of Part IX of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985 insert** –

"**402 Transitional provision – Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026 – employment on or after 12 November 1997 but before 20 October 1999**

Section 134A(3) and (4) as inserted by Part 3A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** does not apply in relation to a cause of action for damages in relation to a dust-related condition arising out of, or in the course of, or due to the nature of any employment on or after 12 November 1997 but before 20 October 1999 if that cause of action has been finalised and fully determined before the commencement of Part 3A of that Act.".

15G New Division 21 of Part IX inserted

After Division 20 of Part IX of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985 insert** –

"**Division 21 – Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026 – Transitional matters**

405 Regulations dealing with transitional matters – Part 3A of Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026

(1) The Governor in Council may make regulations containing provisions of a transitional nature, including matters of an application or savings nature, arising as a result of the enactment of Division 1 of Part 3A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**, including any repeals and amendments made by or as a result of the enactment of that Part of that Act.

(2) Regulations made under this section may –

(a) have a retrospective effect to a day on or after a date not earlier than the day on which the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** receives the Royal Assent; and

(b) be of limited or general application; and

(c) differ according to time, place or circumstances; and

(d) leave any matter or thing to be decided by a specified person or class of person.

(3) Regulations under this section have effect despite anything to the contrary in –

(a) this Act or any other Act (other than Division 1 of Part 3A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** or the **Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006**); or

(b) any subordinate instrument.

(4) This section is **repealed** on the second anniversary of the day on which it comes into operation.".'.

New clauses agreed to.

New clauses 15H to 15N (22:51)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

14. Insert the following New Division before Part 4 –

'**Division 2 – Amendments relating to actions for damages**

15H Definitions

In section 135BC of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985** –

(a) **insert** the following definition –

"***serious dust-related condition*** means a condition that is –

(a) a dust-related condition within the meaning of the **Administration and Probate Act 1958**; or

(b) an eligible progressive disease attributable or related to exposure to occupational dust;";

(b) the definition of ***serious silica-related condition*** is **repealed**;

(c) in the definition of ***subsequent action***, for "silica-related" **substitute** "dust-related".

15I Section 135BD amended

(1) In the heading to section 135BD of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985**, for "**silica-related**" **substitute** "**dust-related**".

(2) In section 135BD of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985**, for "silica- related" (wherever occurring) **substitute** "dust-related".

15J Only one subsequent award of damages permitted

In section 135BE of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985**, for "silica-related" (where twice occurring) **substitute** "dust-related".

15K Regard must be had to initial award of damages

In section 135BF of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985**, for "silica-related" (where twice occurring) **substitute** "dust-related".

15L Regard must be had to legal costs incurred in initial action

(1) In section 135BG(1) of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985**, for "silica-related" (where twice occurring) **substitute** "dust-related".

(2) In section 135BG(3)(a)(ii) and (iv) of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985**, for "silica" **substitute** "occupational dust".

15M New section 135BI inserted

After section 135BH of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985 insert** –

"**135BI Interaction with Asbestos Diseases Compensation Act 2008**

(1) Despite anything to the contrary in the **Asbestos Diseases Compensation Act 2008**, that Act does not apply to an asbestos- related cause of action that has not been commenced before the commencement of Part 3A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), an asbestos-related cause of action is a cause of action for damages in respect of an asbestos-related condition (within the meaning **Asbestos Diseases Compensation Act 2008**) that is also a serious dust-related condition.".

15N New section 403 inserted

At the end of Division 20 of Part IX of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985 insert** –

"**403 Transitional provisions – Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026 – Actions for damages**

(1) Division 9C of Part IV as amended by Part 3A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** applies to a cause of action for damages in relation to a serious dust-related condition to which that Division applies commenced on or after the commencement of Part 3A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**.

(2) Division 9C of Part IV as amended by Part 3A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** applies to a cause of action for damages in relation to a serious dust-related condition commenced before the commencement of Part 3A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** but only if –

(a) the hearing of the action has not commenced before the commencement of Part 3A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**; or

(b) damages have not been awarded or a settlement has not been reached in that action before the commencement of that Part.

(3) Division 9C of Part IV as amended by Part 3A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** does not apply to a cause of action for damages in relation to a serious dust-related condition commenced before the commencement of Part 3A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** if –

(a) the hearing of the action has commenced before the commencement of Part 3A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**; or

(b) damages have been awarded or a settlement has been reached in that action before the commencement of that Part.".'.

New clauses agreed to.

New clauses 15O to 15Q (22:51)

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

24. Insert the following New Division before Part 4 –

'**Division 3 – Commencing proceedings without complying with certain requirements**

15O Heading to Division 9B of Part IV substituted

For the heading to Division 9B of Part IV of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985 substitute** –

"**Division 9B – Actions by workers with certain conditions**".

15P Section 135BB amended

(1) For the heading to section 135BB of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985 substitute** –

"**Actions by workers with certain conditions**".

(2) In section 135BB(1) of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985**, for "an asbestos-related condition" **substitute** "a serious dust-related condition".

(3) In section 135BB(3)(b) of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985**, for "asbestos-related condition" **substitute** "serious dust-related condition".

(4) In section 135BB(4) of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985**, for "an asbestos-related condition" **substitute** "a serious dust-related condition".

(5) For section 135BB(8) of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985 substitute** –

"(8) In this section –

serious dust-related condition means a condition that is –

(a) a dust-related condition within the meaning of the **Administration and Probate Act 1958**; or

(b) an eligible progressive disease attributable or related to exposure to occupational dust.".

15Q New section 404 inserted

At the end of Division 20 of Part IX of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985 insert** –

"**404 Transitional provision – Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026 – commencing proceedings without complying with certain requirements**

The amendments made to section 135BB by Division 3 of Part 3A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** apply in relation to the commencement of proceedings under section 134AB or 135A on or after the day on which Division 3 of Part 3A of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** comes into operation regardless of whether the injury in respect of which those proceedings are to be commenced occurred before that day.".'.

New clauses agreed to.

New division heading preceding clause 16 (22:52)

Jaclyn SYMES: Consequential to the TAC amendment, I move:

25. Insert the following New Division heading before clause 16 –

"**Division 1 – Supported accommodation**".

New division heading agreed to; clauses 16 to 18 agreed to.

New clauses 18A to 18D (22:52)

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

26. Insert the following New Division to follow clause 18 –

'**Division 2 – Benefits for children**

18A Surviving children

(1) For section 59(1) of the **Transport Accident Act 1986 substitute** –

"(1) The Commission is liable to pay weekly payments, a death benefit and an education allowance in accordance with this section in respect of a dependent child of a person if –

(a) the person dies as a result of a transport accident; and

(b) any of the following apply –

(i) the child has another parent who is not a dependent partner of the person;

(ii) the child has another parent who does not wholly, mainly or in part provide economic support for the child;

(iii) the child does not have another parent.".

(2) After section 59(3) of the **Transport Accident Act 1986 insert** –

"(3A) Despite subsection (3), on or after 1 November 2026, the sum of a weekly payment for which the Commission is liable under subsection (1) or (2) is double the amount that would otherwise be payable under subsection (3)(a).".

18B New section 59A inserted

After section 59 of the **Transport Accident Act 1986 insert** –

"**59A Surviving children – education allowance**

(1) The Commission is liable to pay an education allowance in accordance with this section in respect of a dependent child of a person who dies in a transport accident if the child is not entitled to an education allowance under section 59.

(2) The education allowance payable under subsection (1) in respect of a dependent child is –

(a) the same as the amount that is payable in respect of a child under section 59(6)(a); and

(b) payable to the responsible person for the child for the benefit of the child until the child attains the age of 18 years.

(3) In this section –

responsible person has the same meaning as in section 59.".

18C New section 132AA inserted

After section 132 of the **Transport Accident Act 1986 insert** –

"**132AA Regulations dealing with transitional matters – Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**

(1) The Governor in Council may make regulations containing provisions of a transitional nature, including matters of an application or savings nature, arising as a result of the enactment of Division 2 of Part 4 of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**, including any repeals and amendments made by or as a result of the enactment of that Division.

(2) Regulations made under this section may –

(a) have a retrospective effect to a day on or after a date not earlier than the day on which Division 2 of Part 4 of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** receives the Royal Assent; and

(b) be of limited or general application; and

(c) differ according to time, place or circumstances; and

(d) leave any matter or thing to be decided by a specified person or class of person.

(3) Regulations under this section have effect despite anything to the contrary in –

(a) this Act or any other Act (other than Division 2 of Part 4 of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** or the **Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006**); or

(b) any subordinate instrument.

(4) This section is **repealed** on the second anniversary of the day on which it comes into operation.".

18D New section 236 inserted

After section 235 to the **Transport Accident Act 1986 insert** –

"**236 Surviving children**

(1) Sections 59(3A) and 59A apply in respect of a dependent child of a person who dies in a transport accident, regardless of when the transport accident occurred.

(2) Despite subsection (1), if the transport accident occurred before the commencement day, the Commission is not liable to pay any amount under section 59(3A) or 59A in respect of any period occurring before the commencement day.

(3) In this section –

commencement day means the day on which Division 2 of Part 4 of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** comes into operation.".'.

New clauses agreed to.

New clauses 18A and 18B (22:53)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

16. Insert the following New Part after Part 4 –

'**Part 4A – Amendment of Limitation of Actions Act 1958**

18A New section 23AB inserted

After section 23A of the **Limitation of Actions Act 1958 insert** –

"**23AB No limitation period for certain dust-related conditions**

(1) No limitation period applies in relation to a cause of action for damages for injury to a worker, whether the cause of action is brought by the worker or the dependants of a deceased worker if –

(a) the action for damages is an action to which –

(i) Part IV of the **Accident Compensation Act 1985** applies; or

(ii) Part 7 of the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013** applies; or

(iii) Part III or VB of the **Wrongs Act 1958** applies; and

(b) the injury to the worker is a dust-related condition within the meaning of section 3(1) of the **Administration and Probate Act 1958**.

(2) This section applies despite anything to the contrary in section 5 or section 40(a) and (b).".

18B Saving

In section 40 of the **Limitation of Actions Act 1958** for "Despite" **substitute** "Subject to section 23AB, despite".'.

New clauses agreed to; clauses 19 to 26 agreed to.

Clause 27 (22:53)

David ETTERSHANK: I move:

1. Clause 27, line 24, omit 'at the place;".' and insert –

'that is –

(i) kept at the place; or

(ii) accessible from an electronic device at the place;".'.

2. Clause 27, after line 24 insert –

'(1A) After section 89(1) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 insert –**

"(1A) The authorised representative may request the employer who has, or a person who on behalf of the employer has, the management and control of the work at the place to allow access to any documents referred to in subsection (1)(bb).

(1B) The employer who has, or a person who on behalf of the employer has, the management and control of the work at the place must comply with a request under subsection (1A)."'.

This is a very simple amendment. To use the words of the minister in response to Mr Welch, it is important that we update the statute to reflect contemporary settings. I think contemporary settings probably include PCs. All this does is extend the rights of health and safety reps and ARREOs to access files as they would a paper document. The minister has gone to significant lengths already to explain the safety net that is in place that precludes malpractice, including, obviously, the presence of an inspector and the requirement for notice. This amendment is consistent with the White review, and it is also consistent with the existing federal law. I will not go any further. I think I have discussed this in my presentation, so I commend the amendment.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: From the advice that the Greens have received, we see this to be a beneficial amendment moved by Legalise Cannabis, and we will be supporting it.

Jaclyn SYMES: Thank you, Mr Ettershank, for bringing the amendment to the chamber, but as we have indicated in our response to the White review, further policy work and stakeholder consultation is desirable before legislative change, and we would want to do that before we were in a position to support your amendment.

Richard WELCH: The Liberals and Nationals will not be supporting this amendment.

Amendments negatived; clause agreed to; clauses 28 to 37 agreed to.

New clauses 37A to 37H (22:56)

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

28. Insert the following New Part after Part 5 –

'**Part 5A – Further amendment of Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 – health and safety orders**

Division 1 – Amendment of Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004

37A New definition inserted

In section 5(1) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 insert** the following definition –

"***health and safety order*** means an order under section 137(1);".

37B Section 136 repealed

Section 136 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004** is **repealed**.

37C Health and safety order

(1) In the heading to section 137 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004**, for "**Release on the giving of a health and safety undertaking**" **substitute** "**Health and safety order**".

(2) In section 137(1) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004** for "up to 2 years and make an order for the release of the offender giving an undertaking with specified conditions" **substitute** "up to 5 years and order that the offender is subject to the conditions included in the order".

(3) In section 137(2) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004** –

(a) for "An undertaking must specify the following conditions –" **substitute** "A health and safety order must include the following conditions –".

(b) in paragraph (a) **omit** "during the period of the adjournment";

(c) in paragraph (b), for "adjournment" **substitute** "health and safety order".

(4) In section 137(3) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004** –

(a) for "the court may impose on an offender who is an employer special conditions that the offender" **substitute** "the court may specify in a health and safety order one or more special conditions that the offender";

(b) in paragraph (c), for "Authority." **substitute** "Authority; and";

(c) after paragraph (c) **insert** –

"(d) undertake a specified project for the general improvement of occupational health, safety and welfare within the period specified in the health and safety order.".

(5) At the foot of section 137(3) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 insert** –

"**Note**

In relation to the undertaking of an offender see also Part 3.".

(6) Section 137(4) and (5) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004** are **repealed**.

(7) In section 137(6) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004**, for "undertaking" **substitute** "health and safety order".

(8) In section 137(7) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004**, for "an order under this section" **substitute** "a health and safety order".

37D Section 138 substituted and new section 138A inserted

For section 138 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 substitute** –

"**138 Variation or contravention of health and safety order**

(1) The following persons at any time while a health and safety order is in force may apply to a court for variation or cancellation of the health and safety order –

(a) the offender;

(b) the Authority;

(c) the Director of Public Prosecutions.

(2) On application under subsection (1), the court –

(a) may vary or cancel a health and safety order if satisfied –

(i) that the circumstances of the offender have materially altered since the health and safety order was made and as a result the offender will not be able to comply with any condition of the health and safety order; or

(ii) that the circumstances of the offender were wrongly stated or were not accurately presented to the court or the author of a pre-sentence report before the health and safety order was made; or

(iii) that the offender is no longer willing to comply with the conditions of the health and safety order; and

(b) may deal with the offender for the offence or offences with respect to which the health and safety order was made in any manner in which the court could deal with the offender if the court had just found the offender guilty of that offence or those offences, having regard to the extent to which the offender has complied with the health and safety order.

(3) Notice of an application under subsection (1) must be given –

(a) to the offender; and

(b) to the Authority, if the sentencing court was the Magistrates' Court;

(c) to the Director of Public Prosecutions, if the sentencing court was the Supreme Court or the County Court.

(4) The court may order that a warrant to arrest be issued against the offender if the offender does not attend before the court on the hearing of the application.

138A Contravention of a health and safety order

An offender subject to a health and safety order must not contravene the health and safety order unless the offender has a reasonable excuse.

Penalty: 500 penalty units for a natural person;

2 500 penalty units for a body corporate.".

Division 2 – Consequential amendments to Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026

37E Section 198 amended

In section 198 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026**, for "Before section 136" **substitute** "Before section 137".

37F Section 199 amended

In section 199 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026**, for "before section 136" **substitute** "before section 137".

37G Section 200 repealed

Section 200 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026** is **repealed**.

37H Heading to section 201 amended

For the heading to section 201 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026 substitute** –

"**Health and safety order**".'.

New clauses agreed to.

New clauses 37I to 37O (22:56)

Jaclyn SYMES: This is related to the Sentencing Advisory Council advice and related amendments. I move:

29. Insert the following New Part before Part 6 –

'**Part 5B – Further amendment of Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 – impact statements**

Division 1 – Amendment of Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004

37I Definitions

In section 5(1) of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 insert** the following definitions –

"***impact statement*** means a statement referred to in section 134A;

medical report means a report referred to in section 134D;".

37J New Division 1A of Part 11 inserted

After Division 1 of Part 11 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 insert** –

"**Division 1A – Impact statements**

134A What is an impact statement?

(1) An impact statement is a statement that –

(a) is in respect of an offence against this Act or the regulations; and

(b) contains any information described in subsection (2); and

(c) is in the form of –

(i) a statutory declaration; or

(ii) an affidavit; or

(iii) sworn or affirmed oral evidence.

(2) The information that may be contained in the statement is the following –

(a) information relating to a risk –

(i) that is to the health, safety or welfare of any person; and

(ii) to which the offence relates;

(b) information relating to the eventuation of a risk described in paragraph (a);

(c) information relating to how any person was impacted, directly or indirectly, by –

(i) a risk described in paragraph (a); or

(ii) the eventuation of a risk described in paragraph (a); or

(iii) the offence.

(3) A reference in subsection (2)(c) to how any person was impacted refers to –

(a) how the health, safety or welfare of any person was impacted (including by the person suffering injury, loss or damage); and

(b) any other way in which any person was impacted.

(4) An impact statement that is in the form of a statutory declaration or an affidavit may include photographs, drawings or poems or other material that relates to any of the matters set out in subsection (2).

Note

Under section 134D, a medical report may be given with an impact statement.

134B When court may allow person to give impact statement

(1) A court that finds a person guilty of an offence against this Act or the regulations may allow a person to give an impact statement to the court in respect of the offence for the purpose of assisting the court to determine –

(a) what sentence to impose for the offence; or

(b) whether to make an order under Division 2 in respect of the offence (and if so, the content of that order) –

if the court is satisfied that it is appropriate to do so.

(2) Nothing in subsection (1) limits or otherwise affects the ability of a person to make a victim impact statement under the **Sentencing Act 1991**.

(3) An impact statement given in accordance with subsection (1) may be given on behalf of another person if –

(a) that other person is under the age of 18 years; or

(b) the court is satisfied that the other person is incapable of making the statement because of mental illness or for any other reason.

134C Admissibility

(1) A court that receives an impact statement may rule as inadmissible –

(a) the whole or any part of the statement; or

(b) the whole or any part of a medical report attached to the statement.

(2) It is the intention of Parliament that in interpreting and applying this section, courts have regard to the following –

(a) an impact statement allows a person to give information described in section 134A(2);

(b) an impact statement is not inadmissible merely because it contains subjective or emotive material.

(3) A court may receive the whole of an impact statement, or an attached medical report, despite –

(a) an objection being taken to the statement or report (or to part of the statement or report); or

(b) the statement or report containing inadmissible material.

(4) If the court receives an impact statement, or an attached medical report, that contains inadmissible material, the court, in sentencing the offender –

(a) is not to rely on the material that the court considers to be inadmissible; and

(b) need not specify which of the material is not being relied on.

134D Medical report

(1) A person who gives an impact statement to a court may also give to the court, along with that statement, a report on medical matters concerning that person (or, if the statement is given on behalf of another natural person, that other person).

(2) The report –

(a) must be –

(i) in writing; and

(ii) made and signed by a medical expert; and

(b) may include a document that the medical expert intends should be read with the statement.

(3) A document may be included under subsection (2)(b) regardless of whether –

(a) it was in existence at the time the report was made; or

(b) the medical expert obtained it, or caused it to be brought into existence, at a later time.

(4) In this section –

medical expert has the same meaning as in Division 1C of Part 3 of the **Sentencing Act 1991**;

medical matters has the same meaning as in Division 1C of Part 3 of the **Sentencing Act 1991**.

134E Distribution of written materials

(1) A person who is to give an impact statement to a court in the form of a statutory declaration or an affidavit must give a copy of the statement to the prosecutor a reasonable time before sentencing is to take place.

(2) A person who is to give a medical report to a court along with an impact statement must give a copy of the report to the prosecutor a reasonable time before sentencing is to take place.

(3) As soon as practicable after a prosecutor receives a document under subsection (1) or (2), the prosecutor must –

(a) file a copy of the document with the court; and

(b) give a copy of the document to –

(i) the offender; or

(ii) the legal practitioner representing the offender.

134F Examination of person who gives impact statement

(1) If a person gives an impact statement to a court, the court may call the person to give evidence.

(2) If a person gives a medical report to a court, the court may call the medical expert who made the report to give evidence.

(3) The court may call a person to give evidence under subsection (1) or (2) at the request of –

(a) the offender; or

(b) the prosecutor.

(4) A person called to give evidence under subsection (1) or (2) may be cross-examined and re-examined.

134G Witnesses

(1) A person who gives an impact statement to a court may call a witness to give evidence in support of any matter contained in the statement or a medical report given along with the statement.

(2) A witness called to give evidence under subsection (1) may be cross-examined and re-examined.

(3) Any party to the proceeding may lead evidence on any matter contained in the impact statement or medical report.

134H Reading aloud of impact statement

(1) A person who is to give an impact statement in the form of a statutory declaration or affidavit may request that the court provide for a specified part of the statement to be –

(a) read aloud or displayed in open court in the course of the sentencing hearing by –

(i) the person making the request; or

(ii) a person chosen by the person making the request who consents and who is approved by the court for that purpose; or

(b) read aloud in open court in the course of the sentencing hearing by the prosecutor.

(2) If a request is made under subsection (1), the court must grant the request with respect to each part of the impact statement that –

(a) is specified in the request; and

(b) is admissible; and

(c) is appropriate and relevant to the determination of what sentence to impose (or whether to make an order under Division 2, and if so, what the contents of that order are to be).

(3) The court may direct the person who made the request, or the person who is to read aloud or display the specified parts of the impact statement, as to the parts of the statement in respect of which the request is granted in accordance with subsection (2).

(4) Nothing in this section prevents the presiding judge or magistrate from reading aloud any admissible part of an impact statement in the course of a proceeding.

134I Alternative arrangements for reading aloud of impact statement

(1) If a court grants a request under section 134H for the reading aloud of any part of an impact statement, the court may direct that alternative arrangements be made for that reading aloud.

(2) Without limiting subsection (1), the court may direct that arrangements be made –

(a) permitting the impact statement to be read aloud from a place other than the court room by means of an audio visual link that enables communication between that place and the court room;

(b) using screens to remove the person reading the impact statement from the direct line of vision of the offender;

(c) permitting a person who is –

(i) chosen by the person reading the impact statement; and

(ii) approved by the court for this purpose –

to be beside the person reading the statement while it is read aloud for the purpose of providing emotional support to the person reading the statement;

(d) permitting only persons specified by the court to be present while the impact statement is read aloud;

(e) requiring legal practitioners not to robe.

(3) A direction under subsection (1) may be given, varied or revoked –

(a) on the application of –

(i) the person who is to read the impact statement aloud; or

(ii) the prosecutor; or

(b) on the court's own motion.

(4) For the purposes of this section, the ***reading aloud*** of an impact statement includes the display of material included in it.

Note

See section 134H(1)(a).

134J Alternative arrangements for witnesses

(1) If a person is called to give evidence under section 134F or 134G, the court may direct that alternative arrangements be made for the examination, cross-examination and re-examination of that person.

(2) Without limiting subsection (1), the court may direct that arrangements be made –

(a) permitting the person to be examined, cross-examined and re-examined from a place other than the court room by means of an audio visual link that enables communication between that place and the court room;

(b) using screens to remove the person from the direct line of vision of the offender;

(c) permitting a person who is –

(i) chosen by the person being examined, cross-examined or re-examined; and

(ii) approved by the court for this purpose –

to be beside the person referred to in subparagraph (i) for the purpose of providing emotional support to that person;

(d) permitting only persons specified by the court to be present while the person is being examined, cross-examined or re-examined;

(e) requiring legal practitioners not to robe;

(f) requiring legal practitioners to be seated while examining or cross-examining the person.

(3) A direction under subsection (1) may be given, varied or revoked –

(a) on the application of –

(i) the person called to give evidence; or

(ii) the prosecutor; or

(b) on the court's own motion.".

37K Heading to Division 2 of Part 11 amended

In the heading to Division 2 of Part 11 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004**, for "**Sentencing for offences**" **substitute** "**Additional sentencing orders**".

37L New Division 3A of Part 15 inserted

After Division 3 of Part 15 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 insert** –

"**Division 3A – Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**

188A Impact statements

Division 1A of Part 11 does not apply for the purposes of sentencing an offender for an offence of which they were found guilty before the day on which Division 1 of Part 5B of the **Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026** comes into operation.".

Division 2 – Related amendments to Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026

37M New sections 194A to 194K inserted

After section 194 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026 insert** –

'**194A Heading to Division 1A of Part 11 repealed**

The heading to Division 1A of Part 11 of the Principal Act is **repealed**.

194B New Part 13.1A heading inserted

Insert the following heading before section 134A of the Principal Act –

"**Part 13.1A – Impact statements**".

194C What is an impact statement?

(1) For section 134A(1)(a) of the Principal Act **substitute** –

"(a) is in respect of –

(i) an offence against this Act or the regulations; or

(ii) a contravention of a civil penalty provision; and".

(2) For section 134A(2)(a)(i) of the Principal Act **substitute** –

"(i) that is to –

(A) the health, safety or welfare of any person; or

(B) property involved with the handling of dangerous goods; and".

(3) In section 134A(2)(a)(ii) and (c)(iii) of the Principal Act, after "the offence" **insert** "or contravention".

194D When court may allow person to give impact statement

(1) In section 134B(1)(b) of the Principal Act, for "Division 2" **substitute** "Part 13.2".

(2) After section 134B(2) of the Principal Act **insert** –

"(2A) A court that is considering whether to make a civil penalty order in respect of a contravention of a civil penalty provision may allow a person to give an impact statement to the court in respect of the contravention for the purpose of assisting the court to determine whether to make the civil penalty order (and if so, the content of that order) if the court is satisfied that it is appropriate to do so.".

(3) In section 134B(3) of the Principal Act, after "subsection (1)" **insert** "or (2A)".

194E Admissibility

In section 134C(4) of the Principal Act, after "in sentencing the offender" **insert** "or determining whether to make a civil penalty order (and if so, the content of that order)".

194F Section 134E amended

(1) In the heading to section 134E of the Principal Act after "**materials**" **insert** "**– sentencing**".

(2) In section 134E(1) of the Principal Act, for "court" **substitute** "court, in accordance with section 134B(1),".

(3) In section 134E(2) of the Principal Act, after "impact statement" **insert** "given in accordance with section 134B(1)".

194G New section 134EA inserted

After section 134E of the Principal Act **insert** –

"**134EA Distribution of written materials – civil penalties**

(1) A person who is to give an impact statement to a court, in accordance with section 134B(2A), in the form of a statutory declaration or an affidavit must give a copy of the statement to the Authority a reasonable time before sentencing is to take place.

(2) A person who is to give a medical report to a court along with an impact statement given in accordance with section 134B(2A) must give a copy of the report to the Authority a reasonable time before sentencing is to take place.

(3) As soon as practicable after the Authority receives a document under subsection (1) or (2), the Authority must –

(a) file a copy of the document with the court; and

(b) give a copy of the document to –

(i) the person in respect of whom the Authority seeks that the court is to make a civil penalty order; or

(ii) the legal practitioner representing that person.".

194H Examination of person who gives impact statement

For section 134F(3) of the Principal Act **substitute** –

"(3) The court may call a person to give evidence under subsection (1) or (2) at the request of –

(a) if the impact statement is given in accordance with section 134B(1), or the medical report is given along with a statement given that way –

(i) the offender; or

(ii) the prosecutor; or

(b) if the impact statement is given in accordance with section 134B(2A), or the medical report is given along with a statement given that way –

(i) the person in respect of whom the Authority seeks that the court is to make a civil penalty order; or

(ii) the Authority.".

194I Reading aloud of impact statement

(1) In section 134H(1)(a) of the Principal Act, for "sentencing hearing" **substitute** "relevant hearing".

(2) For section 134H(1)(b) of the Principal Act **substitute** –

"(b) read aloud in open court in the course of the relevant hearing by whichever of the following applies –

(i) the prosecutor; or

(ii) a legal practitioner representing the Authority.".

(3) For section 134H(2)(c) of the Principal Act **substitute** –

"(c) is appropriate and relevant to whichever of the following applies –

(i) the determination of what sentence to impose (or whether to make an order under Part 13.2, and if so, what the contents of that order are to be); or

(ii) the determination of whether to make a civil penalty order (and if so, what the contents of that order are to be).".

(4) After section 134H(4) of the Principal Act **insert** –

"(5) In this section –

relevant hearing means –

(a) in the case of an impact statement given in accordance with section 134B(1), the sentencing hearing; or

(b) in the case of an impact statement given in accordance with section 134B(2A), a hearing in the proceeding in which it is given.".

194J Alternative arrangements for reading aloud of impact statement

(1) In section 134I(2)(b) of the Principal Act, for "vision of the offender;" **substitute** "vision of –

(i) in the case of an impact statement given in accordance with section 134B(1), the offender; or

(ii) in the case of an impact statement given in accordance with section 134B(2A), the person in respect of whom the Authority seeks that the court is to make a civil penalty order;".

(2) For section 134I(3)(a) of the Principal Act **substitute** –

"(a) on the application of the person who is to read the impact statement aloud; or

(ab) on the application of –

(i) in the case of an impact statement given in accordance with section 134B(1), the prosecutor; or

(ii) in the case of an impact statement given in accordance with section 134B(2A), the Authority; or".

194K Alternative arrangements for witnesses

(1) In section 134J(2)(b) of the Principal Act, for "vision of the offender;" **substitute** "vision of –

(i) in the case of an impact statement given in accordance with section 134B(1), the offender; or

(ii) in the case of an impact statement given in accordance with section 134B(2A), the person in respect of whom the Authority seeks that the court is to make a civil penalty order;".

(2) For section 134J(3)(a) of the Principal Act **substitute** –

"(a) on the application of the person called to give evidence; or

(ab) on the application of –

(i) in the case of an impact statement given in accordance with section 134B(1), the prosecutor; or

(ii) in the case of an impact statement given in accordance with section 134B(2A), the Authority; or".'.

37N New sections 242A and 242B inserted

After section 242 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026 insert** –

'**242A Heading to Division 3A of Part 15 repealed**

The heading to Division 3A of Part 15 of the Principal Act is **repealed**.

242B New Part 17.3A heading inserted

Insert the following heading before section 188A of the Principal Act –

"**Part 17.3A – Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Act 2026**".

37O New Part 17.4 inserted

In section 243 of the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026**, for "Division 3" **substitute** "Division 3A".'.

New clauses agreed to; clause 38 agreed to.

Long title (22:57)

Jaclyn SYMES: This amendment is consequential. I move:

30. Long title, after "to amend the" insert "**Dangerous Goods Transport Act 2026** in relation to reckless endangerment offences, the".

Amendment agreed to.

Jaclyn SYMES: This is also consequential. I move:

31. Long title, omit "in relation to guarantees and supported accommodation".

Amendment agreed to.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

32. Long title, omit "**Accident Compensation Act 1985** in relation to supported accommodation" and insert "**Accident Compensation Act 1985**".

Amendment agreed to.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

34. Long title, omit "in relation to the powers of representatives and coercive conduct".

36. Long title, after "consequential" insert "and related".

Amendments agreed to.

Jaclyn SYMES: This goes back to the TAC. I move:

33. Long title, after "the **Transport Accident Act 1986** in relation to supported accommodation" insert "and certain benefits for children".

Amendment agreed to.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

21. Long title, before "and to make" insert ", the **Limitation of Actions Act 1958** to remove a limitation period for certain actions".

Amendment agreed to; amended long title agreed to.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

Jaclyn SYMES: Pursuant to standing order 4.08, I declare the sitting to be extended by 1 hour.

Reported to house with amendments, including amended long title.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (23:00): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

I just would like to put on record that we made that slightly difficult for the table office. Viv, as always, did an amazing job, which enabled us to get through that quite efficiently, so thank you to Viv for her work and to the clerks for their advice to guide us through that. We got some really good, important work done tonight. I thank the Greens, Mr Ettershank and Mr Welch for their engagement. I thank Trades Hall and those officials for their engagement and Minister Dimopoulos's office.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (23:00): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time and do pass.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (22): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Katherine Copsey, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt

Noes (13): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Richard Welch

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill with amendments.

Business of the house

General business

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (23:07): I move, by leave:

> That the notice of motion standing in my name on the workplace protection order scheme in paragraph (3) of the general business order of precedence set for tomorrow be replaced by the notice of motion given this day by me relating to production of documents orders.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Lizzie Blandthorn:

> That the bill be now read a second time.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (23:08): I rise to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. As many others have said in their contributions, this bill has been a long time coming. As this government has been in power for 12 years now we have seen a gradual erosion in the culture of governance in Victoria. I want to state from the outset that at every point over the past four years of my term of Parliament I have supported all motions and all amendments that have sought to strengthen integrity in our state, which is incredibly important, because IBAC's Operation Daintree, Operation Richmond, the Ombudsman and IBAC's Operation Watts and the Ombudsman's investigation into the politicisation of the public service have all painted a pretty grim picture. The centralisation of power, excessive secrecy, the degrading of ministerial responsibility and the failure to let the public service carry out its traditional function to provide frank and fearless advice have all been themes of this government in recent terms. Associate Professor William Partlett described this well when he said:

> The blatant disregard for rules ensuring ministerial responsibility in their codes of conduct suggests a contempt not just for the rules but also for constitutional democracy.

The Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, or IBAC, has not been able to properly address these issues largely because of legislative restrictions. Victoria is just one of two states where the anti-corruption legislation requires the high threshold of a criminal offence to make a finding of corruption. This means that IBAC is not able to investigate what may not amount to a criminal offence despite still having profound impacts on public confidence, integrity and of course governance.

It is particularly galling that we are passing this bill in the very last week of Parliament this term, because, despite their gravity, these problems are not at all new. Organisations like the Centre for Public Integrity and Transparency International and even Victoria's own integrity agencies have been calling for significant reforms to IBAC since shortly after it became operational in 2013. More recently the Integrity and Oversight Committee undertook an inquiry into the adequacy of the IBAC legislative framework that made 31 recommendations to fix this act. We have a government that is keen on pushing the judiciary to enforce so-called community expectations on sentencing but has simultaneously found it acceptable to ignore community expectations about its own conduct.

The widely held public view is that misuses of public power and money are inherently corrupt. The bill seeks to finally address this by broadening the concept of corrupt conduct to include serious disciplinary matters, including breaches of codes of conduct. The bill will also give IBAC so-called follow-the-money powers so that it can trace public funds past government agencies and extend this through private contractors, subcontractors and labour hire firms. This is important because the reality of modern government is that a considerable amount of government work and therefore public money is being conducted by and spent on third-party contractors.

What is not included in this bill and what the government continues to ignore is in relation to IBAC's responsibility of police oversight, which is something I have spoken about many times before in this place. IBAC handles complaints about police criminality and misconduct. This includes violent assaults, human rights breaches, discrimination, stalking, accepting bribes, dealing drugs and driving offences. Despite it being their legislative responsibility, due to considerable resource constraints in practice police oversight is consistently treated as secondary. This too is baked into legislation, with section 15(1A) requiring IBAC to prioritise the investigation of serious or systemic corrupt conduct. Of the 2500 complaints about police that were made to IBAC in 2024, just 0.5 per cent were investigated. The remaining complaints were either dismissed or referred back to police to investigate themselves, which is obviously an unacceptable situation. As I have said in this place time and time again, when we set up systems which allow agencies to mark their own homework – allow the fox to guard the henhouse – we do not have real oversight; we hardly have its appearance.

This is more important now than ever. Under this government police are being handed unprecedented powers to stop and search people without a warrant, to control public events and rallies and to enter people's private homes. With IBAC's corruption jurisdiction expanding in this bill, it is unlikely this situation will improve, and that is exactly why I will be supporting Ms Payne's sensible amendment to repeal sections 15(1A) and 15(1B). Doing this would give IBAC more power to decide which matters it investigates based on how serious they are and the strengths of each case, so that police misconduct and allegations are not relegated to second-order issues.

Ultimately, what Victoria so desperately needs is a standalone, powerful police ombudsman that will independently and effectively investigate complaints against the police. This is yet another case of the government delaying a long-needed integrity reform. Government consultation on the systemic review of police oversight first opened in 2021, after it was recommended by the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants, even though there was a two-year indicative implementation timeframe. I first spoke about this review three years ago in an adjournment debate in this chamber, and nothing has changed since then. This work is critical for people like Jana who experience family violence by a serving police officer. IBAC was forced to publicly apologise earlier this year for mishandling her complaint after referring it back to police and ignoring her concerns about conflicts of interest.

Independent oversight of the executive and public service in all of its forms requires strong legislative frameworks, clear administrative safeguards, adequate resourcing and, importantly, the structurally independent funding model recommended by agencies. Rebuilding the public's trust in government institutions is no small task, but when politicians spend so long resisting changes like these, that work is made considerably more difficult. Even just this week the government had to be dragged to improve this bill and move house amendments of their own after pressure from the crossbench and from the opposition.

It is on that note that I want to take an opportunity today, like many others have also done, to pay tribute to the work of Dr Tim Read, who led much of this reform before us this evening. This will only be one small part of a huge legacy that he has left for the Parliament and for the state of Victoria, and many of us are incredibly grateful for that. We are all constantly talking about concepts like the one that is in this bill – like civics education and getting people involved in understanding our political systems, our halls of power. But if we do not set up the proper checks and balances and trustworthy systems, nobody will believe that they are actually capable of creating real change, which is certainly what many have said to me throughout the events particularly of the last year within this Parliament and the revelations in the state of Victoria. All of us, but of course particularly the major parties and parties of government, need to prioritise the work of improving integrity. This bill is a start that has been a long time coming, and I commend it to the house.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (23:16): I rise to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. One Nation Victoria believes that government must always be accountable to the people who elect it and pay for it. For far too long

Victorians have seen billions of dollars of taxpayers money spent by governments while questions about transparency and accountability remain unanswered. We have seen major projects blow out, contracts become increasingly complex and public money flow through layers of contractors and subcontractors, yet the very body established to investigate serious corruption has not always had the powers necessary to follow that money. That is simply not good enough.

This bill is long overdue. It is about giving IBAC the tools it needs to properly investigate corruption and serious misconduct and ensuring that investigations cannot simply stop when public money moves from government to a private entity. The legislation before the Parliament follows a series of efforts this year to strengthen IBAC's powers, and the amendments that have been circulated help strengthen it further. For One Nation Victoria this is fundamentally about trust. Victorians should not have to wonder whether political connections, government contracts or bureaucratic processes can put matters beyond proper scrutiny. They deserve an IBAC that is genuinely capable of following the evidence wherever it leads. They deserve transparency, they deserve accountability and, most importantly, Victorians deserve to have faith that when allegations of corruption arise they will be properly investigated regardless of who is involved. No government should fear a strong anti-corruption commission if it has nothing to hide. One Nation Victoria supports stronger accountability, stronger transparency and stronger protections for the Victorian taxpayer. This reform is long overdue, and I commend this bill to the house.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (23:18): I move:

> That debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Adjournment

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (23:19): I move:

> That the house do now adjourn.

Electricity infrastructure

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (23:19): (2813) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action I seek is that she join me in meeting with the Liberal candidates for Eureka and Ripon, Megan Read and Emma Muir, and the communities affected by the Western Renewables Link. I have mentioned the Western Renewables Link 213 times across 33 contributions in nearly four years, more than anyone else in this Parliament. Tonight I want to expose Labor's duplicitous rhetoric on the Western Renewables Link.

In December 2022 Labor's member for Ripon told the Assembly:

> I am not in the business of saying one thing in Smeaton before the election and another on Spring Street today. The project is a disgrace and must be fixed …

The project has not been fixed. The member for Ripon is absent. On 9 September the minister warned of 'skyrocketing power bills' if Western Renewables Link is delayed, with Ms Ermacora attacking the coalition's firm stance two days running. The same day I put to her what it really costs. It was costed at $479 million in 2019. In March 2026, though, AusNet's owner Brookfield told the United States Securities and Exchange Commission it is a $4 billion project – more than eight times the original estimate. Yet in May, answering this Parliament, the government put it at just over $1.5 billion, giving a lower figure to this Parliament than that given to the American regulators. On 15 September the minister told a CEDA audience, 'We need these projects.' Forty-five minutes later the Premier ordered a so-called independent review of project costs. The same day, the Minister for Planning released her environment effects statement assessment, foreshadowed in mid-August. So within a week of attacking our stance, Labor announced a review that halts and changes nothing.

The Premier says his review will finish by year's end. He will not say whether that is before an election, though. He says no compulsory acquisitions will occur while it runs. That is a political promise no better than the one he made to his daughter and the Premier he rolled. This Premier voted three times to give VicGrid the power to enter and compulsorily acquire private land and to fine the farmers who defend their property rights. I am told VicGrid is still talking to farmers about acquisitions. This review is smoke and mirrors, an exercise to save seats. If the minister disagrees, she should come and defend it to the people living under it. Western Renewables Link cannot proceed without fundamental changes.

Crime

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (23:22): (2814) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Crime Prevention Paul Edbrooke. The $10 million creating safer places grants program is now open. The action I seek is an update on how this funding will help councils deliver practical upgrades like CCTV and lighting to make local community spaces safer.

Stony Creek

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (23:22): (2815) It is a great privilege to work in an electorate whose residents are prepared to advocate so passionately to protect the environment. I want to congratulate and commend two passionate young constituents, Chris and Lennon from All Kids Junior Landcare. They have launched a petition to clean up a section of Stony Creek which borders two critically endangered grasslands and threatened species habitats. Their petition was signed by 400 residents and was tabled at Maribyrnong City Council on 18 August, specifically requesting that council work with Melbourne Water to improve a neglected part of Stony Creek between the Matthews Hill Reserve and Braybrook grasslands by arranging a clean-up of accumulated litter; assessing and appropriately managing invasive weeds obstructing the creek; investigating the persistent offensive odour, poor water condition and possible sources of pollution; and improving ongoing maintenance and rehabilitation of this section of the creek. The petition is backed by a 2022 RMIT study for Melbourne Water, which identified this area as a litter hotspot and recommended assessing a litter trap at Matthews Hill and Braybrook grasslands.

While existing Stony Creek plans identify litter control, better access, habitat restoration and ecological links as priorities, plans to treat contaminants and trap litter have not been progressed by Melbourne Water. Melbourne Water have advised that the rubbish needs to be removed professionally, as it is unsafe for a community to clean up. The Sunshine superhub project affects the adjoining rail corridor, and Chris and Lennon have rightly summarised that with works yet to commence there is a narrow window to improve access to the creek, remove the rubbish, control the litter and restore the ecological link between the two grasslands. I congratulate Chris and Lennon for spearheading this action. It is great to see our next generation of young activists taking the lead to better their community. With the monstrous NextDC data centre threatening the creek's health downstream in West Footscray, we need people-powered conservation more than ever. So the action I seek is that the Minister for Water direct Melbourne Water to liaise with Maribyrnong council to undertake the necessary works to restore this neglected section of Stony Creek.

Youth homelessness

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (23:25): (2816) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts and concerns the growing crisis of youth homelessness with cases of mental ill health in Victoria. The action I seek is for the minister to work with his ministerial colleagues to urgently develop and deliver a coordinated youth homelessness strategy alongside the mental health infrastructure that has already been promised but has not yet been delivered.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare revealed that 10,924 young Victorians aged between 15 and 24 turned to homelessness services last year and nearly half of them – 5276 – experienced mental health conditions so severe that they warranted hospital-level care. We are seeing a dangerous disconnect between mental health services and housing support. Young people as young as 16 are

turning up at emergency departments in acute distress. They are suicidal and traumatised, and they do not have a safe place to go, yet they are discharged back into the public – into homelessness. This should not happen. Every four days a young person dies while experiencing homelessness. This is not just a gap in the system but a failure. Our housing and mental health system cannot continue to operate in silos as vulnerable young adults are falling through the cracks. Victorians need their government to do more. This Labor government is failing our youth.

What is worse is the failure has been identified before. In 2021 the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System made several clear recommendations, including the establishment of 500 dedicated mental health homes for young people in acute crisis, which the Allan, now Carroll, Labor government accepted in full. Many years later the Carroll Labor government still has not delivered these critical supports. Service providers have also reported that young people are being denied care simply because they do not have a fixed address and in other care cases because their mental health issues are misunderstood or minimised. This is not acceptable or sustainable. Victorians deserve a government that will act with urgency in a crisis like this. Again, the Carroll government has not delivered these services. The 2026–27 budget includes some investment in housing and mental health, but it failed to deliver what the crisis demands: a coordinated, youth-focused strategy that brings these systems together. Will the minister please provide a comprehensive youth homelessness strategy along with the long-promised mental health homes for these young Victorians?

Food security

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (23:28): (2817) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action I seek is for the government to urgently develop a Victorian food sovereignty plan. Recently a report by the UK's leading security agencies revealed that the UK is at risk of catastrophic food shortages within the next five years due to ecosystem collapse and climate change. These are not just the warnings of another scientist or environmental organisation, who have rightly been banging on about this for decades; these are defence and spy agencies. They are sounding the alarm bells because the risk to food systems is so significant that it is creating urgent threats to national security.

Many of us take the food on supermarket shelves for granted. We grab some, typically overpriced, thing off the supermarket shelf and rarely think much further about how it got there or where it came from. We do not often consider the complex systems behind our food, relying on farms and farmers, food workers, water, healthy soil, pollinators, transport, overseas production of food and farming inputs, and a stable climate. It is only when there are shocks to the system, like the COVID pandemic or an illegal war in Iran, that its fragility is exposed. Yet once these shocks pass, business as usual resumes. Climate change and ecosystem collapses, however, are not passing; in fact they are accelerating. Victoria has been getting warmer and drier over the past few decades. We are seeing more frequent and more severe climate-related disasters, and that includes heatwaves, droughts, bushfires and flooding. Land clearing and habitat loss continue and extinctions are mounting. The shocks that climate change and ecosystem collapses are producing are not temporary blips. If there is not drastic change, we face a future in the very near term where we will struggle to access the food that we need to sustain ourselves. This should concern every Victorian.

With extreme weather events like droughts, floods and fires, crops are damaged, livestock is impacted and harvests are smaller, and it has ripple effects throughout our food system. With ecosystems collapsed, soil and water no longer support food production. The Victorian government has previously recognised that climate change poses risks to agricultural productivity, water availability and the resilience of our primary production sector and that food sovereignty needs to be integrated into our climate adaptation policy, but the lack of action underscores a total underappreciation of the seriousness of the current threats to our food system or the urgency with which we need to act. We need a food system that can weather the worst and still ensure food is on the table for Victorians; that prioritises local production, diversification of sources, soil health and protection of water; that supports growers and dismantles the unbridled corporatisation and profiteering inherent to the system; and that

recognises that access to adequate, safe, nutritious food is a fundamental need and right. It is time we had an immediate Victorian food sovereignty plan.

Offshore wind energy

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (23:31): (2818) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and tonight I raise an issue regarding offshore wind transmission planning in the electorate of Eastern Victoria and indeed throughout Gippsland and the process used to determine the preferred transmission technology for Victoria's future energy network. This matter has been raised with me by constituents and community stakeholder groups who recognise that substantial transmission investment will be required as Victoria's energy system moves and evolves. We know also that Gippsland has powered Victoria for generations and is expected to play a significant role in the future of our state's energy. VicGrid's planning now indicates that around 7.5 megawatts of Victoria's 9-gigawatt offshore wind target could come through Gippsland, yet the current transmission project is designed around an initial connection of approximately 2 gigawatts.

The issue raised with me is not whether Victoria should build new transmission infrastructure; rather, it is whether the long-term transition pathway has been assessed on a whole-of-system approach before the state is effectively locked into a particular approach. I thank community members for coming into my office and sitting down with me and sharing their concerns and their research. It is considered research, and they are not individual; there are multiple members. They are seeking an assurance that any comparison of transmission options considers not only the up-front construction costs but also future expansion requirements, operating and maintenance costs, reliability, resilience, delivery risks and community impact over the life of the asset. There is also interest in understanding how the government assessed the relative merits of overhead or underground transmission options, as costs appear to have been a key factor in the decision. Costs are an important factor in the decision; however, stakeholders are seeking greater transparency around the analysis and the assumptions that informed this outcome. These are reasonable questions, and decisions made today will help shape Victoria's future energy network for decades to come. So the action I seek is for the minister to release an independently reviewed comparison of overhead and underground transmission options for Gippsland's long-term offshore wind network, including future expansion requirements, life cycle costs and resilience-delivery risks before major transmission pathways are finalised.

Lort Smith Animal Hospital

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (23:34): (2819) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action that I seek is an annual funding commitment for Lort Smith Animal Hospital which will allow them to expand two critically important services helping keep Victorians and their pets together. The first is a vital service offering urgent veterinary care for Victorians experiencing financial hardship. This program is currently possible through a subsidy pool that is supported largely by benefactors, but at the same time as demand is exploding, funding is starting to dry up. I have spoken in this place at length about the cost of vet care and how it is becoming increasingly inaccessible and unaffordable. Owners are delaying treatment while they scramble for money, or worse, they are surrendering an animal out of desperation. In dire cases, it is leading to animals being unnecessarily euthanised. Lort Smith's important program helps to address this crisis, but they are currently being forced to ration free vet care and often find themselves in the heartbreaking position of being forced to reject applicants who are in urgent need. The call for recurrent funding would allow Lort Smith to strengthen its existing relief model, which covers the cost of urgent veterinary treatment for hundreds of pets in our state each year. This proposal is practical cost-of-living relief that would offer meaningful change for Victorian pet owners. And because this model already exists with clinicians, facilities and triage systems in place, primarily through existing vet services at North Melbourne, government would not need to build new infrastructure or a new approval process.

The second service relates to an issue I have spoken about at length in this place: the link between pets and family violence, and how one of the leading reasons victim-survivors do not leave a violent home

is because they do not want to leave their companion animal behind. Lort Smith offers an emergency boarding program to ensure safe pet care for Victorians experiencing crisis. They are seeking funding to expand into a more coordinated response network for people whose animals need short-term care during periods of hardship. The current program already provides emergency placements through Lort Smith's adoption facility and trusted foster care families while a person seeks safety, treatment, housing or other crisis support. An expansion will be a lifeline for animals but for people too. These programs are not just about animal welfare. Whether it be through vet care or emergency boarding, keeping pets and families together protects a profound emotional bond. It reduces stress, combats loneliness, improves physical and mental health, eases shelter strain and supports healing through major life changes. These two initiatives provide immeasurable benefits to our community. I would all but guarantee that funding these programs saves money in so many other ways, and I am hopeful that the minister will commit to funding them.

Strathfieldsaye Primary School

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (23:37): (2820) My question is to the Minister for Education. I visited Strathfieldsaye Primary School last week together with Andrew Lethlean, the Nationals candidate for Bendigo East, after concerns were raised about the ongoing impact of flood damage on the school facilities. The school is located in a rapidly growing area just 10 kilometres from Bendigo. Student numbers have grown to over 540 students, but the facilities are not keeping pace. It was shocking to learn that 17 classrooms have been impacted by flooding through water-damaged ceilings over the last four years. One teacher noted that their classrooms have been impacted for up to 20 weeks, with prep students disrupted over a period of eight weeks and relocated to other classrooms. The damage to buildings has continued, with regular requests submitted. The department's preference has been silicon repairs, which do little to address the underlying issues. I was concerned to learn that mould and water stains on the roof are commonplace. Parents have expressed concern about the health implications as children in affected classrooms experience asthma with no history of symptoms.

The Building Education Revolution resulted in capital works at the school with ceilings so high you need a cherry picker to change a lightbulb or to remove sections of water-stained tiles on the ceilings. The same toilet block built in the 1980s, when there were over 100 students, is still in use today despite the increase in enrolments. In 2024 there was a parliamentary inquiry into the state education system in Victoria, with members from different political backgrounds. I bring the minister's attention to recommendation 39:

> That the Department of Education ensure that schools are adequately resourced to respond to the needs of students, including their wellbeing …

which the government supported in full. Recommendation 47 of the report called on the Victorian government to:

> … significantly increase its investment in school capital infrastructure funding in government schools …

a recommendation that the government supported in principle.

The Victorian Auditor-General's report *Delivering School Upgrade Projects* was released in June this year, and I was concerned to read the findings:

1. VSBA does not always make recommendations for school upgrade projects in line with its strategies for improving school conditions.
2. VSBA's costings and timelines for school upgrade projects are not always transparent.
3. VSBA could do more to make sure upgrades meet school needs.

The audit found that 29 per cent of school upgrades experience cost blowouts, 25 per cent of projects were delayed, the number of schools in poor condition increased from 182 to 221 in just two years, the government's target of having no schools in poor condition has been pushed back from 2030 to 2034 and schools are not always selected for upgrades in line with existing prioritisation guidelines.

Our kids deserve the very best education and quality facilities. I ask that the minister make it a priority to consult with Strathfieldsaye Primary School to ensure that these ongoing issues of flooding are addressed. It is a great school community, and it is important that its facilities keep pace with the growing population.

Victoria Police

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (23:40): (2821) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Premier. In 2018 the Victorian Auditor-General published a report on Victoria Police's management of property and exhibits. Most people probably do not think about it, but Victoria Police has to store and manage tremendous amounts of property, from lost property to seized items, evidence and firearms, whether they are seized, related to a crime or surrendered for other reasons. There are statutory obligations on how they are supposed to audit and manage this property. It is important stuff. You have evidence related to criminal proceedings and dangerous items such as firearms. The bad news is that the audit results were terrible. The Victorian Auditor-General's Office examined 15 audit reports from eight stations that they visited. Zero were compliant with their audit obligations, and only 6 per cent had audited more than three-quarters of their property. This report had eight recommendations for Victoria Police to improve the efficiency, accuracy and accountability of their property management systems. There does not seem to be any update on the record, though. Did Victoria Police update their property management systems, or has the situation improved? This is important, as the Parliament has passed laws updating aspects of our firearms regulations. Is Victoria Police fit for purpose, or is the situation worse than at the last public audit? My request to the Premier is to write to the Victorian Auditor-General and request they audit Victoria Police's management of property and exhibits.

Fruit fly management

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (23:42): (2822) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action that I seek is for the minister to provide funding of $1 million per annum for fruit fly management ongoing beyond June 2027 and to include representatives from Fruit Growers Victoria and Cobram & District Fruit Growers' Association in the fruit fly strategic management group. Agriculture is vital to the Victorian economy. There are 5000 horticultural producers in the state employing around 11,000 people, and the fruit growing industry has a value of around $3 billion a year. The Goulburn Valley in my electorate is the food bowl of Victoria and exports produce all over Australia and around the world, but horticulture here is under threat from Queensland fruit fly, a pest that must be continually managed to keep it at bay. The Goulburn–Murray Valley fruit fly area-wide management program has been a great success, with a 60 per cent reduction in pest pressure across the wider region and up to an 83 per cent reduction in Cobram. But as Labor has gradually reduced funding for the program, pest pressure has increased, and there is now serious risk that the gains made in previous years will soon be lost.

In June this year I again pressed the government to increase funding for fruit fly management and to provide certainty by committing to the program into the future. But in reply the minister said funding would only be available until June 2027. The minister also revealed the creation of an executive Queensland fruit fly strategic management group that includes membership from industry, local government authorities and public land managers. However, I have been contacted by industry associations who are seriously concerned about this fruit fly management group and its terms of reference. The first problem is that, despite what the minister says, key industry participants like Fruit Growers Victoria and Cobram & District Fruit Growers' Association have been excluded from the proposed structure. The second problem is that the group's terms of reference use language like 'handover plans', 'transition' and 'closure criteria', which suggests that the government intends to end its involvement in fruit fly management in the middle of next year and place the entire burden on commercial growers. Instead of closure, the management group should be focused on determining the best practices and strategies for long-term suppression of fruit fly and how industry and government can collaborate to manage fruit fly. Fruit flies do not only breed in commercial plantations, they breed

in backyard fruit trees and in the 8 million hectares of public land owned and managed by the Victorian government. This means government should continue to play an essential role in funding and delivering fruit fly programs, and the new strategy group must include – *(Time expired)*

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (23:45): (2823) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the government to guarantee the future of VicHealth as an independent, properly funded health promotion agency. In the final months of his time in this Parliament our friend and colleague Tim Read had a number of things that he zeroed in on and was determined to see changed. In recent weeks two of those have moved. After years of campaigning by Tim and the Greens, group voting tickets have finally been abolished, and we are currently considering legislation to strengthen IBAC, drawing on reforms recommended by the Integrity and Oversight Committee inquiry that Tim chaired.

The third thing that Tim was very focused on was anchored in his professional experience before politics but was perhaps the most personal: saving VicHealth. The government has given VicHealth a reprieve, confirming there will be no funding cut in 2026–27. That is welcome, but it is by no means a secure future for this vital agency. The government still intends to absorb VicHealth into the Department of Health, ending its nearly 40 years as an independent health promotion foundation. For Tim this was never an abstract argument about simple machinery of government. He had decades of experience as a doctor and medical researcher, and after his cancer diagnosis he spoke about how public health campaigns like SunSmart might have changed his own risk if those messages had existed when he was young. That is what prevention means. It means fewer people getting sick in the first place; fewer people needing surgery, chemotherapy or years of treatment; fewer hospital beds occupied by people with illnesses that we could have prevented; fewer families sitting beside someone they love in their last days; and fewer funerals and less grief.

Apart from being the right thing to do, the smart thing to do and the kind thing to do, it is simply good economics. Every dollar invested in health protection and promotion returns, on average, more than $14 in benefits. Preventable chronic disease already places enormous pressure on our hospitals, health workers and budgets. We spend vast amounts treating illness once it has happened. The wisdom of VicHealth has always been to invest a comparatively smaller amount early, stopping smoking, preventing skin cancer, supporting healthier food and physical activity, reducing alcohol harm and researching what actually keeps people well. A one-year funding reprieve is not enough. Prevention requires independence, expertise and investment in long-term thinking that goes beyond electoral cycles. Premier, I implore you: please honour Tim's work by making this protection permanent. Reverse the decision to abolish VicHealth as an independent agency, protect its funding beyond 2026–27 and let it continue what it was always created to do: prevent disease, save lives, save hospital costs and spare families avoidable grief.

Child sexual abuse

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (23:48): (2824) My adjournment matter is to the Premier, and the action I seek is for the government to explain why it only apologised for historical child sexual abuse that occurred in government schools prior to the year 2000. I ask the Premier to acknowledge the victims of child sexual abuse whose lives have been shattered over the past 26 years and to clearly explain steps this government will take to better equip child educators to identify grooming behaviour and inappropriate sexualised curriculum in schools, outlining what robust measures it will take to prevent child sexual abuse and sexual grooming conversations and behaviours with minors in our classrooms.

There needs to be an inquiry into what is being taught in Victorian schools, particularly in primary schools, as conversations about sexual pleasure are not suitable for children and should not be taught by schoolteachers. Even reproductive sexual content should only be taught with a parent's full knowledge and consent and the option to be present in the child's class. Under Labor and the Greens

in Canberra, former primary school principal Janelle Rowe was recently forced out of a 34-year career for opting for a 'Bullying. No Way!' week over Wear It Purple Day because she did not want her staff and children to be forced to have age-inappropriate discussions about sexuality. How many educators in Victoria have left the profession due to similar concerns?

Sexual abuse of children is profoundly damaging. The wounds inflicted are deep, and victims may not heal. Under Labor families had their lives shattered last year when 2000 babies aged six months to two years had to be tested for sexually transmitted diseases just because of one childcare worker. The alleged paedophile worked undetected at 23 childcare centres between 2017 and 2025. According to the Commission for Children and Young People almost 1000 abuse and misconduct allegations were made against childcare workers and early educators this past year. Meanwhile, three coaches were stood down for grooming minors in just one community sport. New data shows an increasing number of children, some as young as five years old, are phoning Kids Helpline requesting urgent help to save them from sexual abuse. For every report made there are countless others suffering in silence. Easy access to pornography and horrific online content has unleashed a tsunami of criminal abuse. In the 2024–25 financial year the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation received a staggering 82,764 reports of online child sexual abuse. That is 226 reports a day, with each report containing sickening images and videos of children being sexually abused or exploited. This year a primary school teacher was caught with a hidden camera filming children in the school toilet. Perpetrators accessing children in schools and services regulated by the Carroll Labor government must be stopped and held accountable for their crimes. What is concealed needs to be brought out into the open.

Mental health services

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (23:51): (2825) I am glad the minister is at the table tonight, because the issue I want to raise in the adjournment debate is for the Minister for Mental Health. I want to make a few comments around the failures in the system and concerningly where the data is. I have raised on a number of occasions in my shadow portfolio of health the lack of transparency that the Carroll Labor government is adhering to. The Premier says he is for integrity and it is not optional, but I think that is just hollow words, given his ministers are not following through with what so many within the community are expecting.

In an article in the *Age* 10 days ago there were very concerning comments from leading health professionals and the sector around the Department of Health's quarterly performance data showing the state has gone backwards since the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System five years ago. In fact they say that, then, 49 per cent of patients were looking at being transferred from an emergency department. Now that number is at 46 per cent, so it is going backwards. Our emergency departments are struggling, but this government has failed to address the systemic issues right across the system, and the mental health system is no different. In this article it goes on to say that the AMA met with the minister, and they came out confused because the government claimed it had delivered more new mental health beds than anyone working in the health system can account for. The royal commission recommended the government introduce at least 270 new adult mental health beds, but the monitor who is looking at the royal commission's recommendations can only account for 174 of those beds being opened. The minister told the delegation that 230 new mental health beds had been opened but refused to give a breakdown of where the beds were. Minister, I do not expect you to provide that information to us this evening, but I would ask you to take it on notice and provide to the Parliament, to the people of Victoria, where those beds are. Give us the breakdown of where those beds are for us to understand why there is just such an issue with the data not being released and where it is going backwards. These are huge failures. Clearly you have not delivered on what you said, the stakeholders are confused and it is Victorian mental health patients who are really paying the price.

Craigieburn police station

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (23:54): (2826) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is for the minister to return Craigieburn police station to

24-hour operation. Craigieburn police station used to operate 24 hours a day. Today Victoria Police list it as a non-24-hour police station, with its current public counter open for just 7 hours on Tuesdays and 7 hours on Thursdays, from 10 am to 5 pm. This means residents in one of Melbourne's largest and fastest growing communities have access to the public counter at their local police station for just 14 hours a week. I do not need to tell you again some of the horrific and fatal crimes we have seen take place in Craigieburn over the last few months.

I want to acknowledge the outstanding work our police officers do every single day. A community the size of Craigieburn deserves its own police station that is actually open to the public 24 hours a day. It is particularly important given the serious concern about crime across Hume. As I have previously raised in this place, Crime Statistics Agency figures show total criminal offences in Hume had increased by 28 per cent since September 2023, motor vehicle theft had surged by 82 per cent and prohibited weapons offences had increased by 31 per cent.

Craigieburn is a major metropolitan community servicing tens of thousands of residents not only in Craigieburn but also in areas like Roxburgh Park, Greenvale, Mickleham, Kalkallo and Donnybrook. The Liberals and Nationals have committed to recruiting 3000 new police over four years and reopening police stations like Craigieburn, restoring their hours so the community can once again have the police presence that they deserve. Residents should be able to walk into their local police station when they need help, whether it is during business hours or whether it is late at night.

The action I seek from the minister is simple: return Craigieburn police station to a 24-hour service so the community can have the level of police it once had. It is not good enough for this Labor government to cut funding for police, which has meant Craigieburn police station has gone from 24 hours a day to 10 am to 5 o'clock on Tuesdays and Thursdays but for the rest of the time the counter is closed. It shows the community needs to vote Liberal at this election to restore safety in our community.

Video game industry

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (23:57): (2827) My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Creative Industries. It concerns Victoria's gaming industry. Victoria has a history going back to the 1990s and is currently the leading centre in Australia for video game development. The ecosystem adds a significant source of export revenue and indeed cultural recognition for the state. According to Interactive Games & Entertainment Association data the sector generates $608.5 million in annual revenue, with Victoria hosting 20 per cent of all games studio offices.

Some of this goes back to the period in the 1990s, when enormous work was done by then Treasurer of the state Alan Stockdale. They look at the significance of Victoria hosting studio offices, employing almost 30 per cent of the industry's national workforce. That represents a very significant return on government investment. However, industry feedback consistently indicates that these successes cannot be taken for granted without longer term funding certainty and sustained support. Studios and skilled workers may face challenges from other jurisdictions, and certainly the Queensland government is supporting the gaming industry in that state. Predictable, stable settings are required. My question to the minister is: what steps will the government take to provide longer term certainty for the video game sector and ensure Victoria remains, as it has for some decades, Australia's leading centre of gaming development?

It is important in this context to look at some of the recent budget signals that have occurred and funding decisions which suggest games are sliding from a genuine priority to an afterthought within the state's broader screen strategy – as I say, even as Queensland becomes more competitive. This is a live opportunity for the state to maintain and strengthen its position, and that is not what has been occurring in the state in recent years. It has been slipping. The Victorian budget allocated $27 million to expand the Victorian Screen Incentive. That announcement and the public messaging around it was framed almost entirely around attracting film and television, which is an important sector, but did not pick up games with the importance that they should have been given. There was a failure to fund Freeplay, Australia's longest running independent games festival and a genuine grassroots talent

pipeline, in Creative Victoria's enterprise program for 2026 to 2029. These decisions by state government are weakening the gaming sector, and Creative Victoria's *Creative State* overarching industry strategy did not give it the recognition that was needed. The minister needs to address these weaknesses and challenges.

Responses

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (00:00): There were 15 adjournment matters to various ministers. Those will be passed on for written responses in accordance with the standing orders.

I am very happy to go to Ms Crozier's adjournment matter now. It is in relation to the number of acute mental health beds that are being delivered through the royal commission's recommendations. Of course the interim report recommended that we deliver 170 new beds to be targeted in specific regions that needed them the most, and we have delivered those beds in full. That includes 52 beds delivered at the Sunshine Mental Health and Wellbeing Centre at Sunshine Hospital; 30 acute beds delivered at the Northern; 22 acute beds delivered at the Royal Melbourne; adult Hospital in the Home beds delivered by Barwon Health and Western Health; and youth Hospital in the Home beds delivered through the Parkville Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Service.

In addition, there have been 35 new beds delivered at the specialist women's service Wren. The royal commission's final report recommended a further 100 beds in settings that reflect optimal allocation across the state, and work is well underway in delivering that. In addition to this, we have also invested in and will be delivering 40 new forensic mental health beds at the Thomas Embling Hospital. In total we have delivered 230 beds since the royal commission handed down its final report, and there is more work underway to expand the system more broadly, taking pressure off the acute end of the system.

As part of broader hospital development there have been additional acute mental health beds delivered or in development, including in the new Melton hospital redevelopment, Peninsula University Hospital, the new Footscray Hospital and Shepparton hospital. In terms of subacute care, a $141 million investment has enabled us to deliver 10 youth prevention and recovery care centres across the state, which are delivering 100 beds of subacute step-up and step-down care for young people so they do not need to wait until they need an acute bed – they can get the support and the service and the care that they need in their own communities.

We have also delivered 48 dedicated mental health beds in our mental health and alcohol and other drug hubs at eight of our busiest emergency departments to ease pressure, improve safety and get consumers the specialist support they need sooner when they are presenting at emergency departments. Importantly, because we know consumers need alternative options to inpatient stays, we have substantially expanded community mental health services, and we have grown the number of hours being delivered in the community from 1.3 million hours in 2020–21, which was the year before the royal commission handed down its report, to 1.787 million hours in the 2024–25 financial year across all age groups, which is a significant uplift in the number of hours being delivered in the community.

I do not know why Ms Crozier is presenting this as a confusing situation. I am very happy to continue to engage with a number of the stakeholders, including the AMA. We had a constructive conversation and meeting, and there is a shared priority to keep going with these reforms to make sure that Victorians get the mental health care that they need in their communities.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 12:05 am (Wednesday).