Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 18 March 2026

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

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

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Ben Carroll (from 28 July 2026)

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

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Gabrielle Williams (from 28 July 2026)

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

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

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

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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

David Southwick (from 28 January 2026)

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

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O'Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Anthony Carbines (from 15 April 2026)

Mary-Anne Thomas (to 15 April 2026)

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

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

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

Members of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

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

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

Party abbreviations

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

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Wednesday 18 March 2026

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

The SPEAKER (09:34): General business, notices of motion 24, 61 and 69 to 73, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General:

Modernising myki – Ordered to be published

Timely Payments Performance – Ordered to be published

Integrity Oversight Victoria – Inspection report 2023–24 on controlled operation records and reports under the *Crimes (Controlled Operations) Act 2004*, *Wildlife Act 1975* and *Fisheries Act 1995* – Ordered to be published

Ombudsman – Outsourcing small claims handling: How councils manage fairness and responsibility – Ordered to be published

Wildlife Act 1975:

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

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

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

Bills

National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025

Council's agreement

The SPEAKER (09:35): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the National Gas (Victoria) Amendment Bill 2025 without amendment.

Motions

Motions by leave

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That the house notes that the Victorian Liberal Party are bananas – build absolutely nothing anywhere near anyone.

Leave refused.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (09:36): I move, by leave:

> That this house condemns the Premier for her failure to deliver the Commonwealth Games, leaving Victoria without the games and without the promised community projects, all while allowing $15 billion of taxpayer money to flow to organised crime.

Leave refused.

Committees

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Reporting dates

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (09:36): I move, by leave:

> That the reporting date for the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee's inquiry into enhancing Victorian university governance be extended to no later than 31 July 2026.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Motions by leave

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:37): I move, by leave:

> That this house condemns the former Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy for abandoning the Commonwealth Games at a cost of $589 million and further notes her failure to deliver the promised legacy projects for local communities.

Leave refused.

John LISTER (Werribee) (09:37): I move, by leave:

> That this house notes the Liberal Party are so embarrassed by their half-baked housing plan to cut 300,000 homes that they are refusing to talk about it since its release three weeks ago.

Leave refused.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Brighton can leave the chamber for half an hour. The member for Werribee can leave the chamber for half an hour. It is not because of what you said, it is because of the way that you are behaving in the chamber.

Members for Brighton and Werribee withdrew from chamber.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:37): I move, by leave:

> That this house condemns the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events for abandoning the Commonwealth Games at a cost of $589 million and further notes his failure to deliver the tourism-boosting projects promised to local communities after the cancellation.

Leave refused.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (09:38): I move, by leave:

> That this house commends the Allan Labor government for building more homes close to public transport, jobs and services and giving Victorians real housing choice and opportunity through planning and rental reforms, rather than drawing a line and locking them out of the suburbs that they want to live in.

Leave refused.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events for abandoning the Commonwealth Games at a cost of $589 million and further notes his failure to deliver the sporting infrastructure promised to local communities.

Leave refused.

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

That this house condemns the Liberal Party for their half-baked housing plan that would cut 300,000 new homes, push up housing prices, hand back housing supply to council blockers and lock out young people from living where they want, near the things they need and the people they love.

Leave refused.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Housing and Building for abandoning the Commonwealth Games at a cost of $589 million and further notes her failure to deliver the housing projects promised to local communities.

Leave refused.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Allan Labor government's $6.3 billion Big Housing Build, the largest investment in social and affordable housing in Victoria's history, delivering thousands of new homes for Victorians in need while supporting jobs in the construction sector and strengthening communities across metropolitan and regional Victoria.

Leave refused.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the former Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery for abandoning the Commonwealth Games at a cost of $589 million and further notes her failure to deliver the projects promised to rural and regional communities.

Leave refused.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (09:40): I move, by leave:

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

Leave refused.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the Victorian Liberal Party have drawn a red line around their electorates – what is left of them – and plan to shove housing anywhere but there. Their only plan is to get rid of housing choice.

Leave refused.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Wendouree for backing a botched Commonwealth Games that has now failed to deliver the Miners Rest sports facility for the Ballarat local community.

Leave refused.

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

That this house notes the Allan Labor government's planning reforms to unlock housing supply, including activity centres near transport hubs, housing targets for councils and faster planning approvals, recognising

that building more homes in well-located areas will support affordable and sustainable growth for Victoria's growing population.

Leave refused.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Greens political party for their ongoing opposition to delivering new homes for all Victorians, just like the Liberals, while claiming to be the party of renters.

Leave refused.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Housing and Building for abandoning the Commonwealth Games at a cost of $589 million and further notes her failure to deliver the affordable housing projects promised to local communities.

Leave refused.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Geelong for backing the botched Commonwealth Games plan, which has failed to deliver the Waurn Ponds sporting facility for the people of Geelong and has left the local community worse off.

Leave refused.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bendigo East for backing the botched Commonwealth Games at a cost of $589 million, which has left the people of Bendigo without the promised Bendigo Croquet Club upgrade.

Leave refused.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Ripon for backing a botched Commonwealth Games that has now failed to deliver the Miners Rest sports facility for Ballarat locals.

Leave refused.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for botching the Commonwealth Games, which has left my constituents in Morwell without the promised housing legacy from the proposed athlete village build.

Leave refused.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Police for failing to provide adequate funds to the Colac police station to enable repair of the broken front door that has closed the police station and left the public of Colac vulnerable.

Leave refused.

Members statements

Women's Asian Cup

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (09:44): There has been a lot going on the last couple of weeks in Ashwood, but can I just first say – I reckon I have got bipartisan support here – how good were the Tillies last night? That little piece of play from Carpenter to Fowler to Foord for the first goal – amazing. Then following that – I do not know how Sam Kerr threaded that needle – the through ball from Foord was just beautiful to watch. The home of the Matildas is Melbourne – there you go.

Suburban Rail Loop

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (09:44): The Suburban Rail Loop has had a bit of news in the last week. Infrastructure Australia have – go figure – realised it is a good thing, so that is fantastic to hear.

Members interjecting.

Matt FREGON: Well, we did know. We have known for about eight years. It is on time and on budget, by the way, people on the other side. The tunnel-boring machines are at Burwood, and they are coming together very nicely. I was down there with the minister just the other week, with our good friends from the *Herald Sun*. Those TBMs have been named after some very, very special and important women. The one that was named by the wonderful people at Essex Heights Primary School is named after Bich Cam Nguyen. She is the founder and CEO of the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association, which grew to be the largest Vietnamese community organisation in Victoria under her leadership. Cam is passionate about a harmonious and inclusive Australia.

Brittany Mitchell and Corey Bennett

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:45): I want to acknowledge two exceptional young people in Yea who saved the life of a person who had suffered a heart attack: Brittany Mitchell and Corey Bennett. Ron suffered a heart attack and family friend Brittany Mitchell called 000 and swung into action, administering CPR. Long story, but after maybe 16 or 20 minutes a defib arrived and 23-year-old Corey Bennett, a CFA volunteer and ambulance community officer, arrived too. Corey responded to the call on the GoodSAM app and was calm and in control using the defib. After 26 minutes Ron came through. Brittany said she was pumping good energy out and praised Corey for his work. The life was saved before the ambulance arrived; it came from Seymour not Yea, which ordinarily would have been the case. However, during the Longwood fires, ambulance officers in the Murrindindi shire were directed away from the shire to work out of Mitchell.

Tri Active Life

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:46): Tri Active Life in Marysville has really taken off. What started out as Tri Gym, with a handful of members looking for a bit of health and fitness, has now become a feature of local life. In five years they have come a long way, and they had a reason for a celebratory afternoon tea last Friday. They now have a dedicated gym space downstairs in the Marysville Community Centre to call their own. And this was not your regular afternoon tea. Guests got to taste what is on offer: weight training, pickleball, step classes, tai chi and linedancing. I am sure a cup of tea was only earned after the group linedance at the end. I have to commend Gail Dollimore for her role inspiring others.

Middle East conflict

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (09:47): It is common to hear people talk about the conflict in the Middle East and the horror we all feel at the oppression, displacement and killing of innocent civilians. Often when people do that they are referring to Israel or Gaza or the West Bank or Lebanon or more recently Iran. But there has been very significant violence elsewhere, notably in Syria, where hundreds of thousands of people have been killed during the prolonged civil war and the subsequent takeover by Ahmed al-Sharaa and the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham group. I would like to thank Jim, Rasha, Karl and all the team at the Alawi Islamic Social Centre in Keon Park for putting on a wonderful iftar last week, but I know their community continue to suffer due to that violence in Syria and I reiterate our calls for the protection of minorities and innocent lives.

Italia Limosani

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (09:48): I would also like to raise an issue on behalf of Tony Limosani, who asked if the government could consider ways of formally recognising those who passed away during the peak COVID restrictions and were unable to have their loved ones by their sides. We will follow that up, but I just wanted to take this moment to specifically recognise Tony's mother Italia

Limosani, who was born in Italy – in Lazio, I believe – but was a longstanding member of the Regent community in Reservoir and who passed away in November 2021 in those difficult circumstances.

Emma McGrath

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (09:48): Finally, I would like to recognise Emma McGrath of FKA Children's Services for her longstanding contribution to Victoria's early childhood language program and to our wonderful, multilingual, multicultural, inclusive and diverse kindergarten services.

Birralee Primary School

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (09:48): Recently I was speaking to parents from Birralee Primary School. Birralee is in Doncaster. Its student population has risen from 160 in 2013. It is now, 10 years or so later, more than 600. The school has had very little in the way of facilities upgrades in that time. The school is desperate for a gymnasium or a hall where the children can meet under cover indoors. They have approached the local Labor upper house member and been told that unless they are in a growth area or the western suburbs, they have no chance of any funding of the $2 million they have asked for as a state contribution to enclose a facility for those now 600 children to be able to meet in an environment protected from the weather.

I point out Birralee Primary in particular because Birralee is just a few hundred metres up the road from the North East Link. Two million dollars is what they are after, but just down the road, as people in this chamber will know, we have seen more than $15 billion rorted by the CFMEU and union leadership under the guise, under the watch, of the current Labor government, who cannot find $2 million to help students out at Birralee Primary where the population has gone from 160 to 600 in a decade. They are allowing $15 billion to be rorted by their union buddies on the North East Link, and they are not getting the money back.

Jim Spanswick

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (09:50): I rise to condole the loss of Jim Spanswick, loved husband of Hannah, a professional and compassionate paramedic and a committed trade unionist. When Hannah met Jim, he was a paramedic and Hannah was working at the Alfred hospital emergency department. She recalls how she was working in an incredibly busy ward with two other junior nurses, and Jim helped out. Indeed, he went above and beyond, and Hannah spoke about his obvious kindness. In fact after caring for patients and then transporting them to hospital, Jim would often return to see how they were. That was what impressed Hannah about Jim when she met him: his kindness and his willingness to help out.

I know the member for Melton also worked with Jim, but I wanted to express how much his career as a paramedic meant to him and his concern for his patients and people in his care. Jim was on duty during the Russell Street bombings and transported patients who were victims that day to the Royal Melbourne Hospital, and he was on duty during Ash Wednesday. Importantly, Jim supported Hannah and all of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation nurses during their strike action in 1986. He served in Nunawading as an assistant station manager and then at South Melbourne just before his retirement. After he retired, he often wondered how his patients were.

I want to read and have recorded into *Hansard* what the member for Melton wrote to me upon learning of Jim's passing.

> Jim was a fantastic person and a wonderful paramedic that started with Ambulance Victoria in 1974 and was great to work with.

Jim was born in the Shetland Islands. He passed away in Melbourne. I was very proud to have him in my community. Vale, Jim Spanswick.

Mildura basketball

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:51): Today I want to recognise the under-14 girls Mildura Heat basketball team, who were division 1 winners at the recent South Australian Country Basketball Championships. Basketball is strong and thriving in Sunraysia, as is women's sport, and I am so proud of all of them but particularly this team, as my cousin Stella Ficarra – I should not say 'little cousin', because she is nearly taller than me now – is turning into quite the basketballer. Well done, ladies.

Willow's Walkers

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:52): I also want to recognise a beautiful organisation in Sunraysia, Willow's Walkers, who were recently awarded the Donna Shaw Volunteer of the Year Award. The Donna Shaw Volunteer of the Year Award recognises individuals who make an outstanding voluntary contribution to supporting children and families. It celebrates dedication, compassion and the real impact volunteers have on their communities, and we know this only too well in the regions. It recognises those volunteers, especially in helping to improve access and opportunities for kids who need extra support, and Willow's Walkers supports kids and families with cerebral palsy.

Lifeline Loddon Mallee

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:53): Lastly, the Lifeline ride was held on Sunday, the biggest ever, with 192 bikes registered to raise money for mental health and Lifeline Loddon Mallee, because we need support in the regions now more than ever, with the pressure continually being put on those in the regions by this Labor government.

International Day to Combat Islamophobia

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (09:53): Last weekend, on 15 March, communities around the world marked the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, a day that serves as an important reminder of the need for respect, understanding and solidarity between people of all faiths and backgrounds. This year's day of recognition came during the holy month of Ramadan, a time of reflection, generosity and compassion observed by Muslims right across the world. Ramadan is a period when communities gather, families share meals and people focus on acts of kindness, charity and spiritual renewal. These values are ones that resonate far beyond any single faith. As the member for Tarneit, I have had the privilege of representing one of the most vibrant and diverse communities anywhere in Victoria. Tarneit is home to a large and proud Islamic community, and over the years I have had the opportunity to meet with local families, community leaders and faith groups who contribute so much to life in the area.

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia is an opportunity to reflect on the importance of standing against prejudice and discrimination in all of its forms. This date holds deep significance for Muslims around the world. It marks the anniversary of the Christchurch tragedy, where innocent worshippers were targeted solely because of their faith. Moments like this remind us why it is so important to speak clearly in support of dignity, inclusion and mutual respect. Strong communities are built on the simple principle that everybody deserves to feel safe and valued. As Ramadan approaches its conclusion in coming weeks, it leaves us with a message both simple and powerful of patience, generosity and kindness towards others.

Mental health

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:54): In 2023 the then Minister for Mental Health announced mental health and wellbeing locals for Horsham, Hamilton and Ararat. Yet three years later there is no sign of any funding flowing, no buildings are being planned and most importantly there is no indication that there is any improved access to mental health supports. Our region has never needed access to mental health supports more than we do at the moment. Whether it is areas that have been hit by drought or the bushfire impacts – whether it is the Grampians bushfires, the Little Desert bushfires or more recently the Natimuk, Noradjuha, Quantong, Streatham and Skipton bushfires – we simply need

more support. We have also of course got the local impact of the fallout of the Allan Labor government's appalling engagement around key projects. Whether it is about VNI West, whether it is about the renewables rollout or whether it is about mining, the appalling consultation legislation brought through that has taken away the voice of local people and mistreated local people is just causing so much harm to people's mental health. This has been exacerbated by rising fuel costs and the impact on supply of diesel across our region. Every Victorian household is feeling this but even more so are our Victorian farmers. They are not hoarding fuel; they are planning for the upcoming seeding and spraying season and the harvest later in the year. They are using this fuel to feed stock. They need fuel because no fuel means no food.

Ballan Autumn Festival

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (09:56): Last weekend our wonderful township of Ballan came alive for the Ballan Autumn Festival, and what a magnificent weekend it was, with beautiful sunshine overhead and visitors flowing into town. The streets were full of colour, music and community spirit. The parade is always a highlight, and judging it is never easy, but it is great fun. The creativity on display was fantastic. This year the overall winner was a very deserving group, our emergency services, recognised by the crowd for the extraordinary work they do for our community every day. A particularly touching entry came from Norma and Bert Jarvis, who won most original for celebrating their remarkable 70th wedding anniversary, a beautiful milestone that brought smiles all along the parade route. Gordon Primary School took out best school with their joyful display of twirling umbrellas. Best community group went to the energetic Renegade Bootscooters. A shout-out also goes to the Gordon Ukestra, winners of best entertainers. I want to acknowledge the fantastic evening hosted on Friday by the Ballan chamber of commerce, led by president Laura Sims, but really a huge congratulations to all of the Ballan Autumn Festival's small but incredibly dedicated group of volunteers, who make this event possible every year.

Community Bank Highett

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:57): I want to congratulate the Highett Community Bank branch, who this year turned 25 years of age. Of course 80 per cent of their profits have been returned to the community, and over the 25 years that equates to $3.95 million invested in our community. I want to acknowledge Guireh, the branch manager, and the board.

Sandringham electorate schools

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:58): I want to welcome new principals to the Sandringham district: at Beaumaris North Primary School Julia Stoppa – I was pleased to meet with Julia and some student leaders just recently – and at St Agnes's Catholic primary school in Highett Tom Hartney. I recently spoke at one of their assemblies and encouraged every student to be a leader, and to be a leader of course you simply need to do something good for someone else without expecting anything in return.

Prahran electorate schools

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:58): I would like to acknowledge the outstanding member for Prahran, who is in the chamber at the moment, for inviting me to attend some of her local schools as the Shadow Minister for Education. I visited Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School in Prahran East, and I visited Melbourne High School with the member for Prahran in South Yarra just recently. I am looking forward to continuing to support the member for Prahran, who is a very strong and enthusiastic advocate for her local schools and school communities

Top Arts 2026

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:59): I want to acknowledge Amelia Bull from Mentone Grammar, Dylan Hopkins from Sandringham College and Cassian Walker from Mentone Grammar.

Of 1100 entrants in Top Arts 2026, there were 40 displayed and three were from our district. I want to thank them and congratulate them for their achievements.

Julie Buxton

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (09:59): It is all happening at Boronia station, as I have said in here dozens and dozens of times. The two businesses that we have acquired have been demolished, and construction is well and truly underway for the new landscaped plaza, a direct connection from Dorset Road straight into a new and upgraded Boronia station. We have just had the Minister for Transport Infrastructure out, and she saw how amazing it is going to be. Thank you so much to the minister, to the Level Crossing Removal Project and obviously to the new candidate for Bayswater Julie Buxton, who has been out recently checking works onsite. Thanks to every single local who absolutely made this possible and made it happen. I cannot wait to see progress continue.

It was also great to get out with Julie Buxton, the candidate for Bayswater, to Wattle View Primary School and Dillbadin Primary School in Ferntree Gully and Boronia. At Wattle View we saw the wonderful principal there, Tracy Wright, saw the new upgraded toilets and the wonderful work they are doing there. At Dillbadin Primary School, a school that I was very proud this government delivered, we saw a new student learning building too. They have just got some new funding – quite a substantial amount of maintenance funding. The principal there Penelope Harris is doing fantastic work. It was great to get Julie along to hear about the fantastic work – Julie Buxton, the candidate for Bayswater, a great friend of mine. She is doing great.

It was also great to have Julie Buxton come along to Knox InfoLink recently, where we have delivered the Boronia breakfast program, supporting people who need it most. Julie is out and about and she is doing great work. I will tell you what, it is a pleasure to support her.

Middle East conflict

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (10:01): Australia is now involved in yet another war of American aggression, this time Trump and Netanyahu's war – an illegal war that is spiralling further and further out of control. Australians did not want to be involved in this war, but now it affects all of us. So many Victorians have friends and family in Lebanon, Iran or neighbouring countries and are terrified for their lives. We are also affected by rising prices due to war and that sense of fear and instability, not to mention the huge human, moral and environmental cost of war. Let us be clear: war does not keep us safe; in fact it does the opposite. War endangers us all and has far-reaching implications, many of which we cannot predict right now. This is why the Greens stand for peace and nonviolence – because we have seen far too many times what happens when we follow America into wars like this. History shows us violence begets violence; war begets war. But the most infuriating question is: why is a Labor government tethering itself to the irrational, egotistical actions of Donald Trump when he has shown complete disregard for how his actions endanger all of us? Grow a backbone, Labor. We should be standing up to Trump, not jumping at his every command. And the most disgusting part is now we have shut the door on refugees.

International Women's Day

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (10:02): I would like to take this moment to acknowledge International Women's Day, which was fantastic in my electorate last week, celebrating all the incredible women. I had girls and women attend my morning tea events from schools across the Laverton electorate. I would like to personally thank Caroline Chisholm Catholic College, a great local school, as well as Bemin Secondary College, another great local high school, for hosting us. In particular I would like to give a shout-out to the students from Sunshine College who have advocated to me for sports bras to be included as approved items under the state schools relief program.

The theme of this year's International Women's Day was 'Balance the scales', and here in Victoria that is not just a slogan; it is something we are putting into practice, whether it is supporting victim-survivors through restricting NDAs, banning good-character references in sexual assault cases or even

simply expanding court services across Victoria, like what we are doing with the Wyndham law courts, and we are also making incredible progress in improving access to justice for Victorian women. In areas like women's health we are making incredible strides to support women with health conditions unique to them, like menopause and endometriosis, which we have done through setting up women's health hubs and through our landmark inquiry into women's pain. And of course there is our working-from-home policy, which is in many ways about giving families and particularly women greater flexibility and economic opportunity to be able to juggle the work–life balance that makes life easier. There are so many ways we are acting in this space to not only believe in but advance gender equality in Victoria.

Community safety

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (10:04): I rise today to highlight several issues affecting residents and visitors around Melbourne's central business district. While the CBD remains the beating heart of our city, many constituents are increasingly concerned about the day-to-day impacts on safety, accessibility and amenity. Over the past year and a half Melbourne has experienced more than 70 consecutive weekends of protests. While the right to peaceful protest is fundamental in a democracy, the cumulative impact of ongoing disruptions cannot be ignored.

One of my constituents, Colleen, recently contacted my office, deeply frustrated. Colleen relies on access to her local swimming and gym facilities, as recommended by her doctor to manage her health conditions, yet repeated road closures and transport disruptions have meant that on many weekends she simply cannot get to and from these essential activities. For Colleen and others like her this is not just an inconvenience; it directly affects their wellbeing.

There are also broader concerns about the amenity of our CBD. While the City of Melbourne works tirelessly to remove graffiti and tagging, the scale and frequency of vandalism continues to undermine the appearance of our streets and public spaces. Along the heart of the banks of the Yarra River, particularly around Princes Bridge and Flinders Street station, constituents have raised disturbing reports of erosion and environmental neglect, including used syringes being washed up along the riverbanks. These are not conditions we should be putting up with.

St Kilda Sports Club

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (10:05): I am very happy to say that it was a delight to attend the St Kilda Sports Club, aka the bowlo, for their International Women's Day event. It was a glorious event. I must reflect on the fact that the bowlo was built back in 1865, but it was only in 2001 that women were allowed to play pennant level bowls. It was not easy at first; it was quite a fight. The event was wonderful, because they had invited some of the women who were part of that evolution of the club. I have to say that today it is a truly inclusive club. It is more than being just about the bowls, although they are quite competitive. It is also very much about social connections. Hats off to Tommy and everyone at the club. It was a wonderful day, and it is a wonderful club.

St Kilda Park Primary School

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (10:06): I want to salute St Kilda Park Primary School. They had their fete at the weekend, and I was happy to support the dunking machine, which meant I had to be dunked. Fair's fair, and that was fine. Principal Neil, vice-principal Jac and a whole lot of teachers also were dunked, so hats off to them. It was a terrific event. I think they had dodgeball, there were sustainable cups – people were washing the cups while we were there to make sure that the event lived up to their environmental standards – lots of rides, music and a silent auction. It was fantastic. All the parent volunteers contribute so much, all because they love their kids and they want the school to thrive.

Ripon electorate cultural events

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (10:07): Over the past fortnight I have had the privilege of attending some remarkable community events that truly reflect the heart and soul of our region. On Saturday 7 March I joined the Ararat community for a beautiful iftar dinner at the Gordon Street Recreation Reserve. It was a night filled with generosity, reflection and the powerful spirit of togetherness that defines Ramadan. We came together not just to share a meal, but to honour the incredible contribution the local Muslim community makes to Ararat every day. Thank you to my friends at the Ararat Islamic Welfare Association for creating such a meaningful evening, in particular Altaf Hussain, Muhammad Hanif, Manzoor Mian, Fahim Ahmad Farooq and Faraz Ahmad.

This past weekend I was fortunate to join a spectacular Holi celebration in Lucas, hosted by the Ballarat Indian Association. Hundreds of locals came together to embrace the Festival of Colours. It was pure joy and a living, breathing expression of multiculturalism at its best. My heartfelt thanks to president Ashish Kakaan, past president Elangovan Shanmugam, vice-president Manoj Khandelwal, treasurer Rakesh Patel, secretary Geetha Stephen and events coordinator Kavita Sangwan. Each of you helps make Ballarat a better place.

Let me be clear: racism and hate have no place in Victoria. The state Labor government stands firmly with Victorians of every faith, culture and background. Our diversity is our greatest strength, and we are committed to building a safer, more inclusive and more secure Victoria for all.

Dandenong Ranges Open Studios

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:08): Autumn is here, and that means the return of some great local creative arts events across the hills. I was thrilled to officially open the annual Dandenong Ranges Open Studios group exhibition *Continuum* last Thursday night at Burrinja Cultural Centre. This launched the much-loved and eagerly anticipated open studios weekends held over two weekends. Starting this Saturday and ending on Sunday 29 March, 47 artists studios will be open to the public, completely free of charge. The Dandenong Ranges has long been renowned for the abundance of artists calling this place home, and we are the richer for their vibrant talents, nestled in amongst our beautiful landscape. It is a wonderful opportunity to go behind the scenes and see how artists use their talents to create their works. I am delighted that Burrinja last year received $400,000 over the next four years through our state government's creative enterprises program. This will help this incredible venue continue to thrive and be the cultural heart of the Dandenong Ranges.

The Basin Music Festival

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:09): In further arts news, the hugely popular The Basin Music Festival returns this weekend, from 6 pm Friday until 9 pm Sunday night. Punters can get down there to The Basin and listen to a whole range of music acts across several venues. You are invited too, Deputy Speaker.

Monbulk Car Show

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:09): A different type of art will also come to Monbulk in the form of cars. The Monbulk Car Show returns this Sunday, raising money for the Monbulk, Macclesfield and Kallista–The Patch CFA brigades. What a great way to support local brigades and appreciate the great cars that line up to take part.

International Women's Day

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:10): I had the absolute pleasure of hosting and celebrating women in Narre Warren North, where we organise a high tea for International Women's Day. It was wonderful to spend time celebrating women with women, sharing stories, experiences and discussing what truly matters to them. A huge thankyou to our amazing panel – Kit McMahon, the chief executive officer for Women's Health in the Southeast; Judy Martin, CEO of the Andrews Centre in Endeavour Hills; and Dragana Borojevic, acting sergeant at the Endeavour Hills police station –

three amazing women with one shared objective: to help and support those who need it most. I am really proud to represent such a remarkable area filled with inspiring women. As Judy Martin beautifully quoted Mother Teresa at the end of our session, give your hands to serve and your heart to love.

Ramadan

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:11): I have been very blessed for the last month to be invited to many iftars in my electorate. One standout was that organised by the Uniting Church and the Ahmadiyya Mosque, who brought together all members of faith in our community. It was great to see everyone sharing an incredible meal together and joining to share stories about different faiths. Unfortunately the topic of racism came up, which we have no room for in the seat of Narre Warren North. I also want to give a huge shout-out to everyone that is – *(Time expired)*

David Leydon

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:11): Comrades, almost 10 years to the day ago David Leydon and the ASU led Maurice Blackburn and the team there on industrial action. A historic moment, something that has never happened before. Last month this true legend of the union movement retired from my union, the Australian Services Union, the private sector branch in Victoria. He had provided 38 years of service dedicated to working people and the protection of their rights at work. He started after the union was one. He started there as a delegate, later serving as an industrial officer. He went on to become assistant branch secretary and since 2018 has been the branch president. In nearly four decades of service he has been a steadfast and passionate advocate for members of this great union.

Many on this side of the house will know David – I see the nods around this room. He is fierce. He is principled. He is principled in his defence of workers. He has never wavered in standing up for fairness, dignity and respect in our workplaces. David represents the very best of our labour movement, a tireless champion of working people, a true believer in the light on the hill. He has mentored generations of activists into union leaders, including the leaders of the ASU private sector branch today. Workers in this state are better off because of his leadership, his integrity and his unwavering commitment to justice at work. I wish him the best for his retirement, for more time with his wife Sarah and grandson Archie, who I predict is a future Australian cricketer – guaranteed.

Sunbury electorate schools

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (10:13): It was terrific to join students at St Anne's Primary School and Diggers Rest Primary School last week to discuss civics and citizenship. I want to thank those schools and those students for their contributions and for having me along on the day. I also want to acknowledge Gladstone Park Secondary students that are visiting the Parliament this week, and a shout-out to the $11.7 million investment at that terrific school. I know how hard the students and teachers work, and I want to acknowledge that as well.

SunFest

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (10:13): It was also terrific to be able to attend SunFest – 50 years of our great local community festival – to see stalls, fantastic weather, people out and about, enjoying all things that are great about our community. It was absolutely outstanding to speak to so many local residents about this Labor government's investment in schools and roads, public transport and things that make our community great. I want to acknowledge all the volunteers that have put in such hard yards to make that festival a wonderful festival.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Environment and Planning Committee

Employers and Contractors Who Refuse to Pay Their Subcontractors for Completed Works

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:14): The report I would like to speak on today is *Employers and Contractors Who Refuse to Pay Their Subcontractors for Completed Works*. This report was handed down in November 2023, and can I say since this report was handed down I have had a concern with a subcontractor who was working for a contractor at Cobram Primary School in my home town. The SD Group were engaged by Zauner Construction, and my understanding is that their reputation precedes them, Zauner Construction, about their ability or willingness to pay subcontractors. Last year the SD Group, who did the work – the subcontractor – issued an invoice for $205,942.49. This was last year, and I spoke to managing director and owner Graham Solbrandt yesterday. He said they still have not been paid a cent, and that is quite concerning. They still have not been paid as a subcontractor. On the back of that I wrote to the current Deputy Premier in his capacity as Minister for Education with my concerns, and he wrote back to me saying:

> However, while the department understands and empathises with this situation, they have advised that any claim for payment by SD Group is required to be pursued under the terms of the sub-contract between SD Group and Zauner. The department is not a party to this sub-contract.

That stresses me, the fact that the government can just wash their hands of it and say, 'We've appointed a contractor, but we take no further responsibility whether that contractor pays the subcontractor.' If the government are not going to appoint contractors who will pay their bills, clearly they need to change their policy, because just saying they are not a party to this contract is not good enough. SD Group are on the brink of financial ruin. This $200,000 is really biting them. As I say, it is nearly 12 months since that invoice was issued. Surely the department should make some effort to make sure that subcontractors get paid or else make sure that that contractor who took the job on does not get a job again.

I just want to mention a couple of the recommendations that are in this report. Recommendation 2:

> The new provision should enable contractors to claim a progress payment calculated in accordance with a contract or, if the contract does not provide for the matter, calculated on the basis of the value of construction work carried out.

Again, this was done in 2023, and we are not seeing progress payments going ahead for the SD Group. Recommendation 6:

> The new provision should provide that the *Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Regulations 2023* (Vic) may prohibit unfair construction contractual clauses …

Certainly recommendation 8:

> on the date set by the terms of the contract, subject to the payment term not exceeding 25 business days after the payment claim has been made …

We are talking back in May last year, when the subcontractor issued an invoice for $205,000-odd, and now with the 25-business-day period well expired – as I say, it will not be long before it will be 12 months – that subcontractor has not been paid. It is fair to say there is no will by the contractor Zauner to pay. But what concerns me more is the lack of will of the government to make sure that this wrong gets righted. At the moment it is quite unfair for subcontractors, and if we continue down this path, who is going to want to work for the government? Who will put up their hand as a subcontractor if they are not sure that they are going to get paid? We have certainly seen the rorts, and I am not going to go into that, with the CFMEU. But here is another example of the government just not taking responsibility in a construction zone where a subcontractor has done their job, done it fairly and has not got paid. I just appeal to the government. In the few months that they do have left in government they should consider cleaning up their own mess, because it is important that subcontractors who work on government projects get paid.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:19): I rise again to make a further contribution on the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's report on the inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. It is why I continue to draw the Minister for Roads and Road Safety's and the Parliament's attention – and the Minister for Public and Active Transport's, who is in the chamber – to the 61 findings and 56 recommendations set out in the report to help make our local roads and streets safer. In this respect I draw the house's attention to finding 33:

> Accessible tram stops can act as a traffic calming measure and reduce the risk of pedestrians being struck by a motor vehicle when boarding or alighting a tram.

Recommendation 23:

> The Department of Transport and Planning prioritise the delivery of accessible tram stops.

And recommendation 24:

> The Department of Transport and Planning develop and implement mechanisms to detect, penalise and deter motorists driving past stopped trams when passengers are boarding and alighting.

At page 137 the report goes on to say:

> The Committee received several submissions that voiced concerns about the conflict faced by pedestrians when drivers do not stop at tram stops as passengers are boarding or alighting trams. For example, one submission reported the following safety concern:
>
> > The prevalence of cars speeding past trams while their doors are open. I do not take a single daytime trip on the number 19 tram without seeing this happen. I'm legitimately in fear for my life stepping off the tram and always pop my head out to check if there is a car failing to give way. I've seen several people almost hit and I've even had people just slowly drive past trying to nudge me out of the way while I am in the middle of the road. My observations are that it's a diverse selection of drivers …

Again, on page 137:

> … accessible tram stops, which have raised platforms to give level access to wheelchairs –

and others with mobility issues and needs –

> can act as a traffic calming measure.

A 2016 study of the impact of raised platforms at Melbourne tram stops on pedestrian safety found an 81 per cent reduction in crashes involving pedestrians and an 86 per cent reduction in crashes resulting in fatal or serious injuries for pedestrians. The Victorian government was working – and this is all in the report – towards making all tram stops accessible by 31 December 2022. However, this has not been achieved to date. A 2020 report by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office stated that this target could not be realistically met with the current pipeline, and in 2023, 28 per cent of Melbourne's tram stops were accessible. VAGO found it would take until 2066 to make all tram stops accessible at the pre-2020 rate of delivery. In September 2023 the Department of Transport and Planning stated that it had delivered 83 accessible tram stops and had a further 24 stops in delivery. Page 101 talks about:

> Some submissions also called for cameras to be used on the tram network to detect vehicles that do not stop for passengers to board or alight trams at designated stops.

In this respect I urge the government to continue prioritising the role of accessible tram stops and accessible stops through key and strategic corridors and locations in close consultation throughout my community, including along route 58, Melville Road; route 6, Moreland Road; route 1, Nicholson Street; and in particular route 19 along Sydney Road. This is especially important as we work to provide new accessible tram stops along Sydney Road through Brunswick and Coburg.

Prior to the level crossing removal works commencing on the Upfield line through Brunswick, the Auditor-General identified in 2018–19 that North Coburg's route 19 was found to provide for 71 per

cent of low-floor tram departures but only 14 per cent of level-access stops. However, there are only two accessible tram stops along Sydney Road through Coburg and Brunswick. One is at the end of the line in North Coburg, Sydney Road at the top of Bakers Road, and the other is around the Brunswick Road–Park Street sort of precinct down in Brunswick. In this respect I draw the house's attention to an email from a local constituent, Daniel, who lives in Central Coburg and the Pentridge precinct, which I think best encapsulates these issues and challenges. He said:

> I live in the Pentridge precinct in Coburg just off Sydney Rd, within the Merri-bek Council.
>
> I've read that the Upfield train line will be shut down for 3+ months in 2030 due to the LXRP train station upgrades in Brunswick.
>
> I'm hugely supportive of this, as my local station in Coburg was similarly upgraded a few years ago – the new elevated Coburg station is incredible and fully wheelchair accessible.
>
> My request is that you please plan to upgrade route 19 tram stops along Sydney Rd to be wheelchair accessible prior to 2030.
>
> This way, wheelchair users like myself will still be able to get to the city while the Upfield train is shutdown for 3+ months.
>
> Currently, the Upfield train line is the only wheelchair accessible form of PT that conveniently gets me to the city, where I study at RMIT. And overcrowded 'accessible' replacement busses are not always wheelchair accessible from my experience during previous LXRP train shutdowns.
>
> Upgrading the tram stops would be useful and worth making accessible even without the train line shutdown. I, and any other person with accessibility needs, would be able to get a tram from Pentridge to Coburg market or Brunswick.
>
> And the tram stop is only 100 metres away from my unit compared to the 900 metres for the train station (I'm sure you can appreciate 900 metres is a significant distance in a wheelchair).
>
> An accessible tram line on Sydney Rd would make short trips within Merri-bek far more convenient, helping me engage within my local community a lot more, while the train will remain more ideal for medium-long trips …
>
> Thank you for all your efforts in advancing public transport and accessibility in our area, particularly with the recent station upgrades in Coburg and Moreland. I look forward to hearing any further plans to make our tram network, particularly … accessible …

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:24): I am going to make a contribution on the 2025–26 budget estimates reported by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in October last year. I am going to talk about two sections. Firstly, I am going to talk about Victoria's container deposit scheme in section 9.4.1 and the findings and recommendations there. I am very pleased that the relevant minister is in the shadow to listen to me once again raising issues about the container deposit scheme. Finding 71 outlines the number of refund sites, 640, that have been established across Victoria, and 1.8 billion containers have been deposited, which means $180 million has been provided to charities, individuals and organisations throughout the state.

In my area people have taken to this with a passion. In fact we have had millions and millions of containers deposited across the electorate. I want to specify a couple of areas where people have taken to this with a passion and reduced litter very much, which is one of the recommendations: recording how much the scheme has actually reduced litter. It has reduced litter – people tell me that all of the time; it is visibly obvious. We have had a couple of issues with Smiths Gully being very difficult, the Eildon container deposit return point and the egg farm in Yarra Junction. For some reason the Eildon container deposit scheme, which needed to be moved, was unable to be approved at a new and better location, and the community was in uproar about this. What does this mean? What has actually happened now? People are hoarding, and that is not a good outcome. They are waiting to know whether a new venue will be approved, because what did happen was they found a location, Visy said, 'No, that's not going to happen. We're not going to approve that,' and in the next breath advertised in

the local paper for new locations. They applied again, and Visy said, 'No, we're full.' That just was not right.

People have been hoarding, and they are waiting. An example was given to me of a little kid who came up to the caravan park there who was returning his containers, and he was saving for a wakeboard. It took him a while, and he actually then got enough money to be able to do this. We also have a lot of clubs and organisations who were participating in this scheme at that outlet who now are holding onto the containers, and that certainly is not a good idea. You do not want people having to drive hours and hours, which is what some people think should happen. We do not need that to happen. Volunteers do not have time to do that.

With regard to Yarra Junction, at the egg farm there were a couple of issues down there. That was a very easy location for people to drive into to drop off their containers. After it was closed Visy opened up a little shopfront, which always has one of the two outlets full or jammed, the same as the one up in Seville – people are always complaining about that. That is never going to be able to take the capacity of the millions of containers that people are collecting in the Upper Yarra. What we have seen when the machines have not been working or there is a queue, because it takes ages, is people have dumped them in the rubbish bin. This is exactly the opposite of what should happen. I urge the minister and the government to have a good look at some of these easily accessible options and make that happen.

I want to touch briefly on whole-of-government recommendations around the risk to financial sustainability, particularly recommendation 5, which says:

> The Department of Treasury and Finance create specific targets and timelines for its goal of reducing interest payments on debt as a proportion of general government sector operating revenue …

and they want them published. We have just had, on Friday 6 March, the midyear financial reports, which actually say $3.8 billion was spent on interest repayments in the past six months, up $522 million from the same period last year. What we have got is PAEC having a look at this, saying that government should document its strategy for reducing the interest payments, while at the same time the exact opposite thing is happening. What this means for us is that we have potholes in our roads that are not repaired, we have hospitals that are underfunded and we have bushfire support which is slow to happen. Because we are paying so much in interest because the government cannot manage the books, the taxpayer is losing out.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users

John LISTER (Werribee) (10:29): I rise today to speak to the inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. The reason why I have selected to speak on this committee today comes from a conversation I had with Levi and his mates down at Wyndham Park only a few days ago. Levi is a great kid. I have had the honour of looking after him at Wyndham Central College, and a lot of the kids were there on their bikes. I got chatting to them about e-bikes and some of the concerns around the safety, the monitoring and the enforcement of rules around e-bikes.

This inquiry went a little bit of the way into these electronically assisted vehicles, but I do want to make sure that as I am speaking I am using a little bit of gen Z slang to ensure that those people who may be reading this in *Hansard* – I would hope that Levi checks this out in *Hansard* – understand that yes, chat, we are cooked when it comes to safety around e-bikes. There is a lot of unsafe behaviour on our roads and in our community, and it has been identified not only anecdotally to me or through emails but also through our local police survey that gets done every year. It is one of the top crime concerns. The inquiry goes to e-scooters, which is a little bit millennial – not many gen Z ride around

on e-scooters – but to extrapolate I would like to look at some of their findings, particularly findings 46 and 47, and how they apply to both e-scooters and e-bikes. Finding 46 says that:

> Regulations have not kept up with the growing popularity of e-scooters –

and I would add, to extend to that, e-bikes –

> and the availability for purchase of e-scooters that are capable of high speeds.

I know there is a lot of work that we can do in this area. We want to see people using alternative mobility modes. It is particularly important in communities like mine for younger people to be able to get to and from work and to be able to get to and from school, but when we see kids chasing clout or aura farming by doing monos down Synnot Street on their e-bikes, it is incredibly dangerous. Members of the community have raised this with me, and in fact Levi and his mates raised this with me too in relation to some of the people that they knew of, although they did not snitch when I asked them to.

I think there are a few very important points here when it comes to e-bikes and e-scooters. We need to make sure that the community is reporting illegal behaviour when they are seeing it. The inquiry does go a little bit of a way into talking about the reporting methods and how we need to have some more promotion around those mechanisms, particularly around Crime Stoppers when it comes to road safety matters. I do endorse recommendation 16 – we have to try and develop more awareness around the avenues to report this dangerous behaviour. I would say to Levi and his mates, you can snitch anonymously by going to Crime Stoppers and reporting as much of a description of the behaviour that you saw, whether or not you knew who it was.

I have not only been a teacher and worked with a lot of these young people but I have also met some of them in much different circumstances as a rescue operator with the fire brigade. I will always remember the young man who was riding a motorbike illegally along Shaws Road, lost it and ended up with three compound fractures. I had never seen a compound fracture before that job, but to see three in a young man, 15 years old, at 1 o'clock in the morning out the front of Wyndham Central was pretty confronting.

The inquiry did briefly touch on the issue of the TAC and accident compensation not necessarily covering those injuries when you are in these circumstances. To think that this young man that we helped that night – we ended up having to get him transported to the Alfred pretty quickly – may not be able to access compensation because he was doing the wrong thing is very concerning. I think it starts from going right back to those friendship groups, to those mates that I saw down at Wyndham Park, reminding them that not only is it about reporting it to police, reporting it to adults, but it is also about talking amongst each other. There is no clout to be had in ending up strewn across the road on these e-bikes when you inevitably have an accident. There is no aura in ending up at the Alfred for months in rehab. What I would encourage people in my community to do is to continue to report it to Victoria Police so that we can follow it up through highway patrol. I thank the committee for their work in looking at this particular part of our road safety system.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (10:34): I rise this morning to make some comments about the supply of homes in regional Victoria inquiry report that was produced in November 2025. The supply of homes in regional Victoria, like the supply of homes right around the state, is in a pretty bad state at this point in time. Homes have become increasingly unaffordable, rentals are becoming in shorter supply, and the question all Victorians are asking is: why on earth, in a country so blessed with land and opportunity, is it so hard now to get a home? Relative to the position that we find ourselves in, this country is one of the highest income countries in the world per capita, and by and large we are very fortunate for where we can live and how we can operate.

This is an important inquiry that the Parliament did, but unfortunately it has not really nailed some of the issues, to my mind. I want to talk this morning specifically on the supply of homes in parts of my electorate, being the Surf Coast shire and the Colac Otway shire in particular, because between the Surf Coast and the Colac Otway shires they have the bulk of the Great Ocean Road, and in that it is one of the highest levels of short-stay accommodation available in that region. The government and this report go into some detail talking about the short-stay levy. This government unfortunately has mistakenly thought that if we charge the person more who is staying in the accommodation that will somehow be a perverse incentive to stop people staying in short-stay accommodation. Of course nothing could be further from the truth. All that effectively does is put a tax on holidays. This report highlights it too in fact, where it is referred to here as a new tax measure to help pay Homes Victoria. So the government is selling it on one hand to the community that this tax will in fact put more homes on the rental market, while this report actually identifies that the government is looking to raise around $60 million a year, which they plan to give to Homes Victoria in the hope they can build some more homes. The ability of Homes Victoria to create more homes is a debate for another day. We just note that since this report was released in November 2025 some 2000 extra families now find themselves on the homeless waiting list. Throughout this government's Big Housing Build and its endless talking about the housing crisis, it in fact continues to get worse.

We are talking about how difficult it is along my part of the world on the Great Ocean Road in Polwarth, but specifically about the effect that has on worker accommodation. So why does the housing market in that area, with a high amount of short-stay accommodation, have a problem? Is it the short-stay accommodation that has caused the problem? Or is it the tax levers that this government now pulls that are making it more difficult – or the regulatory burdens, if you like? The real estate agents and those handling properties in my region – and I have talked regularly to operators in Torquay and along the coast, from Lorne through to Apollo Bay – say there has been variously between a 30 and a 50 per cent reduction in long-term rental availability in these communities. That quite simply has come about because the government's land tax grab has continued to rise year in, year out, and this year many people saw COVID levies thrown in as well. There are many holiday homes and parcels of land that once had pretty low-cost accommodation on them that are finding themselves paying $10,000 to $50,000 per year. You just cannot recoup that sort of tax out of long-term rentals; you can only do it through short-term rentals. So what this government has essentially done is it has driven long-term housing to the short-term property market, to the short-stay accommodation market and from there it has put the levy on to create a tax. The government has used property taxes to distort the market and then take advantage of it through the short-term levy, which is a great disappointment.

For all the talk of this government and for all the effort that has gone in, and there is some quite useful information in this supply of homes in regional Victoria report, unfortunately it does not address the situation that in many parts and in other areas identified – Hepburn shire and other tourist areas – it is in fact the short-stay levy and the perverse land taxes that are driving housing affordability and supply down.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Inquiry into Fraud and Corruption Control in Local Government: A Follow up of Two Auditor-General Reports

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:39): You will be very pleased to hear that I am talking on the *Fraud and Corruption Control in Local Government: A Follow up of Two Auditor-General Reports* report. This is my third crack at this one. There is lots to be said in this report, and I look forward to enlightening this house and this chamber a little bit more on a wonderful report that goes into one of those things that affects all of us, which is local government and making sure that they have the appropriate levels of accountability built into their systems.

Just before I get to that I do want to acknowledge the PAEC report previously on tobacco and vaping controls and the wonderful announcement from the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor

Regulation just this week around businesses and landlords being held responsible for selling illegal tobacco in their properties and also the ability to close down those sites that are selling illegal tobacco – a real step forward, something that intersects with local government historically around their inspectors but is now being taken up by the state government inspectors, who have been doing a great deal of work, including seizing more than $5 million worth of illegal tobacco in their first month alone. So all strength to their arm, and these new laws will go some way to supporting the work that they do.

The fraud and corruption report that I speak to is a follow-up on VAGO's report 40, *Fraud and Corruption Control: Local Government* of 2019, and the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report 316, *Fraud Control Over Local Government Grants* of 2022, something that many members in this house will be very familiar with. I want to thank the other members on this committee: the member for Mildura; Michael Galea, member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region; my chamber neighbour the member for Yan Yean; Aiv Puglielli, member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region; the member for Clarinda, who I always welcome and thank for his contributions, particularly to this inquiry; and member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Richard Welch from the other place. I remind members here that there were 31 recommendations and 58 findings – real substance that the member for Clarinda and others put forward. I have acknowledged previously the chair and deputy chair as appropriate. The deputy chair made a contribution to this report in her three months as deputy chair of PAEC, and we hope that the new deputy chair the member for Hawthorn makes a similar weighty contribution.

Recommendation 8, which is an important one that I thought the deputy chair may be interested in, is that:

> Local Government Victoria … undertake or commission a risk assessment for shared services across Councils …

particularly related to communications technology. Smaller councils, those councils who do not cover particularly significant populations but often cover very wide regions, do not always have the resources to put into their IT services. I know the deputy chair's background in IT and probably his view, and I do not want to put words in his mouth, but my view is that IT security is important but you do not really notice it until it goes wrong. Then it goes from important to a whole lot of concerns that are shared by community members, particularly where local councils hold a lot of information about members of our community.

I am just looking at the time, and I will jump forward in a moment, but I would like to speak to recommendation 19, which is that the Victorian government seek to amend the privacy and data protection laws. This follows on from the previous recommendation in making sure that there are specific efforts to make sure that privacy and data protection is in place, because it is not easy for smaller councils representing some thousands of people to have them in line, and it is important that councils share those services. They absolutely should share those services that are at the back end of council operations.

I am just going to step forward a little bit. I know I will be back on this one, but recommendation 14 is that:

> The Victorian Government consider making changes that increase the level of detail provided by Councils in their budgets …

For anyone who has looked at a budget before – and others have described it in this way – it is like the profit and loss statement of a milk bar. They really do not give you any detail whatsoever. We had line items in budgets from councils of multibillions of dollars – $3 billion or $4 billion – with no description of what they were there for. The state government does not do this. We do detailed analysis of our budget and public reporting on the line items that we are going to spend. Local council must do it. They should adopt it straightaway, because citizens can and should know where their money is being spent.

Bills

Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026

Statement of compatibility

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (10:45): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026 (the **Bill**).

In my opinion, the Bill, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I have this opinion for the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

The primary features of the legislative scheme provided for in this Bill are:

- to reform and improve the administration and regulation of the building and plumbing industries;
- to strengthen the enforcement of building and plumbing standards and support effective disciplinary processes for registered building practitioners, licenced building employees, endorsed building engineers and licensed and registered plumbers;
- to establish the Building and Plumbing Commission and associated regulatory entities;
- to establish the Building Appeals Tribunal;
- to impose levies in relation to work requiring a building permit;
- to make consequential and related amendments to the *Building Act 1993* (**Building Act**); and
- to make consequential and other amendments to related Acts.

The Bill provides that the objective of the building system, which includes the building and plumbing industries and the building system regulators, is to promote and protect the health and safety of building occupants and the public. This objective is to be achieved through design, construction, installation, commissioning, testing and maintenance work that is consistent with building and plumbing standards and building legislation and is overseen by robust building system regulators (clause 6). A person, in performing a function or exercising a power under building legislation, must have regard to this objective, as well as any relevant entity-specific objective (clause 11).

The importance of the Bill

The new legislative scheme established by this Bill is designed to strengthen Victoria's building regulatory system with the aim of producing a safer, more transparent and more accountable building system in Victoria. It establishes a new administrative framework that introduces a stronger, integrated and more efficient building regulator, while also enhancing the regulatory powers that underpin the system.

Establishment of an overarching legislative framework

A key feature of the Bill is the establishment of an overarching legislative framework. By consolidating and unifying what are currently discrete pieces of building legislation, the Bill aims to simplify primary legislation for the building and plumbing sectors and improve efficiency across the regulatory landscape.

The Bill will deliver a coordinated and effective system for monitoring and enforcing Victoria's building legislation, ensuring clear, end-to-end accountability for building and plumbing work. This integrated approach is intended to support compliance, lift professional standards, and improve outcomes for consumers and industry participants.

Establishment of the Building and Plumbing Commission

The Bill creates the Building and Plumbing Commission (**BPC**). The BPC will be an integrated building regulator designed to be both efficient and trusted. The BPC is expected to play a foundational role in supporting the Government's housing delivery targets and rebuilding consumer confidence in Victoria's construction sector. This follows the Government's October 2024 announcement that the Victorian Building Authority (**VBA**) would be replaced by the BPC, which will also become the sole insurer for the domestic building sector for buildings three storeys and under. The BPC will operate as a one-stop-shop for building and plumbing practitioners and consumers, and will assume all functions and powers held by the VBA after

all the provisions in the *Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025* and the *Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Act 2025* take effect.

Human rights

In light of the large scope of this Bill, this Statement of Compatibility continues with an outline of the rights generally engaged by the Bill and then discusses the compatibility of relevant Parts of the Bill with those rights.

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to this Bill are as follows:

Right to* protection *from discrimination (section 8)

Section 8(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. Section 8(3) of the Charter relevantly provides that every person is entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. The purpose of this component of the right to equality is to ensure that all laws and policies are applied equally, and do not have a discriminatory effect.

'Discrimination' under the Charter is defined by reference to the definition in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (**EO Act**) on the basis of an attribute in section 6 of that Act, which relevantly includes disability and 'profession, trade or occupation'. The EO Act does not define 'profession, trade or occupation', however a fair reading would suggest that this section protects Victorians who face discrimination and stigma because of their employment. Direct discrimination occurs where a person treats, or proposes to treat, a person with an attribute unfavourably because of that attribute. Indirect discrimination occurs where a person imposes a requirement, condition or practice that has, or is likely to have, the effect of disadvantaging persons with a protected attribute, but only where that requirement, condition or practice is not reasonable. Section 9(3) of the EO Act sets out a number of factors to be considered in deciding reasonableness, which in summary are:

- the nature and the extent of the disadvantage caused;
- whether the outcome is proportionate to what the respondent sought to achieve by imposing the requirement, condition or practice;
- the costs of any alternative measures;
- the respondent's financial circumstances; and
- whether reasonable adjustments or accommodation could be made to reduce the disadvantage caused.

Freedom from forced work (section 11)

Section 11 of the Charter provides that a person must not be made to perform forced work or compulsory labour. 'Forced or compulsory labour' relevantly does not include work or service that forms part of normal civil obligations. While the Charter does not define 'normal civil obligations', comparative case law has considered that to qualify as a normal civil obligation, the work or service required must be provided for by law, must be imposed for a legitimate purpose, must not be exceptional or have any punitive purpose or effect.

Right to privacy and reputation (section 13)

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought. The right to privacy is broad in scope and encompasses rights to physical and psychological integrity, individual identity, informational privacy and the right to establish and develop meaningful social relations.

This right has been interpreted to extend to matters relating to the right to seek employment, and may be interfered with where employment restrictions impact sufficiently upon the personal relationships of the individual and otherwise upon the person's capacity to experience a private life (*ZZ v Secretary, Department of Justice* [2013] VSC 267).

Right to freedom of expression (section 15(2))

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.

However, section 15(3) provides that special duties and responsibilities attach to this right, which may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputations of others, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

Freedom of association (section 16(2))

Section 16(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of association with others. Although this right is generally concerned with allowing people to pursue common interests in formal groups, it has been broadly construed to include private and business associations and is not confined to participation in formal groups.

Right to take part in public life (section 18)

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

Right to property (section 20)

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. This right requires that powers which authorise the deprivation of property are conferred by legislation or the common law, are confined and structured rather than unclear, are accessible to the public, are formulated precisely and do not operate arbitrarily.

Right to a fair hearing (section 24(1))

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing. The concept of a 'civil proceeding' is not limited to judicial decision makers, but may encompass the decision-making procedures of many types of tribunals, boards and other administrative decision-makers with the power to determine private rights and interests.

The right may be limited if a person faces a procedural barrier to bringing their case before a court, or where procedural fairness is not provided. However, the entire decision-making process, including reviews and appeals, must be examined in order to determine whether the right is limited.

Presumption of innocence (section 25(1))

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law. The right is relevant where a statutory provision shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that they are not guilty of an offence.

Right not to be tried or punished more than once (section 26)

Section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which they have already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law. This right reflects the principle of double jeopardy. However, the principle only applies in respect of criminal offences – it will not prevent civil proceedings being brought in respect of a person's conduct which has previously been the subject of criminal proceedings, or vice versa.

Penalties and sanctions imposed by professional disciplinary bodies generally do not usually constitute a form of 'punishment' for the purposes of this right as they are not considered to be punitive.

Human rights issues

The commissioners and the chief executive officer of the Building and Plumbing Commission

Chapter 3 of the Bill concerns the Regulatory and Review Entities established under the Bill, namely the BPC (Part 3.1, Division 1), insurance manager (Part 3.1, Division 5), chief dispute resolution officer (Part 3.1, Division 6), State Building Surveyor (Part 3.2), Building Monitor (Part 3.3), the Building Appeals Tribunal (Part 3.5), and Municipal councils (Part 3.4).

Part 3.1 of the Bill includes provisions relating to the membership and staffing of the BPC. Clause 43 provides that the BPC consists of a commissioner appointed as chair and up two additional commissioners. Clause 58 provides that the BPC may employ an eligible person as the chief executive officer of the BPC.

Clause 44 provides that a person is an eligible person to be a commissioner if the Minister considers that they are of good character and high standing in the community and the person has extensive or specialist knowledge, expertise or experience in one or more specified fields including building, plumbing, architecture, consumer protection or dispute resolution (clause 44(1)–(2)).

Pursuant to clause 44(3) a person is not eligible to be a commissioner if they have, within the preceding 2 years, held a licence or registration under Parts 11, 11A or 12A of the Building Act, been a developer or been employed by a developer, carried out, or been employed or engaged by a person or body carrying out, relevant

lobbying activity for or on behalf of the people listed above, including if their name is or has been contained in the register of lobbyist kept under section 66 of the *Public Administration Act 2004* or a similar register kept under an Act of the Commonwealth or of another State or a Territory. A person is also not eligible to be the CEO of the BPC if any of these matters apply to them or if the person holds other specified positions (clause 59).

Clause 45 provides for the appointment of the chair of the BPC. Similarly, clause 46 provides for the appointment of up to 2 eligible persons as additional commissioners (total of 3). The chair or a commissioner must not engage in any employment or business outside the office of commissioner without the approval of the Governor in Council (clauses 45(4) and 46(5)).

Further, clause 53 provides that a person must not within 2 years after ceasing to be a commissioner:

- become registered or licenced under Parts 11, 11A or 12A of the Building Act;
- become a developer or employed by a developer; or
- carry out relevant lobbying activity, or become employed or engaged by a person or body carrying out relevant lobbying activity.

Right to equality and right to take part in public life

These provisions outlining the requirements for an 'eligible person' to be a commissioner or chief executive officer may limit the rights to equality and public life by excluding people by reference to their 'profession, trade or occupation'. However, to the extent that these rights are limited, I consider that these limitations are minor, and are reasonable and demonstrably justified.

These provisions are necessary to promote the intent of the reforms and ensure the independence and expertise of the BPC. The provisions do this by removing any real, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest of members eligible for appointment. The provisions also ensure that the commissioner and chief executive officer roles are held by a person with extensive or specialist knowledge in one or more relevant fields, which is essential in a regulated sector involving highly technical knowledge.

Right to privacy

Clauses 45 and 46, which prohibit a commissioner from engaging in employment or business outside the office of commissioner without the approval from the Governor in Council, and clause 53, which prohibits a commissioner holding certain licenses, registrations, development or lobbying roles for two years after ceasing holding that office, will necessarily interfere with the right to privacy.

It is recognised that clauses 45 and 46 will impose more restrictions on a person's ability to engage in other work without approval while they are a commissioner, including extending to work that may be unrelated to the building and plumbing industry. It is also recognised that clause 53 imposes restrictions on a person's ability to engage in certain activities for an extended period after ceasing being a commissioner. The provisions relate only to the appointment of the chair of the BPC and other commissioners and are confined in their scope, allowing commissioners to still undertake outside work with approval and only prohibit activities which relate directly to the building and plumbing industries. These provisions are principally directed at ensuring independence and integrity of these public offices, and preventing risks of conflict of interests, misuse of confidential information or undue influence. They are essential to upholding public trust and ensuring impartial decision-making. These types of restrictions are commonly attached to public office to insulate holders from risks of corruption. Accordingly, I consider this interference to be lawful and not arbitrary.

Vacation of the office of the Building Monitor or removal of the Building Monitor or a commissioner

Clause 102(c) provides that the office of the Building Monitor becomes vacant if the Building Monitor is convicted or found guilty of an indicatable offence or an offence that, if committed in Victoria, would be an indicatable offence.

Clause 49 provide that the Governor in Council may, on recommendation of the Minister, remove a commissioner from the office on any of the following grounds:

a) engaging in employment or business outside the office of commissioner without the approval of the Governor in Council;

b) inability to perform the functions of the office;

c) neglect of duty;

d) misconduct;

e) being convicted, or found guilty, of an indictable offence or an offence that, if committed in Victoria, would be an indictable offence;

f) any other ground on which the Minister is satisfied that the person is unfit to hold office.

The nexus between a criminal conviction and the vacation of or removal from office engages:

- the right not to be punished more than once for the same offence (section 26);
- the right to fair hearing (section 24)
- the right of presumption of innocence (section 25(1)); and
- the right to take part in public life (section 18).

The right not to be punished more than once for the same offence and the right to have a criminal charge decided by a court

Section 26 will be relevant if the vacation of the office of the Building Monitor, or the removal from office of a commissioner or Building Monitor under clauses 49(e), 102(c) or 103(1)(e) constitutes an additional 'punishment' for an offence for which the person has been finally convicted. This right may also be relevant to clauses 49(f) and 103(1)(f) which leave open the possibility that a criminal charge could be considered by the Minister as relevant to the assessment of fitness to hold office. Relevant to the concept of punishment, and following recent decisions of the High Court concerning the constitutional validity of schemes involving 'legislated punishment' in the Commonwealth sphere, it may be suggested that the section 24 right to have a criminal charge decided by a court implies a principle that a person may only be punished as a result of a charge being proven in a criminal proceeding.

In my view, clauses 49, 102 and 103 do not engage these rights as the vacation of, or the removal commissioner from office by reference to a criminal charge (as part of an assessment of unfitness to hold office), conviction or guilty finding of criminal conduct is not to be characterised as imposing a form of punishment, for the following reasons:

- The mere fact that a law operates to directly impose a detriment on a particular person does not make it punitive. Rather, what the authorities show is that the *criteria* by reference to which the detriment is imposed, and also the *purpose* for which it is imposed, are central to determining whether the imposition of a particular detriment is properly characterised as punitive. The provisions serve a protective purpose, that is to ensure the integrity and good governance of the Building Monitor and BPC and to safeguard the public trust and confidence in the Building Monitor, the BPC and its commissioners. Consistently with this purpose, a criminal charge will not result in automatic removal from office. Rather, the touchstone remains the Minister being satisfied that the person is unfit for office, which could include consideration of a particular charge and its surrounding circumstances.
- The effect of being removed from office is to prevent a person from performing the functions or duties of, or exercising the powers of, the Building Monitor or a commissioner of the BPC. It is aimed at preventing the functions of the Building Monitor or the BPC from being influenced by a person whose eligibility has come into question.
- The nature of the detriment being imposed, being removed from office, is not of a nature traditionally associated with a criminal sanction. No further conviction flows from this outcome nor is a person liable for subsequent sanctions of a criminal nature, such as a fine or imprisonment as a result of being removed.

Accordingly, as the vacation of the office of the Building Monitor or removal from office for a person convicted of an indictable offence, or whose criminal charge is considered by the Minister as relevant to the assessment of fitness to hold office, is not a punishment, clauses 49, 102 and 103 do not amount to double punishment for the purpose of section 26, or engage the determination of a criminal charge pursuant to section 24, and these rights are therefore not limited.

The right to be presumed innocent

While this right has been found to only apply to criminal proceedings (and not, by contrast, to other proceedings such as disciplinary or civil liability proceedings), it does afford an accused a right to have the benefit of the doubt, and to be treated in accordance with this principle. It is suggested that the right incorporates duties on others to refrain from prejudging the outcome of a trial – including to abstain from actions that affirm the guilt of an accused.

While Victorian case law has yet to consider in more detail the broader application of this right beyond criminal proceedings, the vacation of the office of the Building Monitor under clause 102(c), the removal of a commissioner under clause 49(e) or the Building Monitor under clause 103(1)(e) is only on the grounds of being convicted of or found guilty of an indictable criminal offence. Accordingly, these provisions only have operation where charges have been proven. Consequently, this provision does not impose a limit on the right to be presumed innocent.

Assuming that this right has application beyond criminal proceedings, taking a criminal charge into account in the assessment of fitness for office under clauses 49(f) and 103(f) may limit this right, particularly if that criminal charge forms the basis of an adverse finding. However, I consider that any such limitation is reasonably justified. The purpose of clauses 49 and 103 are to safeguard the integrity of these offices by ensuing the relevant office holder is a fit and proper person. This is particularly important noting the public significance of these offices, the far-reaching impact of commissioners' decisions and the broad remit of Building Monitor and ability to influence system-wide change. The impact on this right is confined and directed to this purpose as criminal charges may only be taken into account by the Minister where the particular circumstances allow for a conclusion that a person's fitness for office will be impacted. Further, in making this assessment the Minister is a public authority and bound to consider and act compatibility with the Charter. As such, I conclude that this limitation is in proportion to its aim and that this provision is compatible with section 25(1) of the Charter.

The right to take part in public life

The scope of section 18 of the Charter has not yet been thoroughly examined by Victorian courts. It is not clear whether section 18(2)(b) is engaged by the vacation and removal provisions in clauses 49(e) and (f), 102(c) or 103(1)(e) and (f), given this element of the right is principally concerned with affording access to public office on general terms of equality. Clauses 49(e) and (f), 102(c) or 103(1)(e) and (f), which provide for the vacation of office or grounds for removal from office on account of being convicted of an indictable offence, does not discriminate against the person. This is because being convicted of a criminal offence is not a protected attribute within the meaning of the EO Act. It follows, in my view, that the right to take part in public life is not limited by these clauses.

Disclosure of interests by a commissioner

Clause 52 requires that a commissioner who has a relevant interest must disclose the interest to the Minister as soon as practicable after becoming aware of it. A commissioner has a 'relevant interest' if they have a direct or indirect financial interest in the building, plumbing or construction industry and the interest is not because the commissioner is a consumer of goods or services that are generally available to members of the public.

Right to privacy and freedom of expression

To the extent that the disclosures required by clause 52 contain personal information, the Bill will engage the right to privacy. In my opinion, any limit on the right to privacy imposed by clause 52 is reasonable and justified. Although these provisions require a commissioner to disclose information, it is limited to a relevant interest, being a direct or indirect financial interest in the building, plumbing and construction industry that is not because they are a consumer of generally available goods or services. This provision is aimed at ensuring the independence of the BPC and only applies to a commissioner, being a person who has voluntarily assumed a role to which special obligations apply, including these obligations of disclosure of matters that are within the public interest to declare. Accordingly, I do not consider this interference is unlawful or arbitrary.

Protection from liability for commissioner, Building Monitor and other employees

Clauses 73 and 113 provide that a commissioner, a person employed or engaged by the BPC and the Building Monitor or acting Building Monitor is not personally liable for anything done or omitted to be done in good faith in the performance of a function or the exercise of a power under certain Acts, or in the reasonable belief that the act or omission was in the performance of these functions or exercise of these powers. Clauses 73(2), 73(4) and 113(2) provide that any such liability attaches to the BPC (for a commissioner or a person employed or engaged by the BPC) or the State (for the Building Monitor or acting Building Monitor).

Property rights and right to fair hearing (sections 20 and 24(1))

The fair hearing right is relevant where statutory immunities are provided to certain persons as this right has been held to encompass a person's right of access to the courts to have their civil claim submitted to a judge for determination. Similarly, insofar as a cause of action may be considered 'property' within the meaning of section 20 of the Charter, clauses 73 and 113 may also engage this right.

The exclusion from personal liability does not deprive a person of their property rights nor interfere with the right to a fair hearing, because parties seeking redress are instead able to bring a claim against the State or the BPC. The provision also serves a necessary purpose by ensuring that the commissioner, those employed or engaged by the BPC and the Building Monitor are able to exercise their functions effectively and independently without the threat of personal repercussions. Additionally, these individuals will still remain personally liable for any conduct not performed in good faith or outside their statutory functions. Accordingly, this provision does not limit property rights or the right to a fair hearing under the Charter.

Information gathering powers of the State Building Surveyor and the Building Monitor

Part 3.2 of the Bill relocates a number of provisions establishing the State Building Surveyor from the Building Act to the Bill. This Part provides for the appointment of the State Building Surveyor to (amongst other objectives) be a primary source of technical expertise on the standards and requirements for building and plumbing work to those industries, to facilitate compliant building and plumbing work and practices, to encourage improvements to regulatory oversight and practices within the building system to facilitate high quality outcomes and to support improvements to practices within the building surveying profession (clause 88). This Part also outlines the functions and powers of the State Building Surveyor.

The State Building Surveyor will now be empowered under clause 94 to require, by notice in writing, a person or body to give the State Building Surveyor information specified in the notice. The purpose of this power is for the State Building Surveyor to exercise its functions, including to monitor a council's delivery of their building control functions and monitor developments and trends relevant to building and plumbing work in the State. Under clause 93, the State Building Surveyor may also issue binding determinations on the interpretation of a technical standard or requirement for building work or plumbing work.

Part 3.3 of the Bill will re-enact a number of provisions previously included in the Building Act. This Part provides for the appointment of a Building Monitor to (amongst other objectives) improve the experiences of domestic building consumers and affected parties of the building system by advocating for their interests at a systemic level and providing independent expert advice on these issues to the Minister and to persons and bodies involved in the building industry (clause 98). As was previously provided for under section 208K of the Building Act, the Building Monitor will be empowered under clause 109 to require, by notice in writing, a person or body to give the Building Monitor information specified in the notice. The purpose of this power continues to be for the Building Monitor to exercise its functions, including to collect and analyse information from certain building system entities to identify issues affecting domestic building affected parties. Under clause 112 (previously section 208P of the Building Act), the Building Monitor will be required to annually publish a Building Monitor Issues Report that is to specify the systemic issues that the Building Monitor has identified as affecting domestic building affected parties and make recommendations to the Minister on ways to address these issues.

The following analysis covers information obtained by both the State Building Surveyor or the Building Monitor. I note that the State Building Surveyor may be less likely to collect personal information, but the provisions in the Bill provide appropriate protections if that is the case.

Right to privacy

To the extent that the information obtained by the State Building Surveyor or the Building Monitor includes personal information, the Bill will engage the right to privacy. In my opinion, any limit on the right to privacy imposed by Parts 3.2 and 3.3 of the Bill is reasonable and justified. Although these provisions require the State Building Surveyor and the Building Monitor to gather and analyse personal and identifying information, I do not consider these functions are unlawful or arbitrary.

The types of information that can be requested by the State Building Surveyor under clause 94(1) or the Building Monitor under clause 109(1) are limited to information that is relevant to the performance of the functions of the State Building Surveyor and the Building Monitor respectively. The functions of the State Building Surveyor are specified under clause 89 and relate to providing technical expertise through binding determinations on the interpretation of building and plumbing regulations, codes and standards for the building and plumbing sector. The functions of the Building Monitor are specified in clause 99 and relate to matters of concern to domestic building affected parties.

Under clauses 94(2) and 109(2), the State Building Surveyor and Building Monitor are also required to consult with a person or body before giving them a notice under those sections to provide information or data. This is intended to enable the State Building Surveyor or Building Monitor to gain an understanding of what information is held by the person or body who will receive a notice and to ensure the notice does not unintentionally gather information that the State Building Surveyor or Building Monitor does not need for their functions.

The persons or bodies from whom or which the Building Monitor may require information be provided are limited to those listed in clause 109(4) of the Building Act and they are confined to public sector persons or bodies.

The persons or bodies from whom or which the State Building Surveyor may require information is confined to those listed in clause 94(4) and include a council, a building practitioner, a registered plumber or licenced plumber or a prescribed person or body. Consequently, clause 94(4) is not confined to public sector persons or bodies. A building practitioner, registered plumber or licensed plumber are taking part in a regulated industry and so may have a reduced expectation of privacy in those circumstances.

The Bill will also include clauses 95 and 96, and 110 and 111 (previously sections 208L and 208M in the Building Act respectively) to limit how the State Building Surveyor and the Building Monitor may use the information gathered. Under clauses 96 and 110, the State Building Surveyor and the Building Monitor must not publish or authorise the publication of any personal information or data or commercially sensitive information or data that has not first been de-identified or aggregated with similar information (as the case requires) before it is published.

Clauses 95 and 111 make it an offence if the State Building Surveyor or the Building Monitor or any person assisting or acting on behalf of the State Building Surveyor or Building Monitor uses or discloses information (including personal information) obtained in the course of performing the functions of the State Building Surveyor or Building Monitor other than for the purposes of performing the their functions.

Further, under clause 112 (previously section 208P of the Building Act), the Building Monitor will be required to gather information transparently, by including in an Issues Report information about when and to whom a notice under clause 109 was given, the type of information or data required under the notice and whether the Building Monitor is a party to any information sharing arrangements or agreements.

The Bill also includes clause 100(2) (previously section 208G of the Building Act) to provide that the Building Monitor, when exercising its powers, must comply with any relevant requirements specified by the Bill or under any other Act. The purpose of this provision is to restate, for the avoidance of doubt, the obligation of the Building Monitor, as a statutory entity, to comply with legislation such as the Information Privacy Principles set out in Schedule 1 of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*.

These provisions establish an appropriate balance between enabling the State Building Surveyor and the Building Monitor to perform their functions and achieve their statutory objectives by ensuring they can transparently gain access to the information needed to understand the issues faced by domestic building consumers and affected parties in the building sector, while protecting the rights of individuals to have their privacy and reputations protected.

Consequently, I consider that these provisions under the Bill are compatible with the right to privacy under section 13 of the Charter.

Right to freedom of expression

The information-gathering powers of the State Building Surveyor and the Building Monitor to require persons to provide information or data specified in a notice may also interfere with the right to freedom of expression, to the extent that the right extends to a right not to express or impart information. While the information gathering powers may impose a limitation on the freedom of expression, I consider that this is a lawful restriction which is reasonably necessary to both protect public order and the rights of others within the meaning of the internal limitation in section 15(3) of the Charter. The expression 'protection of … public order' is a wide and flexible concept and includes measures for 'peace and good order, public safety and prevention of disorder and crime' (*Magee v Delaney* (2012) 39 VR 50) and can include laws that enable the public to engage in their personal and business affairs free from unlawful interference to their person or property. The meaning of protecting the rights of others is similarly broad and would include restrictions reasonable necessary to protect the property rights of others (*Magee v Delaney* (2012) 39 VR 50).

This restriction on freedom of expression is confined to a very particular context, being the use of information gathering powers to facilitate the operation of the State Building Surveyor and the Building Monitor and their effective completion of their functions. In this context, there is a reduced expectation of privacy. Further, I consider that this restriction is closely tailored to its purpose of supporting the functions of the State Building Surveyor and the Building Monitor. I consider there are no less restrictive means of achieving this purpose and in turn facilitating the State Building Surveyor to facilitate high quality outcomes and improvements within the building surveying profession and the Building Monitor to improve the experiences of domestic building consumers. These powers are required to enable the State Building Surveyor and the Building Monitor to effectively complete their functions.

Accordingly, I am of the view that to the extent the right is limited, that limit falls within section 15(3) of the Charter as it is reasonably necessary to protect public order and the rights of others. As such, these provisions impose no limitation on the freedom of expression.

Review by the Building Appeals Tribunal

Parts 3.5 and 5.3 of the Bill provide for the establishment, powers, functions, procedural processes and jurisdiction of the Building Appeals Tribunal (**Tribunal**), re-enacting the provisions in Part 10 and Schedule 3 of the Building Act concerning the Building Appeals Board, subject only to minor changes. The body replacing the Building Appeals Board will be called a Tribunal to better reflect the nature of the work that the Building Appeals Board, and the body that replaces it, undertakes and will undertake (respectively).

The Tribunal established under this Bill is an independent tribunal which hears and determines disputes (as specified in Part 5.3, Division 3), other applications (arising under Part 5.3, Division 4) as well as appeals from decisions of other decision-makers (Part 5.3, Division 2) made under various acts, including under the Building Act. All members of the Tribunal are required to have relevant expertise and experience, including relating to the building industry (clause 121(1)). Tribunal members can be removed by the Governor in Council, on the recommendation of the Minister, on the grounds of an inability to perform their functions, neglect of duty, misconduct, a conviction or finding of guilt in relation to an indictable offence or, on the basis of any other ground that the Minister is satisfied means the member is unfit to hold office (clause 129).

The Tribunal has broad and flexible powers to conduct a proceeding in any manner it sees fit (clause 138(2), particularly sub-clauses (2)(a), (b), (d) and (f)) and when hearing an appeal may consider matters not raised before the decision under appeal was made (clause 216(2)). Despite this broad discretion, the Tribunal is still bound by the natural rules of justice (clause 138(2)(c)) and is required to give the parties a reasonable opportunity to make written or oral submissions (clause 138(1)), including on any advice the Tribunal has received to assist in dealing with the proceeding (clause 138(4)). Parties with a relevant interest in the matter have the right to be served with a copy of the document commencing a proceeding which specifies the nature of and the grounds for commencing the proceeding, the relief sought and other matters specified in regulations (clauses 136 and 137). The Tribunal is required to conduct a hearing in public unless it considers it is in the public interest or in the interest of justice to conduct the proceeding in private (clause 138(2)(e)). The Tribunal must also provide the parties to the proceeding with a written determination (clause 139(1) and (4)), as well as reasons for that determination upon request (clause 139(5)–(6)).

Fair hearing

The Tribunal determines private rights and interests of parties and so conducts 'civil proceedings' within the meaning of section 24 of the Charter. As such, the decision-making process and procedure of the Tribunal needs to be assessed to determine whether there is any limitation of the right to fair hearing when it conducts a proceeding.

Having regard to the provisions outlined above, I consider that there are sufficient protections in place to ensure a party before the Tribunal will have their fair hearing rights upheld. This Bill ensures that a person affected by a decision of the Tribunal will know the matters relevant to the decision, have a reasonable opportunity to present their case and respond to adverse information. They will also have their case heard by an independent, competent Tribunal after a public hearing (unless there are legitimate public interest reasons for conducting the matter in private).

For these reasons, I consider that the hearing of matters by the Tribunal pursuant to this Bill does not limit and in fact promotes the right to fair hearing.

Immunities for members, legal practitioners and witnesses in matters before the Building Appeals Tribunal

Pursuant to clause 149(1), Tribunal members, in the performance of their functions, have the same protection and immunity as a Judge of the Supreme Court. Pursuant to clause 149(2), legal practitioners or other people appearing on behalf of another person before the Tribunal are afforded the same protections and immunities as an Australian legal practitioner has in appearing for a party in a proceeding in the Supreme Court. Finally, clause 149(3), provides that a person appearing as a witness before the Tribunal has the same protection as a witness in a proceeding in the Supreme Court, and is subject to the same liabilities as a witness in a Supreme Court proceeding.

Fair hearing and right to property

The fair hearing right is relevant where statutory immunities are provided to certain persons as this right has been held to encompass a person's right of access to the courts to have their civil claim submitted to a judge for determination. Similarly, insofar as a cause of action may be considered 'property' within the meaning of section 20 of the Charter, these immunity provisions may also engage this right.

A judge of the Supreme Court is immune from or has a defence to a civil suit arising out of acts done in the exercise, or purposed exercise, of their judicial function or capacity. A Tribunal member would thus have the same protection in relation to the exercise, or purported exercise, of their functions provided for under this Bill.

Legal practitioners acting in matters before the Supreme Court, and so before the Tribunal, are immune from liability for negligence in relation to the conduct of a case in court and for work intimately connected with the conduct of this case. This immunity does not cover work unrelated to court proceedings and is subject to certain exceptions, such as where the practitioner has acted dishonestly or fraudulently.

As these immunities act as a bar to bringing a civil claim in certain circumstances, the fair hearing right and property right will be limited by this clause.

However, I consider that this limitation is reasonable and justified. The scope of these immunities is broad but not unlimited, requiring that a Tribunal member act within their functions and a practitioner provide services or a witness give evidence associated with a proceeding. Further, these immunities are necessary to ensure to facilitate the proper administration of justice in the matters before the Tribunal. The immunity for Tribunal members facilitates the independent performance of their functions free from the spectre of litigation, and enhances the finality of the Tribunal's decisions. Similarly, immunities provided to legal practitioners, and the protections and liability of witnesses also encourage the giving of independent advice or evidence without the threat of suit from litigants who may be dissatisfied with the outcome of a proceeding, assists with the effective administration of the proceeding, and avoids multiplicity of actions where the matter could be effectively relitigated outside the regular appeal processes. In this way, these immunities assist with the efficient and proper regulation of the building system.

For these reasons, I consider that the limitation imposed on the right to a fair hearing and right to property by this clause is justified and so compatible with the Charter.

Application for modification of building regulations relating to access for persons with disabilities

Clause 231 provides that an application may be made to the Tribunal for a determination that a provision of the building regulations relating to access for persons with disabilities does not apply or applies with modifications on the ground that compliance with this provision would impose unjustifiable hardship on the owner of a building, the purchaser of a particular lot or the lessee of a building who proposes to have the building work carried out. The criteria upon which the Tribunal is to assess whether an application should be granted is consistent with, and implements in Victoria, Part 4.1 of the *Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010 (Cth)* (**Commonwealth Access Standards**), which is an instrument under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)* introduced by the Commonwealth Government to develop a set of uniform access provisions.

Clause 231(4) provides that the Tribunal must take into account all relevant circumstances of a particular case including, but not limited to, the costs associated with compliance, any effect compliance would likely have on the applicant's financial viability, any exceptional technical factors, the benefits or detriment likely to accrue from compliance or non-compliance including to persons with disabilities, and the nature and results from any consultation undertaken. If a substantial issue of unjustifiable hardship is raised having regard to the factors mentioned in subclause (4), the Tribunal must consider the extent to which substantially equal access to public premises may be provided otherwise than by compliance with the relevant provision and any measures undertaken or to be undertaken in order to ensure substantially equal access (clause 231(5)). Clause 231(6) provides that a determination under this section must provide for compliance with an access provision of the building regulations to the maximum extent not involving unjustifiable hardship.

Right to protection from discrimination

The access provisions in the building regulations are designed to protect and promote the rights of people with disabilities to equitably access buildings, and so facilitate access to services, their place of work, recreation or otherwise allow participation in public life. By allowing for the disapplication or modification of these provisions where compliance with the improved accessibility requirements would impose unjustifiable hardship on the building permit applicant, clause 231 may result in indirect discrimination and so limit the right to protection from discrimination under section 8 of the Charter.

However, for the reasons that follow, I consider that this clause places a reasonable condition on the operation of the access provisions and so does not constitute indirect discrimination and therefore does not limit this right under the Charter.

As set out above, clause 231 requires that the Tribunal to have close regard to the particular facts of a case and consider many of the same factors which go to reasonableness as defined in section 9(3) of the EO Act. The Tribunal is required to carefully balance the rights of people with disabilities to dignified and equitable access to buildings with the considerations of cost-effectiveness, achievability and certainty for builders and occupiers. The Bill also requires that compliance with an access provision is maintained to the maximum extent possible, ensuring that reasonable alternatives or possible carve outs to any exemption granted are required to be actively considered and must be ordered by the Tribunal where possible (for example, as outlined at Part 4.1(2) of the Commonwealth Access Standards, while enlarging a lift may impose unjustifiable hardship, upgrading the lift controls panel to provide braille and tactile buttons may not). Further, it is noted that the onus is on the applicant to establish that there is an unjustifiable hardship, indicating that exemption will only be provided where the Tribunal is be satisfied of this hardship on the basis of cogent evidence which has been tested using processes and procedures that uphold fair hearing rights (as discussed above).

Given these protections, I consider that this clause is reasonable and does not limit the right to protection from discrimination under section 8 of the Charter.

Private building surveyors – appointment and transfer of functions

Chapter 4 of the Bill relates to building surveyors. The following provisions largely re-enact existing provisions in Part 6 of the Building Act, subject to minor changes.

Clauses 155 and 160 introduce the concept of a '***related person***' in relation to a builder and private building surveyor, which include such persons as another partner in the partnership if the builder or surveyor is a member of a partnership, an officer or director of a body corporate if the builder or surveyor is a body corporate, and their spouse or domestic partner, sibling, parent or child.

Clause 155 prohibits builders who have entered into a major domestic building contract, or who act (or propose to act) as a domestic builder and related persons to these builders, from appointing a private building surveyor on behalf of the owner of the land on which domestic building work is to be carried out.

Clause 160 relevantly prohibits private building surveyors from undertaking building surveyor functions in relation to a building or building work if they or a related person:

- prepared the design of the building or building work;
- is or was, within the prescribed period, employed or engaged by the person or body that prepared the design of the building or building work; or
- had a pecuniary interest in the building or building work, or in the body that prepared the design of the building or building work or carried out the building work.

Clause 164 provides that the BPC may direct a registered building surveyor who has employed or engaged a person to act as a private or designated building surveyor to transfer all of that person's functions under building legislation to another surveyor if certain circumstances apply, including that in the opinion of the BPC, the private or designated building surveyor is incapable of carrying out the work because they are mentally or physically infirm.

Right to equality

To the extent that clause 160 restricts a person's ability to work as a private building surveyor on the basis of their prior employment activity, it may give rise to 'discrimination', within the meaning of the EO Act as discussed under the equality right above, on the basis of the protected attribute of employment activity (section 6(c), EO Act).

Similarly, the BPC's power to deprive a person of their employment functions under clause 164 on the basis of mental or physical infirmity may engage the right to equality under section 8(3) of the Charter as it would constitute discrimination on the basis of a protected attribute, specifically being disability (section 6(e), EO Act).

I consider that any such limits on the right to equality are reasonably justified under section 7(2) of the Charter. This is because in respect of clause 160, the core functions of a private building surveyor include the issuing of building and occupancy permits and the conduct of inspections of buildings and building work (clause 154(1)). Therefore, the exclusion of persons involved in the design of the building or building work from assessing and approving the safety and quality of their own work is necessary to ensure the independence and proper functioning of these regulatory mechanisms.

I also consider that the BPC's powers under clause 164 to direct the transfer of surveying functions where the surveyor is incapable of carrying out the work are reasonably necessary to ensure that the building surveying work is undertaken and completed to a professional standard, thereby protecting public safety and safeguarding the quality and integrity of the building industry.

Accordingly, I consider that any limits on the right to equality are reasonable and proportionate to achieve the purposes of the limitation.

Right to freedom of association

As the right to freedom of association has been broadly construed to include private associations, clauses 155 and 160 may engage this right by prohibiting the appointment, engagement or employment of persons on the basis of their personal or business associations.

However, these amendments are aimed at achieving the legitimate purpose of safeguarding the integrity of the building approval process by avoiding potential conflicts of interest or risks of undue influence. Accordingly, any limitations on the right to free association occasioned by the restrictions on the appointment of private building surveyors are necessary to fulfil a legitimate and pressing purpose that cannot be achieved by less rights-limiting means. I therefore consider that these amendments are compatible with the rights under in section 16 of the Charter.

Appointment of manager for private building surveyor's business

Clause 169 empowers the BPC to appoint a manager for a private building surveyor's business if the BPC is of the opinion that the appointment is necessary to protect the interests of other persons in specified circumstances such as suspension or cancellation of the private building surveyor's registration or their insolvency.

Clause 179 provides that the expenses of the management of the private building surveyor's business must be paid to the manager from the receipts of the business and any balance paid by the BPC may be recovered in court from the private building surveyor as a debt.

Right to property

'Property' under the Charter includes all real and personal property interests recognised under the general law, relevantly including debts. Accordingly, this right may be engaged by the provisions allowing for the appointment of managers, requiring payment to the managers from the receipts of the business and enabling the BPC to recover outstanding expenses as a debt owed by the private building surveyor.

However, the right to property will only be limited where a person is deprived of property 'other than in accordance with the law', where the law is not publicly accessible, clear and certain, or operates arbitrarily. In this instance, the interference will not be arbitrary, but governed by a clear and accessible process set out in the Bill and subject to reasonable conditions. For example, item 1 of the table in clause 201 relevantly enables the private building surveyor to apply to VCAT for a review of the BPC's decision to appoint a manager to their business. Further, any claim by the BPC to recover money paid to the manager must be sought in a court of competent jurisdiction such that procedural fairness is afforded to the private building surveyor (clause 179(2)).

Therefore, I am satisfied that the right to property is not limited by these amendments.

Powers of entry

Clause 176 authorises managers appointed by the BPC under clause 169 to enter and remain in or on any building or land used by the private building surveyor's business for the purpose of exercising their powers under clause 175. This provision also requires the private building surveyor (or their partner, officer, employee, agent or other person with control of documents relating to the appointment of the private building surveyor) to give the manager access to certain information and documents as the manager reasonably requires. The powers of entry also include operating equipment or facilities on the land or in the building; taking possession of any relevant document or thing; securing any relevant document or thing found in or on the building or land against interference if it cannot be conveniently removed; taking possession of any computer equipment or program.

Right to privacy

Section 13 of the Charter provides that a person has the right to not have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. The determination of whether certain activities amount to an interference with privacy depends on whether the person has 'a reasonable expectation of privacy' in all the circumstances. As the building or land used by the private building surveyor's business are places of work, and a private building surveyor is taking part in a regulated industry, there is a reduced expectation of privacy in relation to such property and premises.

The expectation of privacy would be further diminished by the existence of a regulated matter, where powers are conferred on managers for the important purpose of protecting the interests of other persons in circumstances where the BPC considers the private building surveyor incapable of carrying out their functions.

Further, the entry powers are clearly circumscribed, reasonable and proportionate. For example, the entry powers must only be exercised during normal business hours or other hours with the consent of the occupier of the building or land (clause 176(2)). Further, prior to exercising entry powers, a manager must produce to the occupier the notice of appointment and a prescribed form of identification (clause 176(3)). The manager is also subject to strict confidentiality provisions in respect of information obtained as a result of their appointment (clause 185).

Thus, to the extent that privacy is interfered with, in my opinion it will in circumstances which are neither unlawful or arbitrary. Accordingly, I consider that the provisions are compatible with the right to privacy in section 13(a) of the Charter.

Property rights

As 'property' under the Charter includes all real and personal property interests recognised under the general law, the power of managers to take possession of any document or thing from the building or land used by the private building surveyor's business under clause 176 may also engage section 20.

However, the provision empowering the removal of documents or things does not limit property rights, as any interference with property through such removal would be undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the Bill, which are accessible, clear and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable a manager to perform their functions. For example, a manager must only take possession of any computer equipment or program if it is reasonably required for a purpose relevant to the management of the private building surveyor's business (clause 176(1)(f)). Any deprivation of property is thereby reasonably necessary to achieve the important objective of carrying out work under any existing appointment of the private building surveyor or completing any existing work of the business. In addition, a number of safeguards regulate the handling, retention and return of documents or things taken into possession by the manager (clause 176(4)–(7)), including requirements to take all reasonable steps to return documents or things as soon as they are no longer required. These safeguards ensure that the interference with a person's property is the least restrictive possible whilst also ensuring the necessary functions are carried out.

Protection from liability for building surveyors

Clause 178 provides that a manager, or a person acting at the direction of the manager, is not liable for anything done or omitted to be done in good faith (in the reasonable belief) that the act or omission was in carrying out a function of the manager under Division 3 of Part 4.2 of the Bill.

Clause 188 provides that a municipal or private building surveyor appointed under Chapter 4 is not liable for anything done or omitted to be done in good faith in reliance on a certificate given to the surveyor under section 238 of the Building Act by a registered building practitioner or an endorsed building engineer. The clause provides that the liability instead attaches to registered building practitioner or endorsed building engineer who have the certificate.

Clause 189 provides that a relevant building surveyor is not liable for anything done or omitted to be done in good faith in approving a draft building manual under section 41B(1) of the Building Act. The clause provides that the liability that would have attached to the relevant building surveyor instead attaches to the applicant for the relevant occupancy permit.

Fair hearing and property rights

Where an immunity clause restricts a person's ability to access a court by effectively removing their ability to bring an action in court and depriving them of their ability to obtain effective relief due to the absence of an appropriate defendant, the right to a fair hearing and right to property may be engaged. The exclusion from personal liability for building surveyors acting in good faith under clauses 188 and 189 does not deprive a person of their property rights nor interfere with the right to a fair hearing, because parties seeking redress are instead able to bring a claim against another person.

As the immunity in clause 178 acts as a complete bar to bringing a civil claim in certain circumstances, the fair hearing right and property right will be limited by this clause. However, for the reasons that follow, I consider that this clause is compatible with these rights.

Any deprivation of the ability to bring an action will be 'in accordance with law' as these provisions are drafted in clear and precise terms and are reasonably necessary to achieve the important objective of ensuring that persons appointed as managers for the purpose of protecting others are able to effectively perform their functions without the threat of significant personal repercussions. If the role attracted personal liability, this would impact the availability of qualified appointments, which are essential to ensuring critical building projects and regulatory functions remain active and compliant. The scope of the immunities is also limited to good faith actions and omissions such that it is proportionate to the legitimate aim sought. As such, there are no less restrictive means of achieving the Bill's objectives. Accordingly, the protection from liability provisions are appropriately granted and so, are compatible with the rights to fair hearing and property.

BPC's directions powers

Clause 190 empowers the BPC to direct a municipal or private building surveyor to carry out certain surveyor functions if the BPC considers it necessary for the purposes of building legislation.

Freedom from forced work

This provision may engage the right to freedom from forced work by requiring a municipal or private building surveyor to undertake functions that the BPC considers necessary for the purposes of building legislation. While it is unclear the degree to which the right would even be engaged by a power of direction over a holder of a public office (being a municipal building surveyor), it can be accepted that the right would at least be relevant to a power of direction over a private building surveyor.

As outlined above, 'forced or compulsory labour' relevantly does not include work that forms part of normal civil obligations, which is work provided for by law, imposed for a legitimate purpose, and not exceptional or having a punitive purpose or effect. This would include obligations to undertake work in order to ensure

compliance with regulatory standards, particularly where those standards are to protect against risks to persons whose safety is reliant on the compliance of others.

I am of the view that, if the right is engaged, functions required under a direction made under this clause would form part of normal civil obligations and would, therefore, not constitute a limit on the right. A direction requiring the undertaking of certain surveying functions will be provided in accordance with the Bill and will be confined in its impact, in that the direction must be necessary for the purposes of building legislation. As discussed above, the Bill protects the public by ensuring that directions require specific functions to be done in order to support compliance, lift professional standards, and improve outcomes for consumers in the building industry.

Additionally, except where cladding product-related high risk or emergency circumstances apply (sub-clause (5) and (6)), before giving a direction, the BPC must give the municipal or private building surveyor written notice stating the BPC's intention and the period (being not less than 7 days of the notice) within which the building surveyor may make submissions to the BPC about the matter.

As such, I consider that these amendments are compatible with the right to freedom from forced work.

Appointment of BPC-appointed inspector

Clause 232 provides that the BPC may appoint as a BPC-appointed inspector the following specified persons: a person employed or engaged by the BPC; a person appointed as an authorised officer or inspector by or under another Act; or a person appointed or authorised as an inspector, investigator, authorised officer or authorised person under a prescribed interstate Act. Further, this provision provides that the BPC must not appoint a person to this role unless it is satisfied that they are appropriately qualified, have successfully completed appropriate training, or have appropriate knowledge and experience (subclause 232(3)).

Right to equality and right to take part in public life

By introducing eligibility criteria for these appointments, based principally on their qualifications, training, occupation and employment, these clauses may engage the right to equality on the grounds that they would constitute discrimination on the basis of protected attributes, which includes a person's employment activity (section 6(c), EO Act) and profession, trade or occupation (section 6(la), EO Act).

On its face, this provision may involve unfavourable treatment on the basis of a person not being employed in one of the professions or occupations listed in clause 232(1), or not having the qualifications, training, knowledge or experience required in clause 232(3). For this reason, the eligibility criteria in these clauses engage the right to equality in section 8(3) of the Charter.

However, I consider any limitations on section 8(3) to be justified given that the eligibility criteria serve a legitimate and important purpose: by requiring a BPC-appointed inspector to have the requisite knowledge, skills and experience to perform their functions, these provisions facilitate the objectives of the BPC's power to make the appointment, being to perform functions and exercise powers under building legislation, for the purpose of monitoring and enforcing compliance with building legislation, and building and plumbing standards and building safety. The provisions function as a protective mechanism to ensure appointees are appropriately qualified in a role that assumes significant responsibilities concerning matters of public importance, being accountability and oversight of building legislation and the building system.

I therefore consider that the Bill is compatible with the right to equality in section 8 of the Charter.

As the provisions above do not, in my view, constitute discrimination, it follows that the right to take part in public life in section 18 of the Charter is not limited by these provisions.

Power to require production of documents

Clause 249 empowers the BPC to require a person to provide information or produce documents that may assist the BPC in monitoring compliance with building legislation, including by appearing before the BPC and answering questions.

Clause 250 empowers the BPC to require a person to provide certain information, produce certain documents or to give that information (either orally or in writing) or produce those documents to the BPC, including by appearing before it and answering questions if the BPC reasonably believes that a person is capable of providing information, producing documents or giving evidence relating to a matter that constitutes, or may constitute, a contravention of building legislation.

Subclauses 249(3) and 250(5) provide that a person is not excused from answering a question, providing information or producing or permitting the inspection of a document on the ground that the answer, information or document may tend to incriminate or expose them to a penalty. Therefore, these provisions would engage the right in section 25(2)(k) not to be compelled to testify against oneself.

Right to protection against self-incrimination

The privilege against self-incrimination generally covers the compulsion of any information or documents which might incriminate a person. While it is generally accepted that the privilege does not extend to producing pre-existing documents (particularly documents required to be produced to demonstrate compliance with a regulatory scheme), the right affords strong protection against the compulsion of oral testimony or documents that are required to be brought into existence to comply with an information request. Therefore, to the extent that these provisions compel persons to answer questions and produce new documents that may incriminate the person with respect to certain offences under building legislation, they would limit the privilege against self-incrimination.

The primary purpose of this abrogation is to enable the BPC to monitor compliance with building legislation and investigate potential contraventions. Taking into account the protective purpose of the Bill, there is significant public interest in ensuring that the BPC is able to access information and evidence that may be difficult or impossible to ascertain by alternative evidentiary means, and to use such evidence to bring enforcement action where appropriate.

The information and documents that the BPC can require are those necessary for the purpose of monitoring and enforcing compliance with building legislation. Therefore, any limitation on the right in section 25(2)(k) that is occasioned by the abrogation of the privilege is thus directly related to the Bill's purpose.

Further, the Bill provides for 'use immunity' that restricts the use of information and documents to particular proceedings, such that the abrogation of this privilege is limited. Clauses 249(4) and 250(6) provide respectively that an answer given by the person and any information provided or document produced by the person in compliance with a notice under this section are not admissible in evidence against them in any proceeding other than a proceeding under that section, or in respect of clause 250(6), that any answer given or information provided could not be used in any criminal proceeding against the person other than a proceeding under that section . Accordingly, any limitation on the right to protection against self-incrimination is appropriately tailored and the least restrictive means to achieve the regulatory purpose.

Therefore, I consider there are no less restrictive means available to achieve the purpose of the provisions. For the above reasons, I consider that to the extent that these provisions may impose a limitation on the right against self-incrimination, that limitation is reasonable and justified under section 7(2) of the Charter.

Expansion of definitions of authorised persons

Clauses 239 to 242 expand the list of persons who are authorised persons for the purposes of exercising all or any powers conferred under Chapter 6 of the Bill. The effect of these amendments is to expand the pool of persons who are authorised to exercise various compulsive powers under the Bill, potentially increasing the frequency and scale at which interferences with human rights may occur. As the sections authorise entry, search and seizure powers, these provisions engage the rights to privacy and property. Notwithstanding that the powers can be exercised by a broader cohort of persons, these powers must still be exercised in accordance with the safeguarding provisions discussed below, pursuant to the authorisation conditions specified in clauses 239 to 242, and subject to identification documentation and production requirements (clauses 243 and 244). Importantly, a specified person may only authorise another person to exercise such powers if they are satisfied the person is appropriately qualified or has successfully completed appropriate training. Accordingly, for these reasons I consider these amendments to be compatible with the Charter.

Powers of entry, search and seizure

Divisions 3 to 5 of Part 6.3 of the Bill introduce a suite of powers that enable authorised persons to enter, inspect and search buildings and land, and to seize any document or thing after entry. Clause 238 provides that Part 6.3 of the Bill applies to a caravan or vessel as if these are a building and the occupant of the caravan or vessel is its occupier, granting additional powers of certain BPC-appointed inspectors to enter and inspect a caravan or vessel.

These powers provide a hierarchy of options that scale in the extent of their interference with rights:

- at the lower end of the scale are powers to enter a building or land for the purpose of carrying out any inspection authorised by building legislation with the consent of the occupier (Division 3);
- at the medium end of the scale are powers to enter a building or land without consent if it is open to the public, the safety of the public or the occupants of the building or land is at risk, or an emergency order applies (Division 4);
- at the higher end are powers to enter a building or land used for residential purposes, which can only be exercised pursuant to a search warrant (Division 5).

Where an authorised person enters a building or land, they may exercise the powers specified in these clauses and Division 6. These powers differ, depending on the basis on which entry is authorised, but broadly include

powers to search the building or land; inspect or require the production of certain documents; photograph, copy or take an extract from documents; take or keep samples of any thing; conduct destructive testing of a building product or material; and seize any document, equipment, or other thing in certain circumstances. Clause 238(2) grants BPC-appointed inspectors further powers of inspection and testing over plumbing work, including powers to isolate land or building from water or gas supply and dismantle plumbing work. Warrants can be issued where a magistrate is satisfied by evidence that:

- entry is necessary:
  - to determine whether a building, or building or plumbing work complies with building legislation;
  - to assist in the enforcement of the safety of buildings and of building and plumbing standards under building legislation,

and that entry is appropriate in all the circumstances (clause 273(1)–(2));

- there are reasonable grounds to suspect that:
  - in the next 72 hours, in or on the building or land, there is, or may be a thing (of a particular kind), connected with a contravention of building legislation (clause 274(2)(a)); or
  - information in digital or electronic format connected with a contravention of building legislation that is accessible from the building or land (clause 274(2)(b));
- it is necessary for the effective monitoring of compliance with clause 279(5) where a thing is subject to an embargo notice in or on a building or land.

Where entry is authorised by warrant, an authorised person may also seize things not mentioned in the warrant if they believe on reasonable grounds that the thing is of a kind which could have been included in the search warrant and will afford evidence about a contravention of building legislation, or that it is necessary to seize that thing in order to prevent its concealment, loss or destruction or its use in the contravention of building legislation (clause 275).

Right to privacy

These powers engage the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter, which protects against unlawful and arbitrary interferences with a person's privacy or correspondence. To the extent that the building, land, caravans and vessels are a person's residence, these expanded entry and inspection powers are likely to engage the right to privacy. Privacy is a right of considerable breadth and relevantly protects a person's 'home', which includes a person's place of residence. As a person has an increased expectation of privacy in relation to their private residence, this provision has the potential to empower a significant interference with privacy in particular circumstances.

However, in my view, this power is precisely prescribed, aimed at achieving a legitimate objective and equipped with sufficient safeguards to ensure it is not arbitrary.

First, the provisions are necessary to ensure that inspectors have the means to carry out any inspection authorised or required by building legislation, determine compliance with building legislation or assist in the enforcement of the safety of buildings and of building and plumbing standards.

Second, a number of safeguards apply to the exercise of such powers to ensure they are not exercised arbitrarily or unlawfully. In particular:

- in relation to entry for inspections, authorised persons may not enter any part of a building used for residential purposes unless with the written consent of the occupier at an agreed time (clause 264(2)), or for the purpose of inspecting (at a reasonable time) work that is being carried out under a building permit (clause 264(3));
- in relation to entry for monitoring, powers to enter a building or land (other than those used for residential purposes) must be exercised during normal business hours, when a business conducted at the building or land is operating, or when building work or plumbing work is being carried out, unless the occupier of the building or land consents otherwise (clause 266(6));
- authorised persons may only exercise entry powers with consent (other than under a warrant) for the purpose of monitoring compliance with building legislation or for the purposes of determining whether building legislation is being complied with or assisting in the enforcement of the safety of buildings and of building and plumbing standards (clauses 266(1));
- when consent is required to exercise a power, authorised persons must inform the occupier of the purpose of the entry and search and explain certain matters including the person's right to refuse consent, and seek a signed acknowledgment of consent (clauses 267 and 268);

- for entry without consent or warrant, authorised persons must only enter if the building or land is open to the public, the safety of the public or the occupants of the building or land is at risk, or an emergency order applies (clauses 270 and 271);
- authorised persons must comply with retention and return limits in accordance with clause 288 for anything seized under Part 6.3 or under a search warrant; and
- when exercising powers of entry under a warrant, authorised persons must generally announce that they are authorised by warrant, and provide a copy of the warrant to the occupier (if present) (clauses 277 and 278).

As such, a broad range of safeguards apply to ensure the powers may only be exercised in a reasonable and proportionate way that protects the privacy of individuals as much as possible. The powers serve the important purpose of enabling authorised persons to effectively monitor and enforce compliance with building legislation. The powers are appropriately tailored to reflect the source of the authority to enter a building or land and exercise associated powers, with the most intrusive powers being reserved to circumstances where a magistrate has granted a warrant.

Accordingly, I consider that the interference is neither unlawful nor arbitrary and is therefore compatible with the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter.

Right to property

While property is not defined under the Charter, it is likely to include personal property interests recognised under general law. While entry for inspection purposes may, in certain circumstances, affect an occupier's use or enjoyment of their property, the nature and extent of such interference would be at the low end of the spectrum. The seizure powers which authorise the removal of anything found on the premises will engage property rights under section 20 of the Charter. Additionally, the authorising actions such as the demolition of or cutting into building work (if specified conditions are met), will engage the right to property.

However, the provisions empowering the seizure of any document, equipment, or other thing do not limit property rights, as any interference with property occasioned by these provisions would be undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the Bill, which are accessible, clear and sufficiently precise. For example, an authorised person may only seize anything in or on the building or land if they consider it necessary for the monitoring or enforcement purposes (clause 266) and must provide a receipt for the thing seized as soon as practicable (clause 286). Further, equipment not be seized or operated unless the authorised person believes on reasonable grounds that the operation can be carried out without damage to the equipment. As these actions must only be undertaken if reasonably required to facilitate the inspection or where an authorised person reasonably believes the thing is connected with a contravention of building legislation, any deprivation of property is reasonably necessary to achieve the important objective of ensuring compliance with building legislation.

Under a search warrant, the power to seize anything not named in the warrant is subject to various conditions: specifically, an authorised person must believe on reasonable grounds that the seized thing is of a kind which could have been included in a warrant, will afford evidence of an offence and is necessary to seize to prevent its concealment, loss or destruction or its use in the commission of that offence (clause 275). Further, any deprivation of property is reasonably necessary to achieve the important objective of ensuring and enforcing compliance with building legislation.

Therefore, any deprivation of property will be 'in accordance with law' and will therefore not limit the Charter right to property.

Right of owner and owners corporation to carry out required work

Clause 304 provides that the owner of a building or land may apply to the Magistrates' Court for an order requiring the occupier to permit the owner (and any other person) to enter the building or land and carry out the work or do any other thing required under building legislation.

Clause 306 empowers an owners corporation to authorise a person to enter a lot or a building on a lot on its behalf to carry out works in accordance with an order or notice under building legislation requiring the conduct of building, protection, plumbing or other work in relation to that lot.

Clause 307 provides that the BPC or a council may apply to the Magistrates' Court for a warrant if a person refuses to vacate a building or land when required to do so by order under the Bill. A warrant under this clause authorises an authorised person to enter the building or land (by force if necessary) and with such assistance as is necessary, to compel all persons for the time being occupying the building or land to vacate that building or land.

Privacy and property rights

To the extent that the building, land or lot is used for residential purposes, it may engage the right to privacy, which relevantly protects a person's 'home' and includes a person's place of residence. Therefore, powers to enter a building, land or lot are likely to constitute a prima facie interference with privacy. While a person would have a lower expectation of privacy in respect of entry onto the land, they would have a higher expectation in respect of entry into a building which is used as a private residence, such that the interference would be greater.

The provision also relates to a person's property interest, which includes contractual rights, specifically the right to temporary possession by reason of a tenancy agreement. Further, powers of entry for the purpose of undertaking works may amount to a deprivation of property if they substantially restrict a person's exclusive possession, use or enjoyment of their property, particularly if such works are prolonged or pose a significant interference with a person's ability to use and enjoy the building, land or lot. Similarly, powers to compel all persons occupying a building or land to vacate will clearly constitute a substantial restriction.

However, I consider that any interferences with these rights would be neither unlawful or arbitrary and would be 'in accordance with the law'. This is because powers are subject to strict safeguards. For example, an application under clause 304 can only be made if the occupier of the building or land does not comply with a notice after 7 days of it being provided. Further, these powers are for an important purpose of enabling the conduct of works that are required by law to be carried out. As such, they are aimed at ensuring the safety and compliance of the building and land, thereby protecting the safety of the occupier, other land users and the general public.

Recovery of expenses for mandatory works

Clause 305 provides that if an owner of a building or land does not carry out works mandated by building legislation, an occupier or any registered mortgagee of the land is entitled to recover any expenses necessarily incurred from carrying out those works from the owner as a debt due to the occupier or mortgagee, deduct those expenses from or set them off against any rent or add the amount to the principal sum owing under the mortgage (as the case may be).

Clause 306(6) allows an owners corporation to recover from an owner of a lot affected by an owners corporation as a debt due to the owners corporation the cost of any work carried out under clause 306(3) that is not covered by the insurance held by the owners corporation.

Right to property

'Property' under the Charter includes all real property interests recognised under the general law, relevantly including debts. Accordingly, this right may be engaged by the provision allowing the recovery of any expenses as a debt owed by the owner.

However, the right to property will only be limited where a person is deprived of property 'other than in accordance with the law', where the law is not publicly accessible, clear and certain, or operates arbitrarily. In this instance, the interference will not be arbitrary, but governed by a clear and accessible process set out in the Bill and subject to reasonable conditions. For example, clause 305(3) prohibits an occupier from recovering any expenses incurred by the carrying out, in respect of an essential safety measure, certain repairs, maintenance work or installations referred to in the *Retail Leases Act 2003*, if the occupier has agreed to bear the expenses under certain retail premises leases. Further, clauses 305(4)(b)–(5) require a registered mortgagee to give written notice of expenses to the mortgagor prior to them being added to the principal sum owing under the mortgage.

Therefore, I am satisfied that the right to property is not limited by these amendments.

Embargo notices

Clause 279 empowers an authorised person executing a search warrant issued under clause 274(2) authorising the seizure of any thing, to issue an embargo notice if the thing cannot (readily) be physically seized and removed. The notice would prohibit a person from undertaking such actions as selling, leasing, transferring or otherwise dealing with the thing or any part of it.

Right to property

'Property' under the Charter includes personal property interests and property rights characteristically entail the right to use, control, transfer, dispose and exclude. Accordingly, clause 279 is a form of 'de facto dispossession', where despite retaining formal ownership, the person is temporarily prevented from exercising various rights such as selling, renting or gifting the property. It also deems any sale, lease or transfer of the thing, carried out in contravention of the embargo, to be void. This provision may thus amount to a 'deprivation' of property so as to interfere with a person's property interest.

However, I consider that any interference occasioned by section 279 would be in accordance with the law. It ensures a thing that was otherwise required to be seized in accordance with the Bill, is not dealt with in a way that would frustrate the purpose of the seizure, akin to comparative provisions preventing the destruction of evidence. Further, it contains appropriate safeguards such as excusing a person from liability if they contravene an embargo for the purpose of protecting and preserving the thing.

Liability of officers of bodies corporate

Division 3 of Part 6.5 of the Bill extends liability for certain offences committed by a body corporate to the officers of that body corporate where the officer authorised or permitted the commission of the offence by the body corporate, or was knowingly concerned in any way in the commission of the relevant offence by the body corporate or where the officer failed to exercise due diligence to prevent the commission of the offence by the body corporate (clauses 312, 313, and 314). Similarly, clause 352(3) provides that if a body corporate is found to have failed to comply with an enforceable undertaking, each officer of the body corporate is taken to have failed to comply with the undertaking if the officer knowingly authorised or permitted the failure.

Subclause 314(3) additionally introduces a reverse onus defence that requires an officer of a body corporate to prove that they exercised due diligence to prevent the commission of an offence by the body corporate as a defence to a charge for an offence against a list of provisions specified in clause 314(2).

Presumption of innocence

These provisions are relevant to the presumption of innocence as they may operate to deem as 'fact' that an individual has committed an offence based on the actions of another body, based on their association with that body. I consider these three clauses to be consistent with this right for the following reasons.

Clause 312 does not engage the presumption of innocence as the prosecution is required to prove the accessorial elements of the offences. That is, that the relevant person authorised or was knowingly concerned with the commission of the offence. This requires proof, beyond reasonable doubt, that the individual knew the essential facts that constitute the offence and, through their own acts or omissions, was a participant in that offence. Clause 312 is broadly consistent with existing common law principles of accessorial liability.

Clause 313 goes beyond the normal principles of accessorial liability by allowing a director to be held liable for a failure to exercise due diligence. This also does not limit the presumption of innocence as the burden of proof lies on the prosecution to adduce each element of the offence beyond reasonable doubt, being the failure to take reasonable steps. The director is presumed to be innocent unless the prosecution can prove otherwise. In the alternative, to the degree that the right is still considered to be limited, due to the fact that a director who is proven to have failed to exercise due diligence is deemed guilty of the underlying offending without needing to prove the elements of the underlying offence, I consider any limit to be reasonably justified.

There is a strong need to ensure adequate deterrence of regulatory offences arising from the failure to meet minimum standards of safety in the building and plumbing industries. The Supreme Court, as well as comparative approaches in other jurisdictions, have held that the presumption of innocence may be subject to reasonable limits in the context of regulatory compliance, particularly where such standards are necessary to protect third parties who may not have the capacity to protect themselves (in this case, consumers). These provisions only target persons who have elected to undertake a position as an officer of a body corporate, which includes assuming the responsibilities and duties that apply to these roles, and who have the capacity to influence the conduct of the entity concerned. Clause 313 specifies the offences and subject matter to which a director assumes responsibilities in relation to ensuring due diligence.

The provisions ensure that such persons are appropriately held responsible for breaches that occur by or on behalf of the entity over which they have responsibility, enabling offences to be successfully prosecuted and operate as an effective deterrent. Affected persons should be well aware of the regulatory requirements and, as such, should have the necessary processes and systems in place to effectively meet these requirements and not incur accessorial liability. Additionally, the provision is appropriately tailored to allow a court to enquire into the individual circumstances of a director's culpability. In determining whether an officer failed to exercise due diligence, a court may have regard to such matters as what the officer knew, or ought reasonably to have known, about the commission of the offence by the body corporate, whether or not the officer was in a position to influence the body corporate in relation to the commission of the offence by the body corporate, and what steps the officer took, or could reasonably have taken, to prevent the commission of the offence by the body corporate (clauses 313(3)). Finally, in contrast to the accessorial liability clause which applies to a broad range of offences under the Act, clause 313 only applies to a small and appropriately targeted category of offences, including offences related to obtaining appropriate insurance for the benefit of the consumers of building work and offences relating to not making consumers pay more than a lawful deposit or progress payment amounts for a domestic building contract.

In my view, there is no less restrictive way of ensuring accountability of officers of bodies corporate for breaching the provisions of the proposed Act.

Turning to clause 314, I accept that this clause will limit the right to the presumption of innocence, as it shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish that they are not guilty of an offence. Clause 314(3) requires an officer of a body corporate to prove that they exercised due diligence to prevent the commission of an offence by the body corporate as a defence to a charge for an offence against specified provisions, rather than merely requiring the raising of evidence capable of supporting the defence. As this provision provides the officer with a statutory defence that can only be made out if they *prove* due diligence, the statute will shift the legal burden, not merely the evidentiary burden.

However, as noted above, the presumption of innocence may be subject to reasonable limits in the context of regulatory compliance, particularly where regulatory offences may cause harm to the public. The underlying offences subject to this provision are serious offences that go to fundamental requirements in building legislation, intended to protect the public from safety concerns and consumers from significant financial harm.

For example, a number of applicable offences pertain to unregistered building work, where requiring those undertaking building work to be registered is fundamental to the effectiveness of the building regulatory regime and consumer and public protection. Unregistered work creates significant risks to the health and safety of building occupants and the public because it both lacks initial quality control at the point of industry entry and subsequent oversight by regulators of the building work produced. Illness, injury or death may result from unregistered work if, for example, non-compliance with fire safety standards does not come to the attention of building surveyors, inspectors, or the BPC.

As registration is fundamental to the lawful operation of building companies, all directors in the building industry should have a basic understanding of registration requirements and turn their minds to compliance with those requirements. It is therefore appropriate that where an offence relates to registration, a director should bear the burden of proving that they exercised due diligence in relation to this core area of corporate compliance. Directors will also be on notice that they will be required to prove that they exercised due diligence to the legal standard, and that they will need to employ necessary processes and keeping of records to be able to satisfy this burden. I therefore consider that the reversal of the legal burden to be a reasonably necessary and proportionate response to address public safety and consumer harm risks due to the negligent conduct by officers in the building industry.

Further, the purpose of shifting the burden of proof is to provide the accused with an opportunity to avoid liability in circumstances where they were not at fault, without undermining the ability to enforce compliance with the law. Whether or how an officer exercised due diligence is peculiarly within the knowledge of the officer (e.g. access to evidence) such that they are best placed to prove the due diligence defence. Accordingly, this defence provision is necessary to ensure the effective administration of the regulatory scheme.

As such, I conclude that the right to be presumed innocent in section 25(1) of the Charter is not limited by this Bill.

Ineligibility for registration

Part 6.10 of the Bill provide that if a court makes a civil penalty order against a person, or the person is found guilty of an offence against building legislation, it may make various orders including that specified licenses or registrations under the Building Act be cancelled, and that a person not be eligible to hold specified licenses or be registered under the Building Act (in essence, a disqualification order). Similar orders concerning the cancellation of, and disqualification from eligibility for, registration, may be made in relation to a body corporate.

Right not to be punished more than once

As such orders follow a finding of guilt or a contravention of a civil penalty, I do not consider that they constitute double punishment in the sense that the orders are part of the same proceeding and are considered to be consequences that follow the finding of guilt or contravention of a civil penalty. In other words, they have the characteristic of auxiliary orders made at the same time as the primary sentence.

Secondly, the purpose of the orders is not punitive but serves to exclude persons with a history of contraventions from being able to continue to participate in the building sector, for the safety of consumers.

Finally, these orders are to be taken into account at sentencing under the principle of totality, which concerns the combined effect of a sentence and any auxiliary order to ensure it is not disproportionate to the offence.

Infringement notices and injunctions

Part 6.6 of the Bill provides for a regime where an authorised building and plumbing officer, including an BPC-appointed inspector, the chief executive officer or a municipal building surveyor, may serve an

infringement notice on any person in certain circumstances (clause 326). Infringement notices must include the details required under section 13 of the *Infringements Act 2006* and the details of any additional steps required to expiate the offence (clause 326(4)). Additional steps required to expiate a building and plumbing infringement offence may include carrying out any work if failure to carry out the work constitutes the offence, stopping any work that constitutes the offence, or doing or failing to do a specified thing for the purposes of remedying a contravention of building legislation (clause 327).

Clause 328 applies if an infringement notice requires additional steps to be taken to expiate an offence and the person served with the notice informs the authorised building and plumbing officer that those steps have been taken either before the end of the period for payment specified in the notice or if the officer allows and the person has not been charged with the offence, at a later time. In this instance, the authorised building and plumbing officer must find out whether or not those steps have been taken and serve on the person a notice stating whether or not those steps have been taken. Clause 328(3) provides that a statement that additional steps have been taken is for all purposes conclusive proof of that fact.

Part 6.9 of the Bill provides for a regime where a court may grant an injunction in any terms that it considers appropriate if it is satisfied that a person has engaged, or is proposing to engage, in various conduct that relates to the contravention of building legislation. Clause 356(6) specifically empowers the court to grant an injunction requiring a person to carry out specified building work, plumbing work or other specified work.

Freedom from forced work

Clauses 327(a) may engage the right to freedom from forced work by requiring a person subject to an infringement notice under clause 326 to undertake additional steps to expiate a building and plumbing infringement offence, specifically to carry out any work if failure to do so constitutes the offence. Similarly, clause 356(6) would engage this right.

As outlined above, 'forced or compulsory labour' relevantly does not include work that forms part of normal civil obligations, which is work provided for by law, imposed for a legitimate purpose, and not exceptional or having a punitive purpose or effect. This would include obligations to undertake work in order to ensure compliance with regulatory standards, particularly where those standards are to protect against risks to persons whose safety is reliant on the compliance of others.

I am of the view that, if the right is engaged, work required to be carried out under an infringement notice issued under clause 326 or an injunction granted under clause 356 would form part of normal civil obligations and would, therefore, not constitute a limit on the right. A notice requiring that certain additional steps be undertaken will be confined in its impact, in that the notice must only be issued where the issuing officer has a reason to believe that the person has committed a building and plumbing infringement offence. As discussed above, the Bill protects the public by ensuring that specific actions are undertaken in order to support compliance, and thus improve outcomes for consumers in the building industry. The work is not being directed for any punitive purpose.

Additionally, for example, an infringement notice issued under clause 326 will be subject to the requirements in section 13 of the *Infringements Act 2006*, such that it must be in writing and state that the person is entitled to elect to have the matter of the infringement offence heard and determined in the Court. Given this, the person may make submissions to the Court about the matter before carrying out any required work (clause 326(2)).

For these reasons, I do not consider that the freedom from forced or compulsory labour will be limited by this Bill.

Civil penalty orders

Part 6.7 provides the circumstances in which the BPC may apply to a court for a civil penalty order. Clause 330 outlines the factors the court may have regard to in determining a civil penalty amount, including whether the person has previously engaged in conduct that constitutes a contravention of a civil penalty provision.

Clause 332 provides that a court must not issue a civil penalty order against a person if the person has contravened a civil penalty provision and has been found guilty of an offence constituted by conduct that is substantially the same. Clause 333 provides that a proceeding for the making of a civil penalty order is stayed if a criminal proceeding is or has commenced against the person and is constituted by conduct that is substantially the same as the conduct alleged to constitute the contravention. If the person is found not guilty then the civil penalty proceeding may be resumed or if they are found guilty then the proceeding for the civil penalty order is dismissed (clause 333(2)). Clause 334 provides that a criminal proceeding may be commenced against a person for conduct that is substantially the same as conduct constituting the contravention of the civil penalty provision regardless of whether a civil penalty order has been made against the person. Further, information given and documents produced by an individual in a civil penalty proceeding

are not admissible in evidence in a criminal proceeding for an offence constituted by conduct that is substantially the same (clause 335).

The right not to be punished more than once for the same offence

As discussed above, section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which they have already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law. Relevant to the concept of punishment it may be suggested that the section 24 right to have a criminal charge decided by a court implies a principle that a person may only be punished as a result of a charge being proven in a criminal proceeding.

In my view, Part 6.7 broadly promotes the right not to be punished more than once for the same offence by ensuring that a court must not make any civil penalty order against a person if the person who contravened a civil penalty provision has been convicted of an offence constituted by conduct that is the same, or substantially the same, as the conduct alleged to constitute the contravention of a civil penalty provision (clause 332). Further, proceedings that have been commenced against a person for a contravention of a civil penalty provision listed under building legislation are stayed if criminal proceedings are commenced or have already been commenced against the person for an offence, and the offence is constituted by conduct that is the same or substantially the same as the conduct alleged to constitute a contravention of the civil penalty provision (clause 333). These provisions seek to protect against concurrent civil and criminal proceedings for conduct that is substantially the same. However, if a person is not convicted of the criminal offence, clause 333(2) provides that civil penalty proceedings may be resumed. In my view, these sections promote the right not to be punished more than once for conduct that is substantially the same.

Clause 334 provides that criminal proceedings may be commenced after a proceeding for a civil penalty order regardless of whether a civil penalty order has been made against the person. The civil penalty regime in the Bill may interfere with a person's right not to be punished more than once given the proposed parallel operation of the civil penalty regime with the criminal law. The new civil penalty regime is intended to provide the BPC with the capacity to respond appropriately to corporate wrongdoing and the most egregious contraventions of building legislation and thus, to deter further contraventions. The regime establishes that a person cannot be given a civil penalty order if a person has been convicted of an offence constituting the same conduct.

Clause 334 enables criminal proceedings to be brought against a person regardless of whether a civil penalty order has been made for conduct that is substantially the same as the conduct constituting the offence. Accordingly, a person may receive a civil penalty and then have a subsequent criminal sanction imposed upon a conviction for the same conduct. This is relevant to the protection against double punishment in section 26 of the Charter. Whether the right is limited in this context will depend on whether the civil penalty is of such nature and magnitude to constitute truly penal consequences.

In my view, the civil penalties in this Bill for breaching the relevant provisions would not be considered to be punitive, or in effect, criminal sanctions. Although some of the maximum pecuniary penalties are up to 3000 penalty units for a natural person (clause 331), the purpose of the civil penalties is to encourage regulatory compliance and deter further contraventions, particularly for conduct that has the capacity to cause serious harm. A civil penalty order will be enforceable as a judgment debt and a person will not be liable to be imprisoned for a failure to discharge the debt.

While I do not consider that clause 331 limits or engages section 26 of the Charter, to the extent that right may be limited if a court should consider that the larger civil penalties do constitute punishment, I am of the view that the limit is reasonable and justified in the circumstances.

In relation to clause 334, this approach mirrors the 'pyramid of sanctions' model of enforcement employed by comparative regulatory schemes in other jurisdictions. This model is predicated on findings that implementing a bar against the use of both criminal and civil proceedings can undermine effective enforcement. Civil penalty proceedings can be more efficient in enforcing a regulatory scheme and deterring misconduct due to the lower burden of proof, streamlined procedure, availability of negotiated settlements and lower costs. However, civil penalties alone can be an insufficient deterrent in relation to the more serious and harmful misconduct which warrant criminal punishment. Criminal sanctions are directed at appropriate punishment and serve as a greater deterrent. A criminal conviction poses much more reputational risks for a defendant, with negative publicity and stigma potentially arising from a conviction far outweighing the label attached to an adverse decision in civil proceedings and/or the making of civil penalty orders. The availability to commence criminal proceedings following a civil penalty contravention is an important part of the pyramidal structure of enforcement of sanctions for more serious cases, while still providing for effective and efficient deterrence.

The Bill implements sufficient safeguards to protect criminal process rights, including deeming any information and documents produced by an individual in a proceeding for a civil penalty order against the

individual as inadmissible in a criminal proceeding concerning substantially the same conduct (clause 335). Further, the Bill does not interfere with existing sentencing discretions, including a sentencing judge's consideration of the principle of totality and rule against double punishment in relation to imposing a criminal sanction for substantially the same conduct already subject to a civil contravention order.

Accordingly, I consider that clause 334 of the Bill is compatible with the right not to be tried or punished more than once in section 26 of the Charter.

Improvement notices

Clause 345 provides that a person on whom an improvement notice is served must comply with the notice within the period specified in the notice unless they have a reasonable excuse.

Right to be presumed innocent (section 25(1))

Section 25(1) of the Charter is relevant where a statutory provision shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that they are not guilty of an offence.

This reverse onus offence provision, which places an evidential burden on the accused, may engage the right to the presumption of innocence. In other words, the accused is required to present or point to evidence that suggests a reasonable possibility of the existence of facts that would establish the exception or excuse.

As clause 345 is a summary offence, section 72 of the *Criminal Procedure Act 2009* will apply to require an accused who wishes to rely on having a reasonable excuse to present or point to evidence that suggests a reasonable possibility of the existence of facts that, if they existed, would establish the exception. In other words, the provision imposes an evidential onus on an accused when seeking to rely on the defence.

However, the Supreme Court has held that evidential onus provisions on an accused to establish an exception does not transfer the legal burden of proof and does not limit the right to the presumption of innocence. Once the accused has pointed to evidence of a reasonable excuse, the burden shifts back to the prosecution who must prove the essential elements of the offence to a legal standard. Further, the exceptions relate to matters which are particularly within an accused's knowledge and would be unduly onerous for a prosecution to disprove at first instance.

Accordingly, I am of the view that these offence provisions are compatible with the Charter.

Enforceable undertaking registers

Clause 354 requires the BPC to maintain a register of all enforceable undertakings; and register each enforceable undertaking in the register. The register relevantly must include such personal information such as the name and address of the person who gave the enforceable undertaking. Clause 354(4) provides that the register must be made available for inspection by any person upon request.

Clause 355 provides that the BPC must maintain a public register of enforceable undertakings given by various entities including developers or a person who is in the business of building or plumbing The BPC must publish the register on the BPC's Internet site.

Right to privacy

The establishment of the registers – and the holding of the personal information of persons in the register referred to in clause 354 – engages the right to privacy. The publication requirement in respect of the register maintained under clause 355 may also engage the right to privacy.

However, any impacts on the right to privacy are not unlawful or arbitrary. The personal information to be included in the register is clearly stipulated in the legislation and primarily limited to basic personal information (e.g., does not include criminal records). The public register does not contain any sensitive personal information and publication is necessary to alert consumers and industry members to wrongdoing by the regulated entity who provided the undertaking, to promote accountability, and ensure transparency of the BPC's enforcement decision-making.

Accordingly, any impacts on the right to privacy are appropriate and proportionate to the legitimate aim of protecting consumers, ensuring transparency and accountability in the building industry. I therefore consider that the register established by the Bill is compatible with the privacy right in section 13 of the Charter.

Other remedies: injunctions and prohibition notices

Clause 356(6) empowers the court to grant an injunction requiring a person to: carry out or arrange for the testing, including the destructive testing, of a building product or material used in the construction of a building; transfer property; and destroy or dispose of goods that have been or may be used in carrying out building or plumbing work.

Clause 356(5) empowers the court to grant an order restraining a person from carrying on a business as a building practitioner or a plumber or supplying goods or services used in building work or plumbing work (whether or not as part of, or incidental to, the carrying on of another business) for a specified period or except on specified terms and conditions.

Clause 362 empowers the court to make a prohibition order, on an application by the BPC, of various actions such as making of a payment by another person in discharge of a debt owed to the person or their associate; parting with possession of, or transferring or encumbering, any of the person's money or other property; another person who is holding money or other property on behalf of the person or their associate from transferring or encumbering all or any of the property to the person or the person's associate. An order under clause 362 may be expressed to operate for a period specified or until a proceeding under another provision of building legislation in relation to which the order was made has been concluded. An order under clause 362 made on an ex parte basis cannot operate for a period of more than 30 days.

Property rights

As outlined above, 'property' under the Charter includes all real and personal property interests and property rights characteristically entail the right to use, control, transfer, dispose and exclude. As the above provisions authorise such actions as the destruction or disposal of building products or materials or goods and dealings with property, it will constitute a substantial restriction to a person's use or enjoyment of their property, such that the interference could amount to a 'deprivation' of property.

However, this right is not limited where a law that authorises a deprivation of property is adequately accessible, clear and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable a person to regulate their conduct. For example, it is subject to judicial oversight, where the court may only grant an injunction if it is satisfied that certain specified conditions related to the contravention of building legislation, a condition of any licence or registration under building legislation, or a notice, permit, direction, order or determination issued or made under building legislation.

A prohibition order that may be made under clause 362 potentially interferes with property. In my opinion, the right to property is not limited by these provisions, as any deprivation of property will only result from adherence to the sufficiently certain and circumscribed provisions, only following an application to a court, and only for a specified period (section 362(2)). If an application is made on an ex parte basis then it cannot operate for more than 30 days. This requirement confines any interference with property in circumstances where the person whose property may be affected by the order is not provided with advance notice of the application for an order.

As any deprivation of property which occurs as a result of the operation of section 362 will occur by way of a court order, it will be in accordance with law. Further, any deprivation of property is reasonably necessary to achieve the important objective of ensuring compliance with building legislation.

Therefore, I consider that any deprivation will be in accordance with the law such that the right to property is not limited.

Right to privacy

Although the Charter does not include an express 'right to work', there is case law which suggests that the right to privacy may include 'a right to work of some kind' where there is a sufficient impact upon the personal relationships of an individual or on their capacity to experience a private life, for example by curtailing their ability to earn a living and maintain their identity through employment.

It is possible that an injunction under clause 356(5) restraining a person from carrying on a business as a building practitioner or a plumber or supplying goods or services used in building work or plumbing work may significantly curtail their ability to earn a living and maintain their identity through employment. Accordingly, on a broad reading, the right to privacy may be engaged by this provision. However, for the right to be limited, any interference must be unlawful and arbitrary. The question of arbitrariness depends upon the proportionality of any interference with privacy.

In my view, any impacts on the right to privacy are not unlawful or arbitrary. This is so because the injunction power is subject to a range of safeguards, such that any limits on rights are precise and carefully circumscribed. As outlined above in the property discussion, an injunction can only be made by the court if it is satisfied that certain specified conditions related to the contravention of legislation, a condition of any licence or registration, or notice, permit, direction, order or determination. Accordingly, any deprivation of privacy is reasonably necessary to achieve the important objective of ensuring compliance with building legislation.

Therefore, these provisions are aimed at ensuring that only suitable people are permitted to work in the industry, which serves a legitimate and important protective purpose. The power to restrain employment due

to a person's failure to comply with the law is an important regulatory function that protects the integrity and safety of the industry.

Accordingly, I consider that any interference arising from the injunction provision would not be arbitrary.

Adverse publicity orders

Clause 367 of the Bill provides the court with the power to make an adverse publicity order if a person is found guilty of an offence or to have contravened a civil penalty provision.

If the court finds a person guilty of an offence against the building legislation or finds that a person has contravened a civil penalty provision, the court may, on application by the BPC, make an order requiring the person to do all or any of the following within the period specified in the order: disclose specified information to which the person has access to a specified person and in a specified way; or publish an advertisement at the person's expense in terms specified or determined in accordance with the order and in a specified way. The court may make an adverse publicity order in addition to imposing a penalty or making any other order the court may make in relation to the offence or contravention of the civil penalty provision.

An adverse publicity order serves the important purpose of seeking to promote accountability by preventing a person from concealing that they have been found guilty of an offence or found to have contravened a civil penalty provision and have been subject to a penalty. The purpose of the order is to deter future breaches and promote consumer awareness of the offender or contravener. This helps to create better outcomes for consumers, who will be made aware of the previous conduct of persons who have contravened the building legislation who they may be considering engaging related to the provision of services in their homes or businesses. The risk of an adverse publicity order and the resulting damage to a person's reputation may create a greater deterrence than a monetary penalty, which will in turn encourage greater compliance with the building legislation.

Right to privacy and reputation

This power engages the right to not have a person's privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with under section 13(a) of the Charter and the right to not have a person's reputation unlawfully attacked under section 13(b) of the Charter, by a court ordering that a person must make the commission of an offence or contravention of a civil penalty provision known to the public or to a specific person, or both.

I consider it likely that the information that a person will be required to publish under an adverse publicity order will already be in the public domain as a consequence of judicial proceedings held in open court.

In my view, the right not to have a person's privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with under section 13(a) and the right to not have one's reputation unlawfully attacked under section 13(b) of the Charter will not be limited, because any interference with a person's privacy or damage to the person's reputation will not be unlawful as it will be in accordance with an accessible and precise legislative framework. Further, any interference with a person's privacy will not be arbitrary as the required disclosure of information serves the legitimate purpose of deterrence and consumer protection.

I am satisfied that the right to privacy and reputation under section 13 of the Charter is not limited by the power for the court to make adverse publicity orders in clause 367.

Right to freedom of expression

The power engages and may limit the right to freedom of expression, because it potentially results in an order that compels a person to publish certain information. To the extent that the right to freedom of expression may be limited, I am satisfied that any such limitation is justified, given the important deterrent and consumer protection purposes that adverse publicity orders serve, as described above.

Disciplinary action against licensed or registered persons

Chapter 7 provides for a framework for the BPC to take disciplinary action against licensed or registered persons (including registered or licensed building practitioners or employees, or licensed or registered plumbers, or endorsed building engineers) in the circumstances set out in that chapter.

Part 7.2 provides for the disciplinary powers of the BPC, including the disciplinary action it can take, and the grounds for disciplinary action in Part 7.3.

Training, rectification or other directions

Clause 374 of the Bill defines 'disciplinary action' to include directing a licensed or registered person to do, or not to do, a specified thing, including to rectify or complete specified building or plumbing work (clause 374(b)), or requiring the person to complete training (clause 374(c)).

Freedom from forced work

As outlined above, 'forced or compulsory labour' under section 11 of the Charter does not include work that forms part of normal civil obligations, being work provided for by law, imposed for a legitimate purpose, and not having a punitive purpose or effect. The action provided for under clause 374(b) and (c) is intended to ensure that building and plumbing work complies with regulatory standards, and that licensed and registered people are appropriately qualified to undertake building and plumbing work. This, in turn, is intended to protect against risks to people from unsafe building and plumbing work and lift professional standards. Accordingly, as this work is provided for by law, imposed for a legitimate protective purpose on people who have voluntarily assumed responsibilities participating in a regulated sector, and do not have a punitive purpose or effect, I do not consider that these provisions engage section 11.

Rights to fair hearing and to not be tried or punished more than once

Clause 374 of the Bill also defines 'disciplinary action' to include ordering a licensed or registered person to pay the BPC a penalty (clause 374(d)).

This provision is relevant to the rights to a fair hearing (section 24(1)) and the protection against double punishment (section 26).

Firstly, the right to a fair hearing includes a right to have a criminal charge decided by a competent, independent and impartial court after a fair hearing. Implicit in this right is that a criminal penalty is only imposed on a person following a finding of guilt by a court pursuant to a criminal process. While clause 374 empowers the BPC to order a person to pay the BPC a penalty of penalty units, in my view, this is not to be regarded as a criminal sanction so as to engage this implied right.

The disciplinary action provided for in Chapter 7 could not be characterised as punitive or constituting a criminal proceeding. The Bill describes such proceedings as 'disciplinary action' which has a civil connotation. Disciplinary proceedings are brought by application (not by arrest or summons). Proceedings are brought on grounds relating to upholding professional standards, protecting the public and maintain confidence in the building and plumbing sector. The available sanctions are largely preventative and relate to enforcing compliance with building legislation and deterring non-compliance. To the extent that they do include penalty units, these are set at a moderate amount and do not enliven criminal consequences such as a conviction or imprisonment. A disciplinary sanction involving penalty units is a common sanction in regulated sectors.

As this is not a criminal process involving a punitive sanction, it is not relevant to the protection against double punishment in section 26. Nonetheless, I note the Bill still gives effect to this right by way of clause 374(d), which provides that the BPC cannot order a person to pay a penalty if a charge has already been filed in relation to the matter, or if the matter has been dealt with by a court exercising its criminal jurisdiction or by an infringement notice. Additionally, clause 375 permits the BPC to take disciplinary action in relation to an expiated building and plumbing infringement offence under the *Infringements Act 2006* (which would involve circumstances where a person has already paid an infringement penalty), but (pursuant to clause 375(2)) cannot impose a further penalty as a disciplinary sanction under clause 374(d).

Accordingly, I am satisfied these provisions are compatible with these rights.

Show cause process

Part 7.5 provides for a show cause process to be initiated if the BPC proposes to take disciplinary action against a person.

Fair hearing

As noted above, a 'civil proceeding' under section 24(1) of the Charter is not limited to a proceeding decided by judicial decision-makers; it may encompass the decision-making procedures of administrative decision-makers with the power to determine private rights and interests. The entire decision-making process, including the availability of reviews and appeals, must be examined to determine whether the fair hearing right is limited.

In my view, the show cause process provided for in Part 7.5 promotes section 24(1) of the Charter by affording a licensed or registered person subject to proposed disciplinary action the following procedural fairness safeguards:

- the BPC must give a show cause notice to the person, stating the proposed disciplinary action, the ground for the action and the facts forming the basis of the ground, and that the person may make written or oral representations to the BPC (clauses 392 and 393);
- if the BPC ceases to reasonably believe that a ground exists to take disciplinary action, it must give written notice to the person that no further action will be taken in relation to the show cause notice (clause 396);

- if the BPC does reasonably believe that a ground exists, it must give written notice to the person of the decision to take disciplinary action, and include either the reasons for the decision or that the person may request written reasons (clause 398); and
- if the BPC decides to defer taking the disciplinary action proposed in the show cause notice, it must also give written notice to the person of the decision, including details such as whether any conditions are imposed on the deferral and then give written notice if it decides to then revoke the deferral (clauses 398, 400 and 401).

A licensed or registered person can apply for internal review of a decision of the BPC to take disciplinary action against them (under clause 398), to impose any condition on the deferral of disciplinary action (under clause 399(2)), to revoke a deferral of disciplinary action (under clauses 400 and 401). A person can apply for VCAT review of a decision of the BPC under clause 398 to disqualify them from holding a licence or being registered. Other decisions of the BPC made under clause 398, or decisions made under clauses 399(2), 400 or 401, if the chief executive officer or a commissioner made the decision or was involved in the matters that gave rise to the reviewable decision, are also subject to VCAT review.

Mandatory cancellation and suspension (emergency, interim or immediate) of licence or registration

Fair hearing

As noted above, a 'civil proceeding' under section 24(1) of the Charter is not limited to a proceeding decided by judicial decision-makers; it may encompass the decision-making procedures of provided for in Chapter 7 of the Bill, including:

- the BPC or VCAT must cancel a person's licence or registration if they make a finding during disciplinary proceedings that the person is not a fit and proper person or does not satisfy one or more of the matters set out in section 377(2): clause 381(1) of the Bill (**mandatory cancellation**);
- before taking any disciplinary action, the BPC may suspend a person's licence or registration if the BPC reasonably believes that a ground for disciplinary action exists and suspension is in the interests of the public, including having regard to any risks to neighbouring properties, people's health and safety, and consumers: clause 382(1) of the Bill (**emergency suspension**);
- if the BPC reasonably believes that a person has contravened prescribed provisions in building legislation or prescribed provisions in any other Act, the BPC may (and in certain cases must) suspend the person's licence or registration on an interim basis: clause 385(1) and (2) of the Bill (**interim suspension**); and
- if the BPC reasonably believes that a person has ceased to be covered by the required insurance, or has ceased to comply with certain building legislation, or has failed to pay a penalty or to comply with licence conditions, or has failed to complete required training, the BPC may immediately suspend the person's licence or registration: clause 388(1) of the Bill (**immediate suspension**).

In my view, the administrative decisions provided for in Chapter 7 of the Bill are compatible with section 24(1) of the Charter because of the key procedural fairness safeguards set out below.

In relation to **emergency suspension** and **immediate suspension**:

- the BPC must give the person notice of its decision to suspend their licence or registration, the grounds for taking disciplinary action and the availability of review: clause 383(1) and clause 389(1) of the Bill respectively;
- the BPC must provide written reasons for the emergency suspension and the immediate suspension to the person within five business days after giving notice: clause 383(2) and clause 389(2) respectively; and
- the show cause notice process applies to an emergency suspension: clause 383(3).

In relation to **interim suspension**, additional information must be included in the show cause notice: clause 386.

Further, under clause 407, the BPC may at any time revoke a suspension, if satisfied it is appropriate to do so, and provide written notice of its decision to the licensed or registered person.

In addition to the safeguards listed above, a person can apply for internal review, and then VCAT review, of a decision of the BPC to suspend a licence or registration on an emergency basis (under clause 382), an interim basis (under clause 385), or an immediate basis (under clause 388).

For these reasons, I consider that the administrative decisions discussed above that are provided for in Chapter 7 do not limit the right to fair hearing.

Publishing adverse decisions and notifying of cancellation or suspension of licence or registration

Clause 409 provides that the BPC may publish on its website details of an adverse decision made against a licensed or registered person under Chapter 7 or the Building Act. Clause 404 requires a person whose licence or registration has been cancelled or suspended to give written notice of the cancellation or suspension to anyone with whom the person has entered into a contract for the carrying out of work.

Privacy and reputation, and freedom of expression

By permitting and requiring the publication and notification of details of adverse decisions, including the cancellation or suspension of licences or registrations, clauses 404 and 409 engage sections 13 and 15(2) of the Charter.

The publication on the BPC's website of details of adverse decisions, permitted under clause 409, would involve the sharing of personal information (for example, at least the name of a licensed or registered person). Further, the adverse nature of the decision would affect the professional reputation of the person. However, I do not consider that clause 409 would limit either the right to privacy in section 13(a) of the Charter or the right not to have a person's reputation unlawfully attacked in section 13(b).

With respect to section 13(a), any interferences with a person's privacy would be lawful and not arbitrary. The details would be confined to only those necessary to identify a licensed or registered person against whom an adverse decision has been made. With respect to section 13(b), the publication of the decision details would be lawful and serves the legitimate and important purpose of making it known to the public the status of the licence or registration of people they might wish to engage for building or plumbing work (for example, whether disciplinary action has been taken against them, the length of any suspension etc). This, in turn, helps to create better outcomes for consumers.

Similar to adverse publicity orders discussed above, the purpose of publishing adverse decisions is also to deter non-compliance with building legislation and promote consumer awareness of the offender or contravener, owing to the risk of an adverse decision being published online and damaging a person's reputation. Further, clause 409 contains the following protections of a person's reputation:

- the BPC must note whether internal or external review of the decision has been sought;
- the BPC must remove from its website the details of any adverse decision that is overturned, or revise the details of any decision that is that is amended or substituted on internal or external review; and
- the decision details cannot be published for longer than 5 years after the decision is made or ceases to have effect.

The requirement under clause 404 to directly notify anyone who has entered into a contract for the carrying out of work by a person whose licence or registration has been cancelled or suspended, confined to circumstances in which that person is prohibited from carrying out the work without the registration or licence, clearly serves a legitimate and important purpose of protecting consumers, including against risks to their safety. Accordingly, clause 404 also does not limit section 13 of the Charter.

Finally, by requiring information to be provided, clauses 404 and 409 engage section 15(2) of the Charter, which protects the right to freedom from being compelled to provide information. This right may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights of other persons including, relevantly, consumers in the building industry. Noting the purposes outlined above that these clauses seek to promote, I do not consider that they limit section 15(2) of the Charter.

Chapter 8 – Building permit applications and the building permit levy

Right to privacy

Clauses 421 and 422 of the Bill set out the information that must be specified in, respectively, a building permit application or a staged permit application. The information provided for in clauses 421 and 422 relates to contract prices, or agreed or estimated amounts, to be paid to builders/contractors, and the cost of chattels or certain items. As this information is not personal information, I do not consider that clauses 421 and 422 engage the right to privacy in section 13(a) of the Charter. If the right were found to be engaged, it would not be limited, because any interference with privacy would be in accordance with law and not arbitrary.

Fair hearing

Chapter 8 of the Bill provides for administrative decisions to be made in relation to building permit applications and building permit levies. Clause 424 of the Bill provides for when a relevant building surveyor must refuse an application for, or to amend, a building permit. With respect to the building permit levy:

- clause 425 provides for the assessment and notification of the amount of building permit levy;

- clause 417 empowers the BPC to reassess the amount of building permit levy after a building permit has been issued;
- clause 418 empowers the BPC to assess the amount of building permit levy if a person is found guilty of, or is reasonably believed by the BPC to have committed, an offence against section 16(1) or 16B(1) of the Building Act;
- clause 419 provides for the imposition of a penalty levy; and
- clause 432 empowers the BPC to charge the reasonable costs incurred by it for reassessments after the issue of building permits or assessments in respect of unauthorised building work.

As noted above, the terms 'proceeding' and 'party' in section 24(1) of the Charter suggest that the fair hearing right was intended to apply only to decision-makers who conduct proceedings with parties that are determinative of existing rights. In my view, the administrative decisions provided for in clauses 424, 425, 417, 418, 432 and 419 do not involve the conduct of proceedings with parties so as to engage section 24(1), nor are they determinative of existing rights: rather, clause 424 sets out the circumstances in which a relevant building surveyor must refuse to issue a building permit, a prospective right; and clauses 425, 417, 418, 432 and 419 concern building permit levy amounts and the BPC's related costs – these are liabilities incurred by, and not rights of, applicants.

If, however, a broad reading of section 24(1) were adopted and it was understood that the fair hearing right was relevant to decisions made pursuant to the clauses above, this right would not be limited. The right to a fair hearing is concerned with the procedural fairness of a decision. The entire decision-making process, including the availability of review, must be examined to determine whether the right in section 24(1) is limited. In my view, section 24(1) is not limited because of the following key procedural fairness safeguards provided for in Chapter 8:

- the BPC must give the applicant for a building permit written notice of the applicable rate of the building permit levy and the amount payable: clause 425(2)(b)(iii), (3)(b)(iii) and (5)(b)(ii);
- in respect of reassessments after a building permit has been issued:
  - the BPC must give notice to the person liable to pay the additional amount of levy, any penalty levy (if applicable) and any costs charged, which addresses the matters in clause 427(2) and states that the person has the right to apply to VCAT for review of the decisions and calculations listed in clause 427(2)(g); and
  - if applicable, the BPC must give notice to the person who paid the levy of its reassessment (and a refund of the difference between the levy amount paid and the reassessed levy amount) and the notice must also state that the person has the right to apply to VCAT for review of the reassessment: clause 428(2);
- in respect of assessments of unauthorised building work, the BPC must give notice of the levy, any penalty levy and any costs charged, and the notice must also state that the person given the notice has the right to apply to VCAT for review of the decisions and calculations listed in clause 430(2)(g); and
- in addition to the decisions listed above that are subject to review, VCAT review can also be sought of the BPC's decisions under clause 425 as to the amount of building permit levy (which includes any amount of penalty levy), the reasons for a reassessment under clause 417(1) and, under clause 432, the costs charged in carrying out a reassessment or an assessment (clause 201).

For these reasons, I consider that the administrative decisions provided for in clauses 417(1), 418(2), 419(3), 425 and 432 would not limit the right to fair hearing, were it considered to be engaged at all.

Penalty levy

Under clause 419 of the Bill, an amount of penalty levy is imposed if:

- a person liable to pay a building permit levy failed to notify the BPC within the specified time period (specified in clause 416(2) and (3)) about a variation to the building work that will result in an increase to the cost of the building work of a certain amount;
- the BPC reasonably believes that a person who is liable to pay a building permit levy has committed an offence against clause 324(1) by knowingly providing false or misleading information referred to in clauses 416 (in relation to notifying the BPC of increased cost of building work), 421 (information required in building permit applications), 422 (information required in staged permit applications) or 423 (information required relating to class or classes of building); or
- the BPC serves a notice under clause 430(1) after assessing a building permit levy in respect of unauthorised building work.

A penalty levy is not payable if the BPC is satisfied that the person:

- honestly and reasonably believed that the variation to the building work did not increase the cost of the building work by a certain amount; or
- will suffer financial hardship as a result of paying the penalty levy.

Right to fair hearing and to have a criminal charge decided by a court

As discussed above, the right to have a criminal charge decided by a competent court, which is a component of the right to a fair hearing, may include an implied protection against forms of punishment being imposed outside of a court process and following a finding of guilt.

Accordingly, it is necessary to discuss the characteristics of the penalty levy, which in my view should not be considered as constituting a criminal penalty for the following reasons:

- Penalty levies are imposed primarily for the purpose of deterrence. As the obligation to give notice of any increase to the cost of the building work under clause 416 (or a failure to do so or a failure to do so accurately) affects the ability of the BPC to calculate the building permit levy, there can be a financial advantage to not providing correct information or not providing the information at all. The penalty levy functions to discourage non-declaration or under-declaration of costs, so that those who do not comply with the law do not gain a financial advantage over those who do. They are intended to deter failures to notify the BPC of increased costs of the building work and to promote compliance with the Bill, in particular by ensuring that the building permit levy paid reflects the cost of the building work.
- This purpose is supported by setting the amount of penalty levy as a percentage of the assessed amount of building permit levy (clause 419(4)). I consider this amount to be reasonably necessary to deter contraventions of the Bill's building permit levy provisions.
- To the extent that the penalty levy is considered to serve a punitive purpose (e.g., to punish failures to notify the BPC of increased costs of building work in a timely and accurate matter), this does not make the penalty levy criminal, or akin to criminal punishment or a criminal charge. The penalty levy is still principally an administrative penalty. Unlike a fine, a penalty levy cannot be converted into other penal sanctions, and does not result in a criminal record. Because the penalty levy is part of the building permit levy (refer to clause 412(1)(c)) a penalty levy may be recovered in a court of competent jurisdiction as a debt due to the Commission (clause 433). Accordingly, any necessary enforcement of this civil debt would be governed by the civil debt recovery system, not the criminal law (e.g., a person would not be imprisoned for a failure to discharge the debt).

For the reasons listed above, I do not consider that the criminal process rights under the Charter are engaged by clause 419 of the Bill. Similarly, as the penalty levy provided for by clause 419 would not be considered as imposing criminal consequences, it does not result in the determination of a criminal charge pursuant to section 24(1) of the Charter.

Right not to be tried or punished more than once

Section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which that person has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law. This right reflects the principle of double jeopardy which only applies in respect of criminal offences. It will not prevent civil proceedings being brought in respect of a person's conduct which has previously been the subject of criminal proceedings, and vice versa.

The penalty levy provided for by clause 419 of the Bill is imposed by that clause if the BPC reasonably believes that a person liable to pay a building permit levy has failed to notify the Commission within the time required of an increase in the cost of building work, or has committed an offence against clause 324(1) in relation to providing false or misleading information. A penalty levy is also imposed by clause 419(1)(c) if the BPC serves a notice on a person under clause 430(1) advising the person that they are liable to pay an amount of building permit levy in relation to building work (for which a building permit is required) that was carried out or that is reasonably believed by the BPC to have been carried out without a building permit.

Whether a person's right not to be punished more than once is engaged by clause 419 will depend on whether the penalty levy is of such a nature and magnitude to constitute truly penal consequences. As I have noted above, the penalty levy would not be considered punitive or a criminal sanction.

Accordingly, I consider that clause 419 of the Bill is compatible with the right not to be tried or punished more than once under section 26 of the Charter.

Presumption of innocence

As also noted above, the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in section 25(1)) of the Charter applies to people charged with a criminal offence. Assuming this right has application beyond

criminal proceedings, imposing a penalty levy based on the BPC's reasonable belief that a person has contravened clause 416 or has committed an offence against clause 324 or against section 16(1) or 16B(1) of the Building Act, as provided for respectively under clause 419(1)(a), (b) or (c), may limit this right. However, I consider that any such limitation is reasonably justified. As noted above, the primary purpose of clause 419 is to deter the avoidance of paying the full amount of building permit levy by a failure to apply for and obtain a building permit in accordance with Part 3 of the Building Act or a failure to notify the BPC of increased costs of the building work or by the provision of false or misleading information.

Further, the Bill provides that a person liable to pay a penalty levy is able to apply for VCAT review of the BPC's decision under clause 419(1) if it is believed that a person has committed an offence (clause 201).

For the reasons above, I conclude that clause 419 is compatible with section 25(1) of the Charter.

Building industry orders

Chapter 9 of the Bill enables the Governor in Council to make building industry restructuring orders and building industry transfer orders.

Building industry restructuring orders made under Part 9.1 can only be made by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Minister if the Minister is satisfied that the proposed order is consistent with the building system objective and is necessary to facilitate the better integration or any improvement of the building system, or the delivery of a specific strategy, policy, program, service or project relating to the building system. They apply in respect of building industry bodies being the BPC, the Building Appeals Tribunal, the State Building Surveyor and the Building Monitor. While a building industry restructuring order can establish a new building industry body, the new body will be a body corporate (clause 440).

Part 9.2 enables the Governor in Council to make building industry transfer orders on the joint recommendation of the Minister and the Treasurer if they are required by a building industry restructuring order, necessary to enable the transfer of a program or project for the building system or are necessary for the transfer of property, rights and liabilities from one building industry body to another.

The provisions in the Bill enable, rather than give effect to, a restructure or transfer of property, rights and liabilities. However, Orders made under Part 9.2 have the potential to impact on property, rights or liabilities or employment of natural persons. If a transfer order is made by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Minister and the Treasurer, all property rights and liabilities specified in the order transfer to the recipient building industry body, and the recipient building industry body is substituted as a party to any agreement or proceeding. The transfer is authorised by law and the enabling provisions are confined and structured, accessible to the public (the orders require publishing in the Government Gazette), formulated precisely and do not operate arbitrarily.

I therefore consider that the transfer of property, rights and liabilities under a building industry transfer order would not limit the property rights of any natural persons holding the interest as they are not being deprived of their interest. Rather, any right or liability of the transferee building industry body would be transferred from one building industry body to another without altering the substantive content of that right or liability. Insofar as a cause of action may be considered property within the meaning of section 20 of the Charter, I also consider that the provisions discussed above would not result in any deprivation of property as they would not extinguish any cause of action which a person may have against the relevant building industry body.

If employees are required to be transferred as a result of the making of a building industry restructuring order or a transfer order and those employees are employed under Part 3 of the *Public Administration Act 2004* (**PAA**), the provisions in the PAA would apply.

If employees are not Part 3 employees, clause 458 provides a mechanism to transfer employees on terms and conditions of employment determined by the Secretary that are no less favourable overall than those that applied to the person immediately before the transfer date, and with the protections set out in that clause. A transferred employee would therefore have equivalent entitlement to benefits accrued as an employee of the transferee body.

I also note that a transferring employee would not be denied the capacity to seek alternative employment on similar terms and that the provisions, if used, are unlikely to constitute an interference with private life of sufficient gravity so as to limit the right to privacy.

I further note that, while the provision effecting the transfer of staff would, if used, automatically alter a person's employer without their consent, the person's ongoing employment is of their own volition. Accordingly, the right to freedom from forced work would not be limited by such a transfer.

Noting that Part 9 contains powers to make orders, if a building industry restructuring order or a building industry transfer order were to be made, I do not consider that any rights under the Chater would be limited for the reasons explained above.

Chapter 10 – General

Information sharing, disclosure and use of personal information

Part 10.1 of Chapter 10 of the Bill includes information sharing provisions and provisions concerning the use and disclosure of building and plumbing information, which includes personal information, as well as commercially sensitive information and dispute resolution information obtained under Part 4 of the *Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995*. Part 10.1 of the Bill will replace sections 259A, 259AB, 259B and 259C of the Building Act and section 52I of the *Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995*. The provisions will provide for the circumstances in which permitted persons, which includes the BPC and its employees, may use and disclose information and also enter into information sharing arrangements with permitted agencies.

The Part also includes an offence provision to ensure confidentiality of building and plumbing information (clause 461) and provisions concerning use of building and plumbing information, including personal information (clauses 462 and 463), disclosure of building and plumbing information (clause 464), disclosure of information obtained under Part 4 of the *Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995* (clause 465), provision of information by the chief dispute resolution officer to the Director of Consumer Affairs Victoria (clause 467), and that the BPC may disclose cooling tower information (clause 468). It also provides for the circumstances in which commercially sensitive information can be disclosed (clause 466).

Right to privacy

To the extent that the information shared between the BPC, any permitted person and any other person includes personal information, the Bill will engage the right to privacy in section 13(a) of the Charter. In my opinion, any limit on the right to privacy by Part 10.1 of the Bill is reasonable and justified.

Although these provisions require and permit the BPC and permitted persons to use and disclose personal and identifying information, I do not consider these provisions are unlawful or arbitrary.

The purposes of the information sharing provisions are facilitating the sharing or exchanging of information held by the BPC and the permitted persons. The information shared must be reasonably necessary to assist the BPC or other permitted person to carry out the BPC's functions or powers. The Bill also provides for the sharing of information between the BPC and permitted agencies.

Clause 470 of the Bill imposes several limitations on how information can be shared under an information sharing arrangement made under that clause. Under clause 470(1) and (3)(a), if the information is to be shared between the BPC and a permitted agency, the information must be reasonably necessary to assist in the performance of the BPC's functions or the exercise of its powers or the functions of the permitted agency or the exercise of its powers. Further, under clause 470(2) and (3)(b), if the information is to be shared between two permitted agencies, it may only be information that (a) the receiving permitted agency could have requested from the BPC under clause 470(3)(a); or (b) is reasonably necessary to assist in the performance of the permitted agency's functions under the Bill.

Further, the BPC and each permitted agency that is a public entity within the meaning of the *Public Administration Act 2004* is bound by the requirements of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and must ensure that any collection, use or disclosure of information is undertaken in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles set out in Part 3 of that Act.

In my opinion, these provisions will not result in any arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, as any disclosure of personal information authorised by these provisions will only occur to the extent necessary to perform the functions of the BPC or permitted agency and, for the sharing of information between permitted agencies, the functions of the permitted agency are confined to any functions the agency has under the Bill.

Accordingly, I consider that the information sharing arrangements provided for under clause 470 of the Bill are compatible with the right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter.

Immunities and indemnities

Part 10.2 of the Bill includes clause 473 which provides for a statutory immunity for members and staff of public authorities for acts or omissions done in good faith performing a function or exercising a power of the public authority under this Bill or the regulations, or the Building Act or regulations or in the reasonable belief that the act or omission was in the performance of a function or the exercise of a power under that legislation. Clause 473(2) provides that the liability instead attaches to the public authority, which, in effect, provides for an indemnity for the members and staff of these public authorities.

Fair hearing

The fair hearing right is relevant where statutory immunities are provided to certain persons as this right has been held to encompass a person's right of access to the courts for determination of a civil claim. Similarly, insofar as a cause of action may be considered 'property' within the meaning of section 20 of the Charter, clause 473 may also engage this right.

As noted above, clause 473 of the Bill provides an immunity for members and staff of public authorities to not be held liable for anything done or omitted to be done in good faith in carrying out a function or exercising a power under the legislation referred to above, or in the reasonable belief that the act or omission was in the carrying out of a function or exercise of a power under that legislation.

While a public authority would include the BPC, clause 473(3) provides that clause 473 does not apply to a municipal council, so it does not apply to persons employed or engaged by a municipal council.

The exclusion from personal liability under clause 473 of the Bill will not interfere with the right to a fair hearing, because parties seeking redress are instead able to bring a claim against the public authority (clause 473(2)).

Additionally, the person employed or engaged by the public authority will still remain personally liable for any conduct not performed in good faith. Accordingly, this provision does not limit the right to a fair hearing under the Charter.

For these reasons, I consider that the limitation imposed on the right to a fair hearing by this immunity is justified and so compatible with the Charter.

Chapter 11 – Savings and transitional provisions and consequential amendments

Transfer of property, rights and liabilities from VBA to BPC

Clause 501 provides that all property and rights that were vested in the VBA are vested in the BPC and all liabilities of the VBA become liabilities of the BPC.

Right to property

The transfer of property, rights and liabilities from the VBA to the BPC is relevant to the property rights of natural persons who hold an interest in the liability transferred. However, this transfer of liabilities will not limit the property rights of persons holding the interest as they are not being deprived of their interest in the liability. Rather, the liability is transferred from one statutory office to another without altering the substantive content of that right.

Insofar as a cause of action in relation to any potential liability held by the VBA may be considered 'property' within the meaning of section 20 of the Charter, clause 501 may engage this right. However, in my opinion, these new provisions do not effect a deprivation of property as they do not extinguish any cause of action which a person may have against the VBA. Rather, liability is transferred to the BPC.

Accordingly, I consider that the amendment to transfer liabilities to the BPC does not limit this Charter right.

Transfer of staff

Clause 508 provides that a person who was employed by the VBA immediately before the commencement day is to be regarded as having been employed or engaged by the BPC with effect from the commencement day. The transfer of staff occasioned by this amendment is relevant to the Charter rights to freedom from forced work (section 11) and the right to privacy (section 13). However, for the reasons below, I consider that neither right is limited by these amendments.

Freedom from forced work

The right to freedom from forced work relevantly provides that a person must not be made to perform forced or compulsory labour, which includes all work or service exacted from any person under the menace of a penalty and for which the person has not offered themselves voluntarily (with certain exceptions).

While the provision effecting the transfer of staff will automatically alter a person's employer without their consent, the person's ongoing employment is of their own volition. For example, clause 509 expressly states that nothing in Division 3 of Part 11.1 prevents a person from resigning in accordance with the terms and conditions of their employment.

Accordingly, the right to freedom from forced work is not limited by this amendment.

Right to work

The right to privacy is a broad right that protects a person from interference in their personal and social sphere, including their capacity to pursue their chosen field of employment and develop and maintain personal relationships in the course of employment. While the right is relevant to matters of employment, it would

generally only be considered limited by restrictions on employment that have consequential effects on an individual's capacity to experience a private life.

Reforms concerning the terms of an individual's employment, particularly in the context of a statutory reform in relation to the person's employment (as discussed above), and where an employee is not being denied the capacity to seek alternative employment on similar terms, are unlikely to constitute an interference with private life of sufficient gravity so as to limit the right to privacy.

Further, subclauses 508(1)(b)–(c) stipulate that a person whose employment is transferred to the BPC will be employed on terms and conditions no less favourable overall than those that applied to them at the VBA and will have equivalent entitlement to benefits accrued as an employee of the VBA. Therefore, the proposed transfer will not result in any materially detriment to a staff member's employment terms, conditions or entitlements. Therefore, I am satisfied that the right to work is not limited by this amendment.

Conclusion

I am therefore of the view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

The Hon. Gabrielle Williams, MP
Minister for Transport Infrastructure
Minister for Public and Active Transport

Second reading

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (10:46): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows:

Background to the Bill

This Bill is first and foremost about protecting consumers from debilitating debt and heartbreak. The single biggest investment most Victorians will make in their lifetime is their home. Whether Victorians are purchasing or renting, they should be able to do so with the confidence that they will be moving into a safe, high quality and affordable home which is free from costly defects. The Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill delivers more protections for Victorians, giving them greater peace of mind by strengthening regulatory oversight of the sector and putting consumers at the core of the system, where they belong.

The affordability and availability of housing is one of the most pressing issues we face today. This is the case not only in Victoria, but around Australia and in many other countries around the world. The Victorian Government is fighting for consumers with comprehensive reforms to deliver a stronger building regulatory system.

In 2023 the Government released the Housing Statement, setting out our plan of building 800,000 new homes over a decade. At a federal level, we are working with the Commonwealth to deliver on the Housing Accord, which targets the construction of 1.2 million new homes nationally by mid-2029. These are ambitious targets, but ambition is necessary to meet the needs of our growing state. The old system, established by a previous Liberal government, left Victorian workers on their own and saw housing become more expensive for both owners and renters, and first home buyers felt their goals slip further from their reach.

Victoria's program of reform is leading the nation and protecting consumers. More homes are being built in Victoria than in any other state. While other states have sought to water down their building controls to catch up, Victoria continues to build more homes and build them *well*.

In 2025, we released the Building Statement to expand upon the foundation of the Housing Statement and guide our program of reforms to the building system. At the centre of this program is the establishment of a new and more powerful watchdog with the teeth it needs to hold dodgy building work to account, the Building and Plumbing Commission (BPC).

The BPC consolidates all aspects of building control, including regulation, insurance and dispute resolution, into a single agency overseeing Victoria's building and plumbing industries. With tough new powers, the Commission represents the beginning of a new era of building and plumbing regulation in Victoria. It is the most comprehensive overhaul of the system since the *Building Act* was introduced over 30 years ago.

Over the past 12 months, the Government has delivered a slate of reforms through the *Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025*, the *Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Act 2025*, and the *Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Job Sites and Other Matters) Act 2025*. These Acts began the process of consolidating all aspects of the regulatory system into a single body, with the Victorian Building Authority operating as the BPC from 1 July 2025.

Through these Acts, we are giving the Commission new powers to force builders to rectify poor work, closing a loophole that prevented the old regulator taking this action after occupants have moved in. We are introducing a new first-resort warranty scheme for projects of up to three storeys, supporting consumers to access their insurance more quickly when issues arise. We have also introduced a new developer bond to provide more financial protection for owners of apartments in buildings four storeys or higher, holding developers accountable for poor building work.

We are modernising the dispute resolution process, and we have worked proactively with industry and consumer groups on reforms to ensure the rules around domestic building contracts are clear and fair.

We have legislated changes to the security of payment framework to better protect sub-contractors and make sure they are paid fairly and on time for their work on site.

These reforms rightly protect consumers, but they also provide industry with more certainty. With clear pathways to identify and rectify defects, and a dispute resolution process that is easier to navigate, builders and plumbers doing the right thing will benefit, while those doing the wrong thing will be held to account. Greater consumer confidence also means greater investment in new homes and development across our state.

The Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill is the next step in permanently establishing the Commission. The main purposes of the Bill are:

- To provide for the administration and regulation of the building and plumbing industries in a standalone Act;
- To strengthen the enforcement of building legislation and building and plumbing standards;
- To provide effective and streamlined disciplinary processes for licensed and registered persons in the building and plumbing industries;
- To ensure effective regulation through the continuation of the building permit levy; and
- To make consequential amendments to the *Building Act 1993* and other Acts.

The scale of change in our state since the Building Act was introduced in 1993 is immense, and the Building Act has become increasingly cumbersome as more is bolted on to try to keep up. Now is the time to establish a new principal Act which clearly articulates the centrality of consumers to Victoria's building industry, a new legislative structure and a new, more robust regulator in the Building and Plumbing Commission.

The building system objective

The Bill introduces, for the first time, a clear building system objective. Its purpose is to define the fundamental goal that underpins all regulation and activity across Victoria's building system: protecting consumers.

At its core, this objective makes clear that protecting the health and safety of building occupants and the public is paramount whenever building and plumbing work is carried out or regulated. By placing this principle at the centre of the framework, the Bill provides a clear lens through which all decisions that affect the building system are to be made. This will protect consumers from expensive rectification costs and rebuild confidence and trust in Victoria's building system.

Building legislation

This Bill introduces a new definition of 'building legislation' to bring together the various Acts and subordinate legislation that regulate Victoria's building system under a single, coherent administration and enforcement framework.

By clearly identifying the legislation that sits within this framework, including this Bill, the *Building Act 1993*, the *Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995*, the *Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002*, and any other prescribed legislation, the reforms remove fragmentation and uncertainty about how these laws interact.

Importantly, the definition ensures that all building legislation is interpreted consistently having regard to the new consumer-focused building system objective. This promotes a unified approach to regulation, supports clearer decision-making and ensures all related legislation is working towards a common purpose across the building system.

The Building and Plumbing Commission

In 2024, an independent review into the Victorian Building Authority's handling of consumer complaints confirmed that significant changes were required to better protect Victorians building or renovating a home. In response, the Government has supported a sweeping transformation of the Authority's culture and performance. This Bill progresses the next step in that transformation by abolishing the Authority and replacing it with the new Building and Plumbing Commission.

The Bill provides flexible, accountable, and transparent governance arrangements for the Commission. Up to three Commissioners and a CEO may be appointed to govern the Commission, allowing the Government to add required skills and experience to the governing body and ensure it can respond to regulatory challenges in a timely manner.

To ensure the Commission acts in the public interest, without bias or conflicts of interest, the Bill introduces new eligibility requirements for Commissioners and the CEO. Persons who have worked in roles where there is a high risk of a conflict of interest, such as lobbying on behalf of industry within the past two years, will be ineligible for the positions of Commissioner or CEO. Similarly, in the immediate two years after leaving office, ex-Commissioners are not to undertake employment in roles where there is a high risk of a conflict of interest.

To ensure greater transparency and oversight of the Commission's operations, the Bill includes new reporting requirements. The Commission will report on a strategic plan, an annual work program and its performance against a consumer safety focused objective. For ongoing accountability and continuous improvement, the Bill provides for independent governance reviews within three years of the Commission's establishment and four years after the first review.

Clear roles in the new administration and enforcement framework

The Bill provides clarity to the roles of different entities across the building system. For the first time, the roles, relationships and responsibilities of government and regulatory bodies will be defined in one place. This means that anyone using building legislation – whether consumers, industry or regulators – can clearly understand how the system operates and where responsibilities sit. This strengthens accountability, improves regulatory effectiveness and supports confidence in the building system.

The Minister

The Bill clarifies the Minister's powers so as to support implementation, align regulation with government policy, and respond quickly to emerging risks, technical developments and urgent safety issues.

The Minister also ensures strong governance across the system, including by recommending statutory appointments to the Governor in Council and approving strategic plans of the Commission and the Building Monitor.

Ministerial advisory committees

The Bill provides for the Minister to seek expert advice through advisory committees. This recognises the technical complexity of the building system and ensures decisions can be informed by the right expertise at the right time.

Secretary

The new administration framework clearly sets out the Secretary's role in the system, providing role clarity across the building system. The Secretary, with their department, is responsible for accurate and high-quality policy advice to the Minister and effective implementation of government policy through legislation and regulation.

The insurance manager

The insurance manager oversees the operation of Victoria's statutory domestic building insurance arrangements. Appointed and employed by the Commission, the insurance manager reports to both the Minister and the Commission on performance of the statutory insurance scheme, as well as outstanding policies issued under the previous domestic building insurance scheme. This dual reporting role is central to transparency, accountability and the long-term sustainability of the insurance schemes, ensuring they continue to meet their public interest objectives.

The chief dispute resolution officer

The Bill integrates the chief dispute resolution officer into the new administration framework, to be appointed and employed by the Commission. Importantly, when performing dispute resolution functions, the chief dispute resolution officer and the conciliation officers and assessors they appoint, operate independently of the Commission's direction or control. This independence is essential to protect the rights of the parties, support procedural fairness, and maintain public confidence in the dispute resolution process.

The State Building Surveyor

The State Building Surveyor provides critical technical leadership within Victoria's building system. The Bill transfers this role from the *Building Act 1993* to the new administration framework.

To strengthen the statutory functions of the role, the Bill provides the State Building Surveyor with new information-gathering powers to support effective monitoring and early identification of emerging risks. These powers ensure regulators have the technical insight needed to respond to issues early, promote compliance, and maintain confidence in the safety and integrity of the building system.

The Building Monitor

The Building Monitor is an independent advocate for consumers within Victoria's building system. Empowered to gather information and engage with relevant entities for this purpose, this role is also being transferred from the *Building Act 1993* to the new administration framework.

Municipal councils

Municipal councils continue to play a vital role in the administration and enforcement of building legislation at a local level. The Bill retains these responsibilities as part of the new administration and enforcement framework, ensuring councils are clearly positioned within the modern regulatory structure.

The Bill preserves the Minister's ability to direct councils in the performance of their functions ensuring system-wide accountability and consistent regulatory outcomes across Victoria. At the same time, the State Building Surveyor has a clear role in monitoring councils' building control functions and providing advice and support, helping to strengthen capability and promote best practice.

Municipal building surveyors

Municipal building surveyors play a frontline role in protecting safety and compliance within the building system in their municipality. They exercise statutory powers under building legislation, including by issuing building permits, occupancy permits, building notices, building orders and emergency orders within their municipal districts.

The Bill maintains clear accountability by enabling both the Minister and the Commission to direct municipal building surveyors in the performance of their functions where appropriate. This ensures consistency, responsiveness and effective intervention when risks arise.

Private building surveyors

Private building surveyors continue to play a role in providing building control functions such as issuing building and occupancy permits. Strong safeguards remain in place to protect independence and integrity. The appointment of a building surveyor may only be terminated with the consent of the Commission, preventing inappropriate pressure and supporting professional independence. Where serious contraventions are identified, private building surveyors are required to escalate these matters to the Commission for further regulatory action.

The Building Appeals Tribunal

The Bill continues the Building Appeals Board as the Building Appeals Tribunal. This Tribunal plays a key role in providing independent review and determination of building matters. It exercises both administrative appeal and original jurisdiction under building legislation, ensuring decisions are subject to proper technical oversight and can be tested on their merits.

The new name of the Tribunal more accurately reflects its legal status, purpose and functions. Importantly, its jurisdiction, powers, constitution and procedures remain unchanged, preserving continuity and legal certainty.

A comprehensive suite of modern compliance and enforcement powers

The Bill establishes a new enforcement framework for Victoria's building legislation, which will equip the Commission and other building system regulators with modern, best practice and efficient powers to protect consumers and uphold the integrity of the industry.

While the vast majority of builders and plumbers work with pride, professionalism and high standards of quality and integrity, we also know that bad actors need to face consequences to stop them undermining hard-working builders in the industry. When things do go wrong, the financial and emotional impacts on consumers can be devastating. And when the reputation of the industry is tarnished, all hard working, professional builders and plumbers are impacted as consumer confidence and investment in the industry diminishes.

That's why we need a robust compliance and enforcement framework that can drive out those who wilfully flout the law and guide, educate and assist those who are doing the right thing.

The enforcement framework contains a range of measures to enhance the ability of the Commission and other building system regulators, such as municipal building surveyors, Energy Safe Victoria and fire safety authorities, to monitor and investigate compliance with building legislation. These include:

- Clarifying and strengthening powers of authorised persons to enter buildings or land to monitor and investigate compliance.
- Strengthening the Commission's investigation powers with an administrative power to compel a person to answer questions.
- Protecting the ability of authorised persons, including staff of the Commission, to undertake their work free of obstruction, abuse or assault through the introduction of new criminal offences.

The Bill expands the suite of enforcement options available at both ends of the scale of severity to enable the Commission to act efficiently and proportionately. Early intervention powers, such as improvement notices and a modernised infringement scheme, will allow the Commission to make proactive regulatory interventions to prevent harms from escalating. For more severe contraventions, enhanced powers will enable the Commission to seek significant consequences that better reflect the seriousness of major contraventions under building legislation.

Civil penalties

The Bill introduces a civil penalty regime, to provide the Commission with a wider suite of powers to hold bad-faith practitioners to account and to align it with other consumer regulators. This will allow the Commission to pursue much higher financial penalties for the most serious breaches of building legislation. Courts will be able to strip companies of the profits they make from cutting corners and disregarding the health and safety of building occupants and the public.

These provisions ensure that penalties appropriately respond to serious breaches, where the current penalty limits mean that a fine can simply be a cost of doing business for the most profitable firms. The size of the company, large or small, will be taken into account by the court when determining an appropriate civil penalty.

Ancillary orders

The Bill also introduces a new range of ancillary orders. These consumer-focused orders will be available to the court under the civil penalty regime, and in criminal proceedings in some instances.

Courts will have an enhanced power to disqualify body corporates and individuals from being licensed or registered, for a period to be determined by the court. That could mean a lifetime ban, where justified. Enhanced disqualification powers are necessary for public protection, and to remove rogue operators who unfairly compete against and undercut responsible licensed and registered persons and businesses.

Other new orders include adverse publicity orders, consumer compensation orders, and regulatory compliance and training orders. Alongside a civil penalty, an industry member may also be ordered to provide a community service relating to their breach of building legislation, like a consumer support service. These ancillary orders are similar to those in the Australian Consumer Law and are common to civil penalty regimes.

Director liability

The Bill will introduce two new forms of liability to enhance the accountability of company directors in the building and plumbing industry. Company structures are a standard way to run a building or plumbing business, however, these structures can be misused to avoid regulatory obligations and consumer protections. When this occurs it is building consumers, government and taxpayers who bear the costs left behind.

If a company does not comply with an emergency order, building order, direction to fix, or rectification order, the Commission will have the option of making company directors jointly and severally liable for compliance with the order or direction by issuing a declared director notice.

The option of issuing a declared director notice that makes a director jointly and severally liable for compliance will incentivise building companies to meet their regulatory obligations. The new scheme will provide fairness to directors by providing them with the option of seeking review of a declared director notice if they did not take part in company management when the order was issued, or if they took reasonable steps to ensure the company complied with the order.

In a small number of serious offences which threaten the health and safety of building occupants and the public, the Bill expands the criminal and civil liability of company directors by ensuring they can be subject to proceedings if they fail to exercise due diligence to prevent the company's wrongdoing. This includes breaches which are cornerstones of the regulatory framework, such as those relating to unlawful work, unregistered work, and failure to comply with rectification orders.

Disciplinary action

The primary purpose of the disciplinary framework in the Bill is to protect consumers, building occupants and the public by upholding high standards among licenced and registered persons in the building and plumbing industries. The Bill provides for a single, consistent and equitable disciplinary framework for all classes of licensed or registered person, providing greater clarity to consumers and the industry.

The framework is based on an efficient show-cause process, which is timebound to ensure there are no unnecessary delays, while providing procedural fairness through the opportunity for licensed and registered persons to make representations as to why disciplinary action should not be taken against them. The grounds for disciplinary action will be reduced in number but broadened in scope, consolidating the voluminous and prescriptive grounds in the current disciplinary schemes.

To ensure the Commission can take timely action to protect consumers from harm, the Bill provides expanded powers to suspend a licensed or registered person with immediate effect. These powers will be available for severe matters, including where a licensed or registered person does not hold required insurance, poses an unacceptable risk to consumers or is performing or allowing work that poses a serious risk to health and safety.

The Bill provides for a flexible range of disciplinary sanctions from reprimands through to cancellation and disqualification, as well as financial penalties. The maximum financial penalties are set at a consistent level for all classes of licensed or registered person and have been increased to better deter breaches and ensure decision makers can take into account the full scale of harm when determining a penalty for severe breaches.

A person directly affected by a disciplinary decision will have the opportunity to seek both internal review by the Commission and review by VCAT. Internal review, which is not available under the current disciplinary scheme for licensed and registered plumbers, provides additional procedural fairness through a free and timebound process. To enhance consumer protection, an application for review to VCAT will no longer automatically stay the operation of a disciplinary decision.

Sustainable funding for regulating the building system

The Bill provides for the continuation of the building permit levy, a long-standing feature of the building system which ensures the effective regulation of the system.

A substantial portion of the Commission's operating costs are to be recovered through various fees including licence and registration fees. The Bill will require all fees to be set in regulations upon their next review. This approach ensures consistency across all fee categories and appropriate consultation and scrutiny of fee changes under the *Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*.

Building and plumbing industry orders

The Bill provides for a flexible approach to adjust or consolidate the statutory entities established under the Bill via the use of Ministerial restructuring and transfer orders, should a need be identified. These orders allow for existing bodies to be renamed, new bodies to be created and for staff and assets to be transferred, facilitating agile reform as part of a more contemporary legislative framework.

Subordinate legislation

The enactment of a new principal Act of building and plumbing will require the subsequent development of complementary subordinate legislation. To this end, the Bill provides various general regulation-making powers.

In many cases, existing provisions in regulations made under the *Building Act 1993* will need to be remade under the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Act.

An important component of subordinate legislation under the Bill will include a new set of standalone regulations to prescribe infringement offences under building legislation.

Commencement

Given the comprehensive nature of the reforms made by the Bill, a sufficient period to prepare for and successfully implement the reforms is required. This will ensure the Commission, other building system regulators and industry are well positioned to adjust to the new legislation.

The Government's intention is that provisions of the Bill will be proclaimed to commence on 1 July 2027. If not proclaimed earlier, the Bill provides that the new laws will commence on 1 December 2027.

Conclusion

The establishment of the Building and Plumbing Commission under a new administration and enforcement framework for the building system will give Victorians greater confidence in the integrity of building and

plumbing work and the quality of our homes. This robust framework will reduce the risk of loss and harm to the public and place consumers at the heart of the system.

These reforms will deliver greater peace of mind to Victorians, greater confidence in our hard-working builders and plumbers and more certainty to industry. Builders and plumbers who do the right thing will benefit, while those doing the wrong thing will face consequences.

Importantly, the reforms will help deliver safe, high quality and affordable homes for working Victorians.

I commend the Bill to the house.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:46): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 1 April.

Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026

Statement of compatibility

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (10:47): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the **Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 (the **Bill**).

In my opinion, the Bill, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

This Bill repeals the *Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020* (**CSV Act**), abolishes Cladding Safety Victoria (**CSV**) and transfers certain cladding safety-related functions to the Victorian Building Authority (**VBA**). The transfer of cladding safety-related functions to the VBA will allow the VBA to manage the completion of cladding safety-related activities outstanding at the time of the abolition of the CSV.

In this context, the purpose of the Bill is as follows:

- to repeal the CSV Act;
- to abolish CSV and to transfer its property, rights and liabilities to the VBA;
- to make related amendments to the *Building Act 1993* (**Building Act**);
- to provide for an amount of building permit levy in respect of non-regional buildings to replace the amount payable in connection with the Cladding Rectification Program; and
- to make related amendments to certain other Acts.

Human Rights

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to this Bill are:

- right to life (section 9);
- right to property (section 20); and
- right to privacy (section 13).

Human Rights issues

Repeal of the CSV Act, abolition of CSV, and transfer of rights and liabilities to VBA

The CSV Act established CSV to identify, manage, and rectify high-risk combustible cladding on residential and public buildings in Victoria and sets out the legal framework to fund, prioritize, and manage remediation, reducing fire risks and protecting building owners. Section 7 of the CSV Act sets out the functions of CSV which includes, among other things, the administration of the Cladding Rectification Program provided for in the Act.

Clause 4 of this Bill repeals the CSV Act.

Clause 5 abolishes CSV and provides that, on the day of commencement of the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Act, the CSV Board is abolished and its members and the CEO go out of office. Further, Clause 5, in combination with the clauses specified below, provides that:

- all property, rights and liabilities of CSV become property, rights and liabilities of the VBA on the commencement day, subject to any relevant encumbrances (clause 6);
- the VBA is substituted as a party to any proceeding pending in any court or tribunal to which CSV was a party immediately before the commencement day (see also clause 10, and clause 11, which provides for continuity in respect of evidence); and
- the VBA is substituted as a party to any arrangement or contract entered into by or on behalf of CSV as a party and in force immediately before the commencement day (see also clause 8, which provides that any reference to CSV in any Act, subordinate instrument, agreement or other document is taken to be a reference to the VBA, so far as it relates to any period on or after the commencement day).

Clause 23 inserts in section 197 of the Building Act – which sets out the functions of the VBA – the function to finalise the administration of the Cladding Rectification Program previously undertaken by CSV under the CSV Act.

Right to life

Section 9 of the Charter provides that every person has the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life. An 'arbitrary' deprivation of life may be described as one that is unreasonable or disproportionate. The right imposes a negative obligation on public authorities to refrain from conduct that causes an arbitrary deprivation of life, and it is possible that it also imposes some positive obligations to take steps to prevent arbitrary deprivation of life and in some circumstances to investigate deaths in which a public authority may be implicated.

Repealing the CSV Act and abolishing CSV, established to administer the Victorian Cladding Rectification Program designed to rectify unsafe non-compliant or non-conforming external wall cladding so as to reduce fire spread risks and protect residents and the broader general public from the fire risk caused by such cladding, could on a broad reading of the right to life, incorporate a positive obligation to take steps to prevent arbitrary deprivation of life, engage the right to life under section 9 of the Charter.

However, in light of clause 23 of the Bill, which sees the VBA absorb the functions of CSV to finalise the administration of the cladding rectification program previously undertaken by CSV, I do not consider the right to life to be engaged. The VBA will upon the abolition of CSV immediately assume the role and responsibilities formerly assumed by CSV under the CSV Act, including the facilitation of cladding rectification work for government buildings and supporting building owners by engaging services for cladding rectification work.

By transferring the functions of CSV to the VBA, the Bill ensures that the cladding safety-related functions under the CSV Bill and that the protective objectives of the Cladding Rectification Program are preserved. For these reasons, I am of the opinion that the right to life in section 9 of the Charter is not engaged or limited by this Bill.

Right to property

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. This right requires that powers which authorise the deprivation of property are conferred by legislation or common law, are confined and structured rather than unclear, are accessible to the public, and are formulated precisely. The Charter does not define 'property' and while there is no Victorian authority on the question as to whether an accrued right to bring an action against the State would be 'property' for the purposes of the Charter, the Supreme Court has indicated that the term should be interpreted 'liberally and beneficially to encompass economic interests'.

Adopting a broad reading of the right to property, the transfer of property as well as rights and liabilities from CSV to the VBA is relevant to the property rights of natural persons who hold an interest in the rights and liabilities of CSV. However, as the rights and liabilities of CSV are, in accordance with clauses 5 to 11 of the Bill, transferred to the VBA without altering the substantive content of that liability, no natural person with an interest in such liabilities are deprived of their interest in that liability.

Accordingly, the Bill does not limit the property right in section 20 of the Charter.

Transfer of staff

Clause 14 of the Bill provides that a person who was employed by CSV before the commencement day is to be regarded as having been employed by the VBA. Clause 15 of the Bill deals with the terms and conditions of employment of staff transferred from CSV to the VBA under clause 14.

The transfer of staff occasioned by this amendment is relevant to the rights to freedom from forced work (section 11) and the right to privacy (section 13). However, for the reasons below, I consider that neither right is limited by these amendments.

Freedom from forced work

The right to freedom from forced work in section 11 of the Charter relevantly provides that a person must not be made to perform forced or compulsory labour, which includes all work or service exacted from any person under the menace of a penalty and for which the person has not offered themselves voluntarily (with certain exceptions).

While the provision effecting the transfer of staff will automatically alter a person's employer without their consent, the person's ongoing employment is of their own volition. For example, clause 15 expressly states that the transfer of an employee from CSV to the VBA does not prevent the employee from resigning in accordance with the terms and conditions of their employment.

In addition, CSV was established as a time-bound statutory authority for the purpose of delivering the Government's Cladding Rectification Program. Given this, the staff of CSV would have expected that they may be subject to such a transfer of their employment upon the conclusion of the cladding rectification program. Accordingly, the right to freedom from forced work in section 11 of the Charter is not limited by this Bill.

Right to privacy

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

The right to privacy is a broad right that protects a person from interference in their personal and social sphere, including their capacity to pursue their chosen field of employment and develop and maintain personal relationships in the course of employment. While the right is relevant to matters of employment, it would generally only be considered limited by restrictions on employment that have consequential effects on an individual's capacity to experience a private life.

Statutory reforms affecting the terms of an individual's employment are unlikely to constitute an interference with private life of sufficient gravity so as to limit the right to privacy. Clause 14 of the Bill stipulates that a person whose employment is transferred to the VBA will be employed on terms and conditions no less favourable overall than those that applied to them at CSV and will have equivalent entitlement to benefits accrued as an employee of CSV. Moreover, staff is not being denied the capacity to seek alternative employment should they wish to do so.

It follows that the transfer of staff from CSV to the VBA will not result in any material detriment to a staff member's employment terms, conditions or entitlements. For these reasons, I am satisfied that the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter is not limited by this Bill.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out above, I consider that to the extent that the Bill engages human rights, the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

The Hon. Gabrielle Williams, MP
Minister for Transport Infrastructure
Minister for Public and Active Transport

Second reading

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (10:48): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows:

The main purposes of the Bill are to:

- repeal the Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020 and abolish Cladding Safety Victoria and the Cladding Safety Victoria Board

- confer upon the Victorian Building Authority trading as the Building and Plumbing Commission (BPC) additional functions to enable the completion of CSV's trailing activities and administrative obligations
- transfer Cladding Safety Victoria's property, rights and liabilities to the BPC
- transfer Cladding Safety Victoria staff to the BPC
- repeal the Cladding Rectification Levy and introduce a new element of the Building Permit Levy (BPL), to be applied to class 2–8 buildings in non-regional Victoria with cost of building works of $1.5 million or more, up to and including 30 June 2029, reducing the overall cost of the BPL.

Background to the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026

This Bill represents the successful conclusion of a world-first initiative, set up by the Victorian Government in response to cladding related safety issues, to fight for Victorian consumers by making their buildings safe from combustible cladding. Cladding Safety Victoria (CSV) has worked with stakeholders across Victoria, becoming the only jurisdiction globally to implement a program to rectify non-compliant or non-conforming external wall cladding products on buildings. CSV has developed a risk-based approach, backed by evidence, to remediate cladding issues and contributed to the global improvements to building safety related to cladding.

The Bill also recognises the importance of a sustainable funding model for consumer-focused building reforms and a need to respond to changes in the way our building system operates. Changes to the building permit levy will reduce costs for consumers and builders, while continuing to provide support for reforms to the building and plumbing systems.

Following the tragic Grenfell Tower fire in London in June 2017, and several cladding related fires closer to home, the Victorian Government established the Victorian Cladding Taskforce (the Taskforce) to audit privately owned residential buildings to determine the extent of combustible cladding. On 16 July 2019, the Taskforce handed down its final report, which included a recommendation to establish Cladding Safety Victoria (CSV). CSV was established as a standalone agency through the Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020 (the CSV Act), with its focus on improving the safety of building occupants.

The Government committed initial funding packages totalling $600 million to establish the Private Residential Cladding Rectification Program (CRP) and $150 million was committed to complete the Statewide Cladding Audit (SCA) and Government Buildings Cladding Rectification Program (GBCRP). In December 2023, additional funding of $109 million, including $95 million through the CRL, was approved to rectify a further tranche of buildings, which had been identified with an unacceptable cladding risk.

In 2022, the Victorian Government approved $40 million for the Cladding Remediation Partnership Program (Partnership Program) to protect a wider range of consumers from cladding-related harm. The Partnership Program provided all in-scope buildings assessed with a lower cladding risk with a pathway to remediation. The Partnership Program also meant that local councils were provided with a consistent framework to support owners of these buildings to mitigate cladding risk at the lowest cost and satisfy any enforcement noticed issued by a municipal building surveyor.

Achievements of Cladding Safety Victoria

Over the last 6 years, CSV has made countless Victorians safe from the dangers posed by combustible cladding. In partnership with stakeholders including building owners, owners' corporations and Fire Services Victoria, CSV has completed remediation on more than 99% of the highest-risk buildings in the Cladding Rectification Program, dramatically reducing their combustible cladding risk, with the remaining buildings to be completed this year.

CSV has also worked to remove the cladding risk on 130 government-owned and community buildings, including schools, hospitals and buildings of cultural significance, with 3 more to finish soon. The Partnership Program has put in place risk mitigation pathways for 100% of additional lower-risk Class 2 buildings (1,210 buildings).

CSV has contributed significantly to global knowledge on combustible cladding risk and led the way in the development of evidence-based cladding risk reduction approaches. CSV's methodology, the Protocols for Mitigating Cladding Risk, has been published online and shared widely around the world.

CSV's ground-breaking approach to identifying, assessing, classifying and treating combustible cladding risk has saved lives, and it has saved building owners hundreds of millions of dollars. At the conclusion of its program of work, CSV will have improved building safety for all of us across Victoria.

I now turn to the Bill. The Bill has 3 sections:

Part 1 – Preliminary

This section contains preliminary provisions for the Bill, including its purpose, commencement arrangements and definitions to enable the operation of the Bill.

Part 2 – Repeal of Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020 and abolition of Cladding Safety Victoria

This part contains provisions for repealing the CSV Act and abolishing CSV as an agency. It provides for the transition of CSV's property, liabilities and rights to the BPC and for the transfer of any remaining CSV staff to the BPC, ensuring that these staff will be employed on terms and conditions no less favourable than those they were employed under at CSV.

Part 3 – Amendments related to repeal of Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020

This part includes the provisions for the granting of cladding-safety related functions to the BPC, to allow it to complete any cladding safety-related activities once CSV is abolished. It also includes provisions repealing the cladding rectification levy component of the building permit levy and introducing a new, lower, component to the building permit levy in place of the repealed CRL. Additionally, Part 3 provides for several technical corrections to the amendments made to the Building Act by the State Taxation Further Amendment Act 2025, as well as consequential amendments required to other legislation on the repeal of the CSV Act.

Repeal of the Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020

With CSV's successful programs coming to an end as planned, CSV will no longer need to exist as an agency. This also means that the need for the legislation under which it operates is removed and the CSV Act can be repealed. CSV was always intended to be a time-limited agency, with a clear goal of making our community safer. In conjunction with the government's consumer-focused program of reforms to the building system, the improvements implemented by CSV have saved lives and protected Victorians from the debilitating debts which would have been incurred had they been forced to self-fund the rectification of combustible cladding-related building work.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the current Cladding Safety Victoria Board, its CEO and its staff, for providing the guidance and leadership required to enable CSV to complete this significant program:

- Rod Fehring (Chairperson)
- Sarah Clarke (Deputy Chairperson)
- Genevieve Overell (Member)
- Jo Pugsley (Member)
- David Webster (Member)
- Dan O'Brien (CEO)

The Bill provides for the BPC to take on cladding-safety related functions, so that it can ensure that any outstanding activities related to CSV's work are completed. The BPC will also receive CSV's property, assets and liabilities, and some CSV staff, to enable a successful transition of responsibility to the BPC and retention of the specialist cladding safety knowledge built up by CSV over the past 6 years.

Integrating CSV into the Commission adds to the consolidation of the building and plumbing regulator and a continued focus on putting consumers at the heart of the system.

Amendments to the Building Permit Levy and continued funding for the building and plumbing systems

The Bill amends the *Building Act 1993* (the Building Act) to make changes to the Building Permit Levy (BPL), with a significant net reduction in the overall levy amount to be paid.

The Building Act requires all building works that are considered construction, demolition or removal of a building in Victoria to have a building permit and a BPL is payable before the permit can be issued for works valued over $10,000. The BPL was established in Victoria in 1993 and was unchanged until 2017, when it was increased to fund building dispute activities.

The Cladding Rectification Levy (CRL) was then added in January 2020, to fund cladding remediation works on Class 2–8 buildings in metropolitan Melbourne. The Minister for Planning's review of the levy in 2023 rightly concluded there was still an ongoing need for the levy at that time to complete CSV's work. However with the approaching completion of the cladding programs, the CRL component of the BPL will soon no longer be required.

While the base rate of the BPL will remain unchanged, a new, lower element of the BPL will be introduced to replace the CRL, which will be repealed. This change to the levy structure will result in an overall decrease in the total levies to be paid on impacted building classes by between 47% and 66%. The levy change, valid

up to 30 June 2029, will only apply to Class 2–8 buildings in metropolitan areas with a cost of building works of $1.5 million or more. This means that domestic residential houses (Class 1), buildings of a public nature (Class 9) or non-inhabitable structures (Class 10) and non-metropolitan builds are exempt and will not suffer from any additional financial pressures.

The reduction in costs will benefit both consumers and the building industry, whilst still allowing the delivery of ongoing building reforms, to support implementation of Victoria's Housing Statement.

Technical corrections to amendments to the Building Act 1993

The Bill also makes several technical corrections in the amendments made to the Building Act by the State Taxation Further Amendment Act 2025. These include clarifying definitions to ensure that all engaged building practitioners are considered for the purposes of calculating the cost of the building work, amending relevant definitions which will change as a consequence of this clarification, and amending section 3A regarding the cost of the building work, to ensure correct interpretation of this clause.

Conclusion

CSV has successfully completed a complex and difficult task in reducing the combustible cladding risk for Victorians. CSV's leadership, adaptability and application of expert knowledge to rectify buildings with non-compliant or non-conforming cladding means that we can now all feel safer in our built environment.

I commend the Bill to the house.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:48): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (10:48): I move:

That debate be adjourned for 13 days.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:48): I think the minister is out of order in requesting a 13-day adjournment here. We can see that the government is quite light on with their agenda, but that frankly is their problem. The government would be very aware of the norm in this place to allow two weeks for adequate debate. I think you could go back quite some time and see that that is very much the norm and custom in the house. The minister has provided no information to us previously, and we do not understand any of the reasons it should be less than 14 days – it remains a mystery.

There have been occasions when the opposition has approved adjournment of debate for less than 14 days, and those times were when it had been agreed with us and when there was something of huge importance – I will go back and have a think about it – like monitors for councils. Sometimes that needs to be done very quickly, and bills get moved very quickly through this house and through the other place and get royal assent very quickly because there is an urgency. The Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 has just been given to us. If they are going to look at repealing something, I do not see that there is an urgency in having to do that, and waiting the standard time is only appropriate.

It appears that the government do not have enough on their agenda at the minute, because we have motion after motion being debated and there are a number of motions on the notice paper that are – how can you describe it – wedge politics, sledge politics, all of those sorts of things. The government is very interested in doing that. But we have got this bill that we need to have time to go through, have a look at and understand what is required. Now, when you have a bill that comes before the house, as an opposition what you need to do is go out to the stakeholders. You have to talk to the stakeholders, they have to review the bill and have a look at what it means for them to see whether it is something that they can get back to us on in time. Very often they cannot get back in time; very often when we have bills and we have gone out for stakeholder consultation, it takes them actually longer than two weeks, because they have to have a look at it and they often have to convene people to talk about it and understand what the issues are. Then when they have done that, they might land on a position, and at that point they will provide that information back to us. Sometimes that can be difficult because the

bill will have already been up for those 14 days, and that information comes when the bill is between the houses.

It can be very easy for the government members to say, 'What's a day?' Well, a day can be very important, because when you are trying to get other people together, sometimes it is a little bit like herding cats. It is not so simple to get everybody there. People's timetables are not our timetables. If we are looking for third parties to make comment and to analyse particular bills – and in this case it is the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 – and if we want them to provide information back to us, we have to give them time to get their ducks in a row and to get with their stakeholders, if it is an organisation and they have people that they need to deal with. We have to give them time, and I think it is only fair that we give them as much time as possible. Sometimes two weeks is not enough. When I look at the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026 that we have also been given, it is voluminous. In fact, it is two volumes, and to expect people to actually get through that in two weeks is exceptionally difficult. The Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill is a little lighter than that, but nevertheless there are a number of different groups that have an interest in that. Sometimes it goes a little bit further than what you may think, because we know that there is cladding on many public buildings. Some of these public buildings have been schools and halls. I know that at the apartment block I stay in during parliamentary sittings we have a cladding problem, and that is not sorted out by any means at the minute. We just got a bill a week or two ago to pay for cladding rectification work. So there are a lot of people that will have input into whether or not it is appropriate to be abolishing Cladding Safety Victoria at this particular point, and I think the government should adhere to custom.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (10:53): Well, well, well, yet again we see pointless procedural debates taking place in this place, taking place in our Parliament here – absolutely pointless. And what over? Like, quite seriously, we are talking about a repeal bill, and we are talking about one day; we are talking about one day here, right?

Members interjecting.

Gary MAAS: You just cannot take the opposition seriously when they keep saying they want to debate bills of substance and yet here they are raising a procedural debate in this place. It is absolutely not on. The opposition are arguing over a single day on a repeal bill, and you cannot take them seriously. On that basis, I support the government's adjournment motion for a period of 13 days.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:54): I rise to make some comments about, again, the government's lack of transparency in not allowing the normal process of this house to ensure that there is proper consultation on what is arguably one of the most significant elements affecting many people's homes – those that have purchased homes that now have issues around cladding and rectification, builders and the retrospectivity of many builders and how that will work in the process thereafter, and insurance companies. This is very complex. It is something for which we have been presented with changes that need the proper consultation, and that is what is expected of any government when they are presenting bills to this house – although we are not surprised, because the government has very good form in riding roughshod over community consultation and wanting to fast-track things into this house when it suits them. We know that has not been the case for a lot of other bills and legislation; it has been very light on. As we heard the member for Eildon say today, we have had a very light program. We have had to revert back to sledge motions and really just filibustering to fill in time in an election year. When we are talking about something really important –

Juliana Addison interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Member for Wendouree, when we are talking about something very, very important in terms of people's houses and the costs affected in terms of rectification of cladding, which is very, very important to many people, then what we need to do is ensure that there is the proper ability to have consultation with the very many people, residents and industry bodies that are affected

by this. A question that needs to be asked is: what is the government hiding? What is the government hiding by fast-tracking something which short-circuits the ability that is normally –

Belinda Wilson interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: It does not matter whether it is a day or a week; the process here is very, very clear: this government is short-circuiting a process that has been the process of this Parliament for many, many years. It is not what we normally do; it is not the convention of this Parliament, but it is clear that in this particular instance the government have got something to hide, because if they have not, then they should stand up and say why. Why are they fast-tracking something? What is the government hiding?

This is very, very important. For anybody that is being affected by cladding, they have the right to ask the government why they are fast-tracking something that could affect them, their house, the costs of the cladding and all of the processes that happen thereafter. As we said, we have had a very fulsome look at this, and now what we need to do is – the government is presenting their options – go back to the community and have that consultation. If the government will not allow that, it is clear that this government is hiding something. I think anybody that is affected by cladding in Victoria has the right to ask: what is the Allan Labor government hiding? If they get a big fat bill for the cladding because this government has hidden something, then they should again be blaming the Allan Labor government for it. I just say this again: if the government has got nothing to hide, then allow the process of the consultation period – very simple. If the Allan Labor government has got nothing to hide, then allow the consultation process for Victorians to have their say. That is what we are supporting and that is what we want, so therefore I do not support the government's bill.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:58): Rarely has so much been made about 24 hours – perhaps not since Kiefer Sutherland made a television program about it. This will be the shortest filibuster that anyone has ever seen in this place, I assure the member for Caulfield. I support the motion to adjourn the second reading for 13 days rather than 14. This will be a bill, when it is debated – I note this is a procedural debate – that is seeking to remove law, to simplify the statute book rather than create new complexity. We all understand the reasons why Cladding Safety Victoria came into existence: the disastrous fires of Grenfell in London and similar instances in our own state as a consequence of unsafe cladding being adhered to high-rise buildings. Cladding Safety Victoria has undertaken really important work over a number of years since it was introduced, but the time has come for an update to the legislative framework that affects that kind of planning and construction law in this state. Thirteen days is effectively a fortnight. It provides ample time for scrutiny. I support the government's motion, and I hope that we can get on and debate the bill.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (11:00): For those members of this place that have had the honour of being on the front bench – obviously we all aspire to be ministers, but those of us who have been shadow ministers – for a long period of time would fully understand –

Belinda Wilson interjected.

Tim BULL: I did have a little go as minister, member for Narre Warren North. The scenario that we face as shadow ministers is we are already given a very restricted timeframe to be able to consult with our stakeholders, and very, very regularly we will send out emails to our large group of stakeholders asking for feedback on legislation. Even when that legislation is relatively benign or straightforward, the feedback that we often get from these groups is, 'Why is the timeframe so restrictive? Why do you need feedback within five days?' – or seven days or whatever it is. 'We actually need time to consult with our membership. We need time to consult with our stakeholder groups. We can't possibly do that, Shadow Minister, in the time that you have given us to provide you feedback.' We get that from all of our stakeholder groups that fall under all of our portfolio responsibilities. So I would put that, with this already extremely restrictive timeframe that we are left with of 14 days, there is a strong argument that that should be extended. What we cannot have is any

impediment or any reduction in those 14 days, because every day when you need to consult with very large stakeholder groups the length and breadth of Victoria is exceptionally difficult. And that is even when we have legislation that is relatively straightforward or perhaps considered benign, or legislation that we on the opposition side will support, let alone when we get to a topic or a subject that is contentious or is complex.

We know through the various media commentaries and various stakeholder feedbacks that we have had on this particular issue that there is a high level of concern. There are large costs involved. There are implications for many, many, many people about where this will end up. And you can imagine the enormous amount of stakeholder groups that will have an interest in this legislation. We are then forced to go out and, with an even more restricted timeframe, be expected to consult properly, collate all those different views, collate all those many, many different concerns and come back and debate very, very important legislation in this chamber around this issue, which has huge implications, in a restricted timeframe. It is just not fair and it is just not right. We often – and I am sure the shadow ministers here will agree with me – get feedback that 'Your timeframes that you are seeking for us to provide feedback in are exceptionally restrictive.'

It is a very, very long held convention in this place that we get 14 days. Would we like that to be 21 or 28 days for the sake of the shadow ministry and having to do the work we do between when a bill is introduced into this place and when we have to come back into this chamber and provide a very, very, very firm position? It is an extraordinarily short timeframe. The size of this bill is huge – it is absolutely huge. There is a lot of detail in this to be perused. Imagine sending this bill out to our stakeholder groups and saying, 'You've got now an even more restricted timeframe to be able to report back.' That is why we are raising these concerns that we raise today. As the honourable member for Caulfield pointed out, the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, it makes you wonder why it has been cut short, when this was as simple as getting this done yesterday. It has to be either you are hiding something or a lack of organisation to be able to get yourself organised and adhere to the conventions of Parliament, and that is why we will very, very strongly argue that it should be 14 days and under no circumstances should that ever be compromised.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (50): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (26): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until Tuesday 31 March.

Motions

Housing

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (11:11): I move:

> That this house commends the Allan Labor government's housing strategy, including the Big Housing Build, housing targets for councils, planning and rental reforms and activity centre planning and recognises that improving affordability requires clear planning direction and building more homes where Victorians live, work and access transport.

I am delighted to be able to speak to this motion this morning – a motion that is commending the Allan Labor government's housing strategy. At the outset can I say that we can speak to this motion because we have a housing strategy, which is to build more homes for more Victorians. Contrast that with that of those opposite, who appear to have a strategy to simply block more homes here in Victoria.

On this side of the house we are builders, not blockers, and we are here to ensure that we open more doors for Victorians. We have been listening to Victorians, we have been working with Victorians and we are building with Victorians so that people can choose the communities that they want to call home. I am really proud to be able to say that Victoria is approving and building more homes than any other state in the nation. We want Victorians to have real choice – choice about where they live, choice about what type of home they live in and choice about the future they build for their families. We want to give them hope and opportunity – opportunity that they will be able to find homes of their choosing in the places that they want to live. That might be in regional Victoria, which is now well accessible with regional rail. It might be a family home in one of our growing suburbs. It might be a townhouse within walking distance of a train or tram stop or an apartment in the vibrant heart of Melbourne city or next to one of our many suburban stations.

We know those opposite would cut that choice. They have confirmed even today that they will cut homes in well-connected locations. They will put the walls up. We heard from the member for Brighton even today that he will rip up our activity centres. He will rip those up. All that will do is lock out more Victorians from these really well-connected, well-serviced suburbs. They will limit supply, they will lock out communities and they will lock out young Victorians and ensure that Victorians are competing for fewer and fewer homes at higher prices. That is not a housing plan, member for Brighton. That is the status quo. This is everything that we are dealing with. It is everything that we have seen that is wrong with the planning system. It is everything that has led to the challenges that we are facing today, where more and more Victorians are losing hope and are finding it harder to find a home where they want to live.

We know the opposition believe in the status quo because the status quo serves them. It serves them, locking out Victorians from their communities and pushing more and more Victorians to our urban fringes, to our growth areas, which have already carried the burden of more homes – a disproportionate burden of new homes. The status quo has left a greater and greater divide between Victorians, and it has simply led to suburbs where families cannot afford to live. And we know this because the data is telling us – suburbs like Kew and Hawthorn, where school enrolments are actually going backwards. The status quo is leading to childless suburbs. We cannot stand by and allow this to happen. We cannot watch as well-connected, well-serviced suburbs see the population of children and under 65 years go backwards. That is not leadership. But under Jess Wilson and her Liberals that is exactly what Victorians will get. Only the Allan Labor government is committed to ensuring Victorians can choose where they live and how they live.

The facts are clear. In the 12 months to January 2026, Victoria approved around 52,800 new homes. That is 10,000 more than Queensland and over 2000 more than New South Wales, and we have provided nearly 12,000 more first home buyer grants than New South Wales. That is because Melbourne remains more affordable than Sydney and Brisbane for both houses and units – because supply matters. We know that the more homes you build, the more affordable they become. Independent reporting has also shown that Melbourne is building more homes per capita than major

global cities such as London, New York, San Francisco and Paris. Victoria ranks among the fastest states in the country for the time it takes to build a home. It is important that we are working together to pull all the levers to ensure that we are getting more homes built right across Melbourne and right across Victoria, not locking up suburbs, not keeping the status quo and locking families out from some of our most well-connected suburbs, not pushing more and more people into our urban fringes but making sure we have a holistic housing strategy that is ensuring there is diversity of homes right across Melbourne and right across Victoria that meets communities' needs at every stage of their life.

We are not just talking about housing, we are delivering it. Our $6.3 billion Big Housing Build and Regional Housing Fund are delivering 13,300 social and affordable homes, with nearly 12,000 already underway or completed. On average, the Labor government has delivered around 250 more social homes per year than the previous Liberal government. But housing of course is not just about statistics, it is about people. It is about first home buyers who are trying to get that foothold into the market. It is about renters wanting stability. It is about grandparents who want to live near their grandchildren. It is about students, workers, nurses, teachers and tradies who keep our state running. Those opposite speak about housing reforms, they speak about a housing policy, but they oppose every single reform we bring in – reforms that are designed specifically to increase housing supply, to drive down the cost of housing and to ensure that all Victorians can find a place to call home that is more accessible and more affordable. We are making sure the planning system actually works so homes can be built faster, with more certainty and at a lower cost.

You have heard me talk time and time again about our *Plan for Victoria*. Throughout 2024 we engaged in the biggest community consultation ever undertaken in this state's history. That culminated in a vision for Victoria, a vision written by Victorians for Victorians. The arrogance of those opposite who think they can speak for Victorians when they have ignored the extraordinary feedback that we received through that consultation, which was: we need more homes everywhere.

We need more affordable homes so that everyone has that opportunity to find a place to call home where they want to live, not just out on the urban fringes, not just in our city centre, but right across Melbourne and right across Victoria. We are not locking up our suburbs, as those opposite have done, those who want to maintain the status quo of a system that has failed to serve Victorians and failed to serve them equitably. We have for the first time set clear housing targets; this has never been done before. Every local government in Victoria has a local housing target. Every community – and I remind those opposite, their communities as well – must contribute to meeting this housing target, because we need to ensure that growth is shared fairly. We are sending the clearest message to Victorians and making it a really clear choice between the Allan Labor government and the opposition: build the homes, do not block them.

But we have not stopped at setting targets; we are pulling every lever available to increase that important supply. We have removed the need for planning permits for granny flats, making it easier for families to support relatives or create a rental option in their backyard. We have introduced 10-day pathways to build two homes on a block, to subdivide your backyard, helping deliver gentle density in established suburbs. And importantly – something else those opposite have opposed from the beginning – we have introduced the townhouse code. We want to make Melbourne and Victoria the townhouse capital of Australia. This is about removing uncertainty for home owners.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the minister is required to be factual. I welcomed it on day one of the announcement.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Member for Brighton, it is not for the Chair to determine whether a member on their feet is being factual or otherwise. There is no point of order.

Sonya KILKENNY: Those opposite joined in the upper house to seek to overturn our amendments, which were the townhouse code, so those opposite opposed our townhouse code. Those opposite have opposed our reforms to deliver more housing supply and to deliver more affordable and

accessible housing. On the townhouse code, the Victorian Liberals' counterparts in New South Wales have called on the Labor government in New South Wales to introduce the same townhouse code that we have introduced here. Since the code was introduced here, townhouse applications have increased by more than 20 per cent – clear evidence that well-designed reform works.

We are also unlocking housing in the places people want to live – near transport, near services, near schools and near jobs – and our train and tram zone program will create capacity for more than 300,000 additional homes in well-located areas across Melbourne. Today we went out and announced final plans for 25 train and tram zone activity centres right across Melbourne, right across our inner suburban locations. These were picked because they are well-connected, well-located suburbs close to those services, close to jobs. It makes sense to build more homes in these areas because the investment is there. More homes near transport means less congestion, shorter commutes, a stronger local business economy, more vibrant communities and more affordable housing options.

None of this is about forcing change overnight; this is about gradual change. It is about a plan for more homes and it is about planning responsibly for the next 30 years, not opposing and not blocking the delivery of more homes. Without important planning for growth, affordability declines and younger generations will continue to be locked out. That is something we will never stand for on this side of the house. We will always stand up for more homes for more Victorians.

At the same time, we will never ignore our growth areas, which have carried a disproportionate burden of more homes. Just by way of example, in Melton and Wyndham we have seen growth now over the past 30 years increase by 400 and 300 per cent respectively. In the same period we have seen areas like Bayside and Boroondara have increased 24 and 28 per cent. It is not fair that these suburbs have carried that disproportionate burden, and it is not fair that other areas that are well serviced, that have had significant government investment, have not grown and in some cases are actually going backwards. It is why we released this 10-year greenfields plan for Melbourne's growing suburbs, the first time we have ever released this plan, and that is to ensure that our growth areas grow sustainably – that they expand sustainably with the right infrastructure and with jobs and services delivered alongside their new homes. The plan clearly sets out new horizons out to 2034, and we will deliver more than 180,000 homes over that period, but we will deliver it in a way that is programmed, that is sequenced and that will ensure that they are not going to carry a disproportionate burden and put overdue pressure on already stretched infrastructure in those areas. It means communities will not be built quickly, but they will be built well.

Taken together, our planning reforms, transport-focused growth, social housing investment and greenfield strategy form a really comprehensive approach to housing supply and housing strategy here in Victoria. And it is important. This plan is grounded in evidence, shaped by extensive community consultation and focused squarely on fairness and equity, because at the end of the day housing policy is ultimately about opportunity, whether it is opportunity for a young couple to buy their first home, opportunity for a family to upsize and to get the home that suits their needs, opportunity for older Victorians to downsize while being able to stay in the area that they love, opportunity for workers to live near their jobs or opportunity for regional centres to really thrive. If we want Victoria to remain the state of opportunity, we must keep building. We must keep building homes. We cannot continue to say no to new homes, we cannot continue to block new homes, we cannot allow the status quo to continue and we certainly cannot allow those opposite to push forward their so-called housing strategy, which, frankly, is the status quo – the status quo that has not served Victorians.

We understand that in order to deliver that opportunity you need a housing strategy that is going to work, that works for Victorians and with Victorians, that builds homes in established suburbs that are well connected, that builds homes in our growth areas and that continues to invest significantly in our social housing. We reform our planning rules, we unlock land and we ensure that infrastructure keeps pace with development. We want to make sure that we protect the ability of Victorians to choose where they live and how they live, and we will continue to do that work to plan responsibly to deliver the homes that Victorians need now, in five years, 10 years, 15 years and 20 years, because we know

on this side that the Allan Labor government will always build homes, we will never block homes and we will always stand for a Victoria where everyone has the opportunity to find a place to call home.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (11:29): *Don't Believe the Hype* – a great song that was written by Public Enemy, and this particular enemy is the Allan Labor government when it comes to housing. It is absolutely the enemy when it comes to housing. This government could not build anything if they tried. Seriously, we have just heard absolute rubbish from the Minister for Planning, who has the hypocrisy to stand up here and say, 'We're building more homes. We're doing so much more,' at the same time as she blocked housing in her own electorate. What a hypocrite of a minister.

Do not believe the hype. In a February 2021 Facebook post Ms Kilkenny can be seen giving the thumbs down as she stands in front of a proposed residential development in Seaford, opposing a plan not for 14 storeys, not for 20 storeys, but for 14 homes. Now this government wants to take appeal rights from Victorians in 60 activity centres. What a hypocrite, what a contradiction, what a government that does not believe a word that it says. You have got a Minister for Planning that says, 'Not in my own backyard.' The biggest NIMBY of the lot, the member for Carrum, opposed 14 homes in Carrum but has the audacity to say they are going to build 60 activity centres, 20 storeys plus, without any appeal rights. Someone in Bentleigh, in Ashwood, in Box Hill, in Mordialloc – in all of the Labor-held seats – can tomorrow wake up with a six-storey building – not 14 homes but six storeys of apartments – without a single chance to object, and that seems to be okay. In a transport corridor the member for Box Hill should not worry, because Box Hill has not got 20 storeys, it has 50.

Do you know what is the big kicker in all of this? The government are not getting these across the line even where they want to. The government I hope will talk about the Grattan Institute today, because they back the Grattan Institute on so many things and what the Grattan Institute has to say when it comes to housing. But what did the Grattan Institute have to say about the activity centres and the Big Build? What they said is five out of six of the projects will not go through because they do not stack up. The member for Box Hill has three towers in his area run by Vicinity where they have said, 'You know what, not in Victoria.' Why? Because they do not stack up.

We have got a government that says, 'Don't worry, we're just going to watch them fly, because this is what we're going to do,' and the Minister for Planning is saying, 'We want to build them everywhere we possibly can, and we'll build the homes, except for Carrum.' If that was the first time the Minister for Planning had done that, maybe she had a friend that was living there or maybe she had an investment property near there. Who knows why she was objecting to 14 homes – not 14 storeys, but 14 homes. But it gets better, because there was another incident in 2018 where the minister called for the application to be rejected a second time. The minister said in a letter to council:

> I indicated previously that the scale, scope and density of the proposed developments is entirely out of context with, and will very likely have negative impacts on, the local amenity and neighbourhood character …

What a blocker, the Minister for Planning – an absolute blocker.

> Further, the additional traffic movements associated with the proposed developments will likely have significant impacts on pedestrian and vehicle safety in the area and congestion.

Do you know what, under Labor's plan the minister could not even write this letter, because council would have no say in this matter. That is the difference between the Liberal–Nationals plan to give locals back the power –

Anthony Cianflone interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: You know what our plan is, member for Pascoe Vale? Our plan is more homes, more choice and better affordability. That is what our plan is. Do you know what, if I can take up the interjection, I went to Pascoe Vale and there is a huge community absolutely appalled that the member for Pascoe Vale is taking people's third-party rights away from them and not giving them the chance to be able to have their say. This is the example. The member for Pascoe Vale can laugh because he is effectively laughing at his constituents because they are not being able to have a say

when it comes to planning. You cannot have your cake and eat it too. So we know Pascoe Vale is going to be dudded. We know Mordialloc is going to be dudded. Again, the likes of Bentleigh – can I say Bentleigh? It is a neighbouring seat to me, so people will say I am worried about Caulfield. Yes, we are getting 20 storeys in Caulfield, if Labor has their way. If Labor has their way, my constituents of Caulfield will have 20 storeys. In each of these activity centres it will be a referendum of a vote come November: if you want 20 storeys, then vote Labor. I know what the people of Caulfield have to say, and the people of Glen Eira. I actually know what the people of Bentleigh have to say, and in Glen Eira as well.

James Newbury: I agree. He's gone quiet.

David SOUTHWICK: Very, very quiet. Last night I had the opportunity to sit with two people that came over to our place, friends of my wife, great friends, lifelong Labor voters who live in Bentleigh, and let me tell you what they said.

Members interjecting.

David SOUTHWICK: You might call them fake people. I will tell you, member for Ripon, how fake these people are. I will tell you what they are. The first thing is they have kids that go to East Bentleigh Primary School, and at East Bentleigh Primary School there are portables across the playgrounds because the school is outgrown in terms of the numbers, so they do not have enough classrooms for the kids. They do not have enough ability for parking in the neighbourhood. Glen Eira has the lowest amount of open space when it comes to playgrounds and sporting fields in the state. What they are saying is this time the government has ignored them, and the government has also done nothing for heritage protection, which these people are very concerned about as well.

Here is a situation where this government does not care, the member for Bentleigh does not care, and they might laugh at it. But you know what, the biggest laugh will come at election time when people will have a say. If they want to wake up tomorrow and have their neighbourhoods butchered by the Allan Labor government, then so be it; but we know that most people will not want that, because they want livability. The member for Ripon might be happy in terms of saying 'We are not going to have any housing in Ripon'. What we need is housing across the state, and what we know is even in growth areas, which the government has been silent upon – why are they called growth areas? I will tell you why: because people actually want to live in them. That is why they are called growth areas. But why has the government been silent when it comes to housing in growth areas? Twenty-seven protected settlement boundary (PSB) priority plans have been shelved by this government for years, and why have they been shelved? Do you know why? Because of the lack of infrastructure. Why is there a lack of infrastructure? I will tell you why: because already in those areas –

Members interjecting.

David SOUTHWICK: Like in Point Cook, the member for Point Cook does not want any housing in his area. And do you know why the member for Point Cook does not want any housing in his area? Because his government has not delivered the infrastructure. He has been sitting here on his hands for four years doing nothing, and they have not delivered the infrastructure. Therefore there is $300 million sitting undisclosed in the budget, just sitting there to prop up the budget instead of actually going into roads, hospitals, schools, open space – sitting there. And why has it not been used? Because the government has run out of money. They have run out of money and they are propping up the budget. So what we would do is actually spend that money –

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member on his feet must be factual. Growth areas infrastructure contribution funding is available online. He just needs to learn to google.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): It is not for the Chair to determine the nature of whether or not a person on their feet is being factual. The member is being relevant. The member to continue.

David SOUTHWICK: Just a reckless, reckless point of order by the member for Point Cook that has done nothing for his constituents. There are a number of PSBs in his area of Point Cook. I met with many of the builders that want to build there, and they want to build the infrastructure that goes with it. But this government of course does not want that because they have not delivered the current infrastructure. So all those people – and many of those people in Point Cook, I have got to say – are very angry at the moment because they are not getting the infrastructure. The member for Point Cook has forgotten that he is actually not in opposition but he is in government. In government you should be able to deliver things, but he is delivering nothing – zero. The member for Point Cook is delivering zero in his electorate and so too are many others, and that is why we will change it.

So what is our plan? Our plan is to ensure, when it comes to building in growth corridors, that we will have infrastructure built at the time of construction. You see, it just makes sense. If you have got builders there, you have got workers there, at the same time as they are building homes they are building roads, they are building schools, they are building infrastructure. But this government does not do it that way. What this government does is say, 'You know what, developer, come in and build the homes, give us the money, and we'll take it out of the area to prop up our budget in Spring Street.' That will not happen under a Jess Wilson government, because what we will do is we will put the infrastructure where it is needed. If you need a school, if you need a road, if you need some open space, we will put it there at the time of the build.

The other issue with all of this is the time it takes to build these things. The time takes so long. Why? Because this government again has its statutory authorities lined up, and it takes years before you get things over the line. Again, talking to a developer who has some property in the western suburbs that they are trying to develop, they have had things sitting there for years, costing $2 million a year just in holding costs because the government have sat on their hands. That is what they have done, they have sat on their hands, and this is what happens. You have a government that does not care about the west. They do not care about the north. They do not care about the east or the south. They just turn around and say they are just going to stack them high in the 60 activity centres, predominantly in Liberal-held seats, although, as I say, Bentleigh, Mordialloc, Ashwood and Box Hill are going to get a fair crack, and we will make sure that their constituents know about it.

I look forward to doorknocking in Bentleigh and telling people like George, who has woken up again in Bentleigh and is running a campaign. If you think I am making up names, you will see George appear a lot in Bentleigh, because he is running a campaign against the activity centres. A number of people are under the name of livability, and they are doing it because it is not livable under Melbourne. In fact it is leavable under Melbourne and it is leavable under Victoria. We have all heard people say that when it comes to building housing, it is anywhere but Victoria. And why anywhere but Victoria? Because this government have failed to deliver, and they have said, 'You know what, here is our Big Build, and we're going to build all of these permits and then away you go.' Well, news to the Allan Labor government: you cannot live in a permit. And what do we have right now? We have 120,000 permits that are sitting on the shelf doing nothing. Why aren't homes being built for the 120,000 permits that sit there? I will tell you why: because the numbers do not stack up. Do you know how much it costs to build a house in Victoria? How much? Do you know how much in terms of cost of tax versus the overall home? What would you say – 10 per cent of the house would be tax? Member for Point Cook, would you be happy with that – 10 per cent of building a house would be tax? Member for Point Cook, 43 per cent of the cost of building a house in Victoria is tax.

Ros Spence interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: The minister at the table just called it a bullshit figure. That is what the minister at the table just called it. That is what the minister just said. I am repeating what the minister at the table just said, and she is just nodding.

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, 'bullshit' is not parliamentary language.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): That is correct. It is unparliamentary language.

David SOUTHWICK: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the Minister for Community Sport called it a bullshit figure and nodded and is still nodding now when I am saying that, so I am just quoting the Minister for Community Sport.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Member for Caulfield, I will also caution and remind everyone in the chamber that repeating an unparliamentary term is also unparliamentary. There is no need to repeat the term. I am now aware of the term. It is an unparliamentary term, and I would ask everyone to desist from using it in the chamber.

David SOUTHWICK: We know that according to the Housing Industry Association and the Property Council of Australia – it is a figure that has been used by a number of people – 43 per cent of the cost of building a house is tax. And why is that? If you break it down, it is very, very simple. In Melbourne you have got nearly 70 new state taxes, and 32 of those are property taxes. Thirty-two of those 70 taxes are property taxes. We have seen property revenue projected to grow from $6.2 billion in 2014 to $20.5 billion in 2028 – from $6 billion to $20 billion in tax. What we are seeing is property tax literally holding our budget together. Forty-seven per cent of our budget is in relation to property tax – that is what is propping things up. We know land tax per person is expected to reach over $1047 in 2025–26, the highest in the country. We have the highest property taxes in the nation, and more than $11,000 on top of that will go to the new housing build for these new houses that the government are acquiring. So what we are seeing is this government – on top of the taxes we already have, the highest taxes in the nation – will now have $11,000 per additional residence in tax as part of these activity centres to pay for them.

That is why people like the Grattan Institute are saying the numbers do not stack up. Five out of six will not be built. Why won't they be built? We have got taxes already: land tax, stamp duty, windfall gains tax and the vacant homes tax. We now are going to have this additional contribution levy value capture of $11,000 a home, and of course they will not be built. We will have this hotchpotch of a solution where some will be built and some will not be, instead of actually dealing with costs and dealing with the supply issue and getting the costs down. In terms of what is being built, I think it was pretty rich for the Minister for Planning to get on her feet and say, 'More homes are being built in Victoria,' because when the government announced their big plan for more housing they said we were going to have 80,000 homes a year. And what number did we just come off? Do you reckon we got 75,000 – 90,000? 56,000 homes is exactly what we got – 56,000 out of 80,000. What is this government doing? Giving itself a pat on the back: 'Look how good that is.' If you extrapolate that – because the government is saying 800,000 homes to meet the population growth of 10 million by 2050 – they are saying 80,000 homes a year or 800,000 homes, so that means it is actually 550,000 homes.

The government is failing right now, so why would you believe this tired old government that has been here for over a decade – nearly 12 years? Why would you believe them when they say that they are going to fix it now when they could not fix it before? They are not delivering homes now, so why would they be able to deliver homes in the future? They will not, because this government are so addicted to tax, they cannot manage the budget and we have got debt blown out. We will be close to $200 billion before we know it; it is $1 million an hour just to pay the debt interest. How do you pay the debt interest? It is very, very simple: you tax people. Who do you tax? This government would call them the rich property owners. So on one hand they say, 'Issue another permit.' Even though we have got 120,000 permits sitting on a shelf and no-one wants to build, 'We'll issue more' – and they will not be built either – 'and then we've done our job.' Well, the government have not done their job.

If you forgave them for a moment and said, 'Okay, they're not really interested in building more homes in the private sector, but the Allan Labor government are interested in the public sector, in social housing' – if you forgave them for at least doing that – then maybe you would give them a pass. They would have done half their job. How much public housing do you think this government has built in a decade? How many additional homes have this government built in a decade? If they are claiming

they are building 50,000 homes a year generally, how many is that in public housing? Thousands? It has been 36 homes in a decade. Across the board it has been 36 homes, according to the Productivity Commission, in 10 years.

That is not a fail; that is a disgrace. It is a disgrace when people are on waiting lists – and we get them coming into our electorates – for two, three or four years for public housing. You can say there are three being built across the state – three. You know what, you would get better odds in TattsLotto than you would of getting one of those. You would get better odds of winning TattsLotto than getting a public house; that is what you would get. This is a hopeless, hopeless government when it comes to housing. They should not be patting themselves on the back. They should be hiding their heads in shame. It is not about affordability, not about home ownership and not about building right across the state; it is a government that does quite the opposite.

One of the other things that I think is really important – and the government will run this argument about our side and they will say, 'They're just a bunch of NIMBYs,' even though the member for Carrum, the Minister for Planning, did not want any housing in her electorate. It is good enough for the member for Carrum, but it is not good enough for everybody else. But let us leave that aside for a moment and let us talk about the middle ring, the 60 activity centres. How does our plan differ from Labor's plan? I will tell you how our plan differs. Our plan differs by saying that under a Jess Wilson government we will allow councils, through their structure plans, to build the housing, informed by community voice. What does that mean?

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker: using correct titles in the Parliament.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Member for Caulfield, please use correct titles.

David SOUTHWICK: The member for Kew, the Leader of the Opposition –

Members interjecting.

David SOUTHWICK: No, they are correct. The member for Ballarat says 'For now'. That is right, because we will be in government very shortly.

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, Ballarat is represented by the wonderful member for Wendouree and the wonderful member for Ripon.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Correcting the record, that was the member for Eureka.

David SOUTHWICK: The member for Eureka quite rightly points out that the Leader of the Opposition will be in that position temporarily, because she will be in government, with a fresh start to ensure that Victorians get what they want and, most importantly, that they will not be silenced, as they are by this Labor government, but will have a say when it comes to everything, including housing. And that is the difference: we will build with people, not over people, like this government does. We will not run roughshod over people's electorates, but we will build with them. How will we do that? We will work with councils, which have structure plans. That is $100 million worth of structure plans that the Allan Labor government wants to rip up and say, 'This is what you're now doing. It will be planning through Spring Street, not planning through the community' – very, very different – 'and you either take it or leave it, and no right of appeal.' What does that mean? I will tell you what it means. In the likes of places like Glen Eira, you will have 55,000 homes built in 2036 and 63,000 by 2051. If you extrapolate these numbers, we are going to build more homes. We will get close to 400,000 homes in Glen Eira, Stonnington, Boroondara and Bayside compared to Labor's 209,000 homes. So we will get close to double what the government is actually proposing in the 24 activity centres in just these areas by applying a local, community-driven housing strategy, which is not NIMBY but is actually informed by community voice. We will not silence people, but we will ensure that people have a voice and a choice when it comes to housing.

That is the difference. I say to all voters today: if you want the government to determine where you live, what is built next door to you and how high people build, with absolutely no say when it comes to housing in the future, vote Labor. Simple: vote Labor. If you want a choice and you want your voice to be heard if you are unhappy with what someone is proposing next door, vote Liberal–National – very simple. There is a very distinct difference: under the Liberal–Nationals we will give you the ability to appeal something if you do not like it. When it comes to Labor, you have no say in what they are going to do for you. It is a really big difference, and I think in every single electorate people need to understand that the government has stopped listening. The Allan Labor government are so desperate now because they have failed on their housing strategy. We are down to 55,000 homes instead of 80,000. They have failed.

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker: correct titles – Allan Labor government.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): That is not a title of an elected official. But whilst I have the microphone at the moment, member for Caulfield, please refrain from using 'you', as it is a reflection on the Chair.

David SOUTHWICK: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Eureka has been here long enough to know that that is a convention. And again, we do not need to be running a protection racket for the Allan Labor government, which has failed to listen to what Victorians have to say. This government has no transparency. We have seen it with $15 billion worth of corruption. We will continue to call out the Allan Labor government's failures, because I think it is really important for people to know that this government has failed –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Member for Caulfield, I am not sure what the point of order was. Member for Eureka, is this on the same point of order?

Michaela Settle: No, it is on relevance. He seems to have strayed from –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): A different point of order? I did actually deal with the first one, so we will leave it there in explaining that it is not an elected person.

David SOUTHWICK: As we say, this government cannot handle the truth, and the truth is that this government has stopped listening to Victorians. When they stop listening, I think Victorians need to respond by booting the Allan Labor government out of office. We have seen so much in terms of corruption and waste, which means we cannot build the homes that need to be built. And we have seen the fact that this government is taxing people to be able to keep up.

You know, we have gone from the Big Build – or as many people will call it, the big dirty build when it comes to some of the transport – and now what we are trying to do in some of the projects is trying to pay for them through the value capture around Suburban Rail Loop activity centres. That is going to cost $11,000 per home, so a lot of these houses will not be built. And then we have towers, 20-storey towers being projected into many of these activity centres. Again, who is going to be working on those? Not small mum-and-dad builders but big CFMEU unions – and what does that cost? It costs four times as much. So forget about affordability when the unions have moved off the transport projects onto the housing projects, the 20-storey towers; it is just one and the same.

Why is this government doing it? You must want to ask why, when they are not building more homes and they are not building in more affordability. It is pretty simple: they just want jobs for their CFMEU union mates. That is what this is all about – for their CFMEU union mates. They are absolutely up to their eyeballs in the $15 billion worth of corruption. Instead of actually trying to deal with that, what they are saying is they are going to move them off transport projects and stick them now into our own backyards onto 20-storey towers in people's neighbourhoods. I think people are a wake-up to the corruption, to the waste and to the mismanagement. They just want more homes.

We want more homes, and certainly under a Liberal–National government we will deliver them right across the state, whether it be in the inner city or in areas like Fishermans Bend, North Melbourne and

Fitzroy, around the areas that desperately need more homes. We will build them, and we will give people that opportunity to live in apartments. We will build in the middle ring to give councils the opportunity to build more homes than the government will currently offer, not in towers but right across the municipality. And we will build in the growth corridors – not like the government is currently doing, putting the handbrake to housing in the growth corridors – and we will put in the infrastructure that goes with it to ensure people already living in the growth corridors get the infrastructure that was once promised. Like in Greenvale: they will get the separation of their roads, they will get their schools, they will get that infrastructure, but also where new homes are built in the growth corridors we will build the infrastructure as well – and in the regions. When it comes to Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong and then the regions alongside them, we will ensure that there is also the opportunity for people to live there and get the infrastructure that they deserve as well. You see, under the Liberal–Nationals we will deliver a choice, we will deliver a voice and we will deliver more homes to all Victorians.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (11:59): I cannot believe that young Victorians and indeed everyone in this place was just subjected to a half-hour lecture on affordability and social housing by someone who has declared an interest in 17 properties. It is pretty paternalistic, pretty patronising, to hear from someone who thinks that they can lecture the young people about where they should live in the great city of Melbourne. My community is one of the activity centres. This disingenuous approach from those opposite that it is just in their electorates, just in the leafy inner east, that there will be activity centres – well, it absolutely is not.

Sometimes I would like to think that the opposition position is a bit nothing, but the status quo is not nothing. The status quo is scary. We need to deliver on a plan for more homes and more opportunities, particularly for young Victorians. It worries me that people that have grown up in my community, in places like Yarraville and Seddon and West Footscray, can no longer afford to live in my community. We do need to build more housing. We do need to build more homes. People in my electorate are supportive of investment into activity centres, into more parks, better schools and so their children can afford to live in the area that they grew up in. The Allan Labor government believes that Victorians should have a choice to live where they want, whether it is out of aspiration or out of necessity. Our housing plan is about ensuring that Victorians have the ability to choose to live near where they grow up, to choose to live near their friends and families or close to work. Young Victorians deserve access to world-class health care, education, jobs and services that are around the corner in suburbs with well-established infrastructure, like the suburbs that have been designated as activity centres.

The member for Caulfield started his contribution by referring to Public Enemy, which was not on my bingo card for this year. But there is another Public Enemy song that he is probably aware of, which is *Prophets of Rage*. I think that what we heard over the last half an hour is a lot of fear and a lot of fearmongering, because part of our plan is not only to ensure that we have more houses but that they are well built, well designed and that they contribute positively to the public realm – that is what we have done. We have done the hard work to make sure that the best city in the world continues to be the best city in the world. That will not happen if the Liberal Party succeed in their plan to continue to expand the urban growth boundary out forever and ever to places where we do not have the infrastructure and lock up the suburbs in the city where young people in particular want to live or where older Victorians might want to downsize.

This is all about choice. It is about designing a city properly and having a courageous conversation with Victorians about how we do that, not kicking the can down the road and saying we are just going to have more of the same. We are just going to have the status quo where people, particularly older generations, have the housing that they like in the suburbs they want to live in, but their kids are locked out forever. Their kids are told, 'I'm sorry, we can't build housing for people like you in the community you grew up in. You need to move somewhere else that's far away from your family, your friends, your work, your community, your connections.'

When I hear members opposite saying 'not in my backyard', I am going to say 'yes in my backyard'. Yes in my backyard. Yes in my community where I want the young people of Melbourne's inner west to be able to afford a townhouse or an apartment close to our amazing Metro Tunnel, which has added an extra 60 per cent capacity, or near our amazing new Footscray Hospital – a $1.5 billion contribution to health care in Melbourne's west. This is exactly where we should be accommodating more housing, and we should be doing it in a well-planned way, not like a previous Minister for Planning, the member for Bulleen, who approved things like Fishermans Bend and Joseph Road without any thought about the public realm or how things are designed – without even developer contributions making a contribution back to the urban infrastructure that we rely on.

We now have to retrofit infrastructure into those communities. That is not the way this government is going to do it, because we care about well-designed communities, we care that Melbourne is the best city in the world and we want it to stay that way. The way that we are going to maintain that is by making sure that our young Victorians have high-quality homes in places that they want to live. Not only have we delivered this ambitious reform to our planning scheme, where the status quo is not okay – the status quo is locking young people out – but we are going to remind the young people of Victoria every single day until the election that it is the Liberal Party that wants to make sure that you cannot have the aspiration to live in the community that you grew up in. That is what the Liberal Party stands for, because, consistent with your party membership, the policy is designed for 80-year-olds. The Liberal Party, the opposition, have no plan except the status quo.

What we have come up with is a policy that not only are things going to be built properly, because confidence in the market is absolutely crucial, but we are going to make sure that apartments are designed properly too. We have introduced ambitious design standards that set a minimum standard. We know that some of the greatest cities in the world – of course, Melbourne being number one, as announced last week – cities like Barcelona, have consistent seven-storey and 10-storey buildings across their inner and middle rings. That is what has made them successful cities, not forever going out and out and out so people have to drive hours to work, so people do not have connections to the infrastructure that they rely on. We are better than that; we are smarter than that, and we have a plan to make sure that Melbourne continues to be the best city in the world but also a place where young people can buy a home.

We have introduced the Building and Plumbing Commission, because we are cracking down on dodgy builders as well. I believe that was opposed by those opposite. We have introduced the train and tram activity centres, which of course those opposite have said that they will rip up. We want to make sure that people can live close to a train station, whether it is in Footscray or Brighton. We do not have double standards here. The member for Brighton keeps saying, 'It's only in Liberal Party seats' – what nonsense. It is in activity centres across Melbourne, including in my own community of Footscray, the minister at the table, the Minister for Public and Active Transport's, community of Dandenong, Box Hill, Bentleigh and Oakleigh – seats that used to be held by the Liberal Party before they abandoned the young people that live there. We are proud to continue to represent those communities, to fight for them and to fight for millennials and young people to have a fair go. That is what this is about: this is about fairness and equity and breaking down that intergenerational wealth problem we have in Australia where some people have access to housing and other people do not. It is not fair, it is not right and our government is going to change it.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:09): The government today has confirmed a plan we know they have had all along, and that is for radical change. That is what this Premier is about: radical change. The Premier said, when she announced her activity centre policy – the first thing she said – 'We are announcing this policy because we are going to grow Melbourne to the size of London by 2050.' That is what the Premier said; that is a direct quote. Let me start by saying, setting aside what the number is, no Victorian has ever been asked whether that is the size they want their city. As soon as I started raising this issue, as soon as this was discussed publicly, guess what happened. The Premier never started talking about the growth to 9 million people, because she realised there was no

community mandate. When Victorians understood the only way for the Premier to achieve it was by packing in 20-storey towers in suburbs she does not like, Victorians understood what the Premier's plan really was about. The Premier's plan is about doubling the size of Melbourne.

Every Victorian, not just Melburnians, knows that the basics are not being done in this state by this state government. Setting aside the budget for a moment, which is appalling, in terms of basic service delivery we have never seen our state in the level of decay – because of this government's lack of service provision – that we are seeing now. We are seeing people die on the street and then a Premier come out crying crocodile tears about it. People are dying on the street. The Premier is changing this state in a way that is disgraceful, because she is a radical. She is absolutely a radical, and you can see it today. The Premier has come out today to announce a radical change to our city that no-one ever asked for, no-one ever voted for, because she wants to double the size of Melbourne. What is even more insulting is she did it by driving 250 kilometres into the city to announce it and then driving all the way back out again – never in the suburb where she is from. Are there any 20-storey towers in Bendigo? There are none in Bendigo – no 20-storey towers in Bendigo – and neither will there be. What is happening in Bendigo is very interesting –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Order! There are a number of members, who are not in their seats, interjecting.

James NEWBURY: Thank you, Acting Speaker; I very much appreciate your protection. There are no towers in Bendigo and no towers in Carrum, where the Minister for Planning is from. In fact the Minister for Planning has had a career of blocking any development in her own suburbs and then saying that other people are blockers when they have called for amenity to be protected. What a hypocrite. The idea that you simply pack in towers in suburbs that the Premier does not like is disgraceful, and the community can see it. The great thing is the community can see it.

On Saturday the Premier thought she was clever to post her little meme about me again – I mean, find a new meme. What I would say is I made one point, and this is the point: the thing that surprises me – set aside the substance of her tweet and the issue – is after two years of driving Labor into an abyss she has never looked up and worked out if she is driving in the right direction. So for two years –

A member interjected.

James NEWBURY: Twenty-five primary – mate, it is a historic abyss. I tell you what, the Victorian community has a very clear choice at this election and on this policy and more broadly on other policies a very clear choice at the election. We have made it very, very clear. We have said it today again: if you vote Labor at the next election you get 20-storey towers and if you vote Liberal and you are in a community that does not want them you will not have them – they will be ripped up. I will go further, and I will be saying this very, very, very loudly: do not just vote Liberal and National in the lower house; you now need to start targeting your upper house vote. I think people like the Minister for Housing and Building ain't gonna be here after the next election. Wouldn't it be sweet to see someone like the minister for housing, who has been championing these outrageous policies, be the first to lose their seat in the upper house on election night? I would say to Victorians: you have a very, very clear choice –

A member interjected.

James NEWBURY: She is gone. Victorians have a very, very clear choice at the next election: if you want 20-storey towers, you vote Labor, and if you want to see the end of these towers and you are in a community that does not want them, you say 'Liberal and National'. That is what you say and that is how you vote. It is a very clear choice, just like on crime. If you want a government that puts criminals first, vote Labor. If you want a government that puts victims first, vote Liberal. These choices are now so clear. And you can see, it has not been said clearly enough, but it is so clear: the reason we

have a crime crisis is because the government puts criminals first. That is why. If you look at all the policies they have brought in over time to weaken the laws, it has always been about putting criminals first, always putting criminals first over victims. So the Victorian community has a very clear choice at this election when it comes to housing, with a housing policy that was announced today, a housing policy no-one asked for. There is no mandate for it. And it is based on a government that is doubling the size of Melbourne. That is what the Premier said on the first day after announcing her activity centre policy. Anyone can go and look it up. She said it on morning television.

Her first line was that she wants to grow the size of Melbourne to the size of London, which is 9 million to 10 million people – a doubling of the size of this city by 2050. It is what she said. She is on TV saying it, and Victorians can look at that and ask themselves whether anyone asked us if we want this city doubled. Did anyone ask? What does it mean? Set aside the final figure – what does it mean? How do you plan for that type of growth without putting out a proper plan of how you intend to do it? What does it mean for services – services which cannot even be delivered now? Everyone knows the services at the moment are atrocious. This government taxes more than any other state, and this state gets the worst services. We say this all the time because it is true. Can you imagine being a state that pays the worst level of taxes and gets the worst services as a result? How can that possibly be? It is only incompetence. When you are paying for $15 billion of corruption you can understand why – at least $15 billion of corruption. When Victorians are being forced to pay $15 billion because of corruption that has occurred under the government's watch you can understand why.

Victorians are going to have a very, very clear choice. The government will say whatever they say, but this government is led by a radical, and the plans of this Premier are radical. Radical change is the Premier's plan. So I would say to Victorians: use your vote wisely. Use your vote wisely in the lower house and use your vote wisely in the upper house, because this is the time for change. This is the time to stop the government's radicalism, including on this outrageous housing policy, which is nothing more than the Premier sticking her middle finger up to the suburbs she does not like.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (12:19): I am going to pose a question: Victoria is now leading the nation in both growth of housing supply and housing affordability more generally – is that too radical? Is that radical or is that just sensible policy? On a rolling 12-month basis we are building, approving and commencing more homes than both New South Wales and Queensland. Boy, that is radical. I mean, what are we doing that for? Why would we want to deliver more housing for Victorians? When it comes to buying or renting a home, the work we are doing is delivering outcomes for Victorian households. We are issuing more first home buyer loans in Victoria: 11,900 more than New South Wales and 16,200 more than Queensland. Obviously the Liberal–National parties are opposed to this. They do not want us to deliver more homes and more first home buyer loans here than, for example, New South Wales and Queensland. What are they talking about?

According to the most recent Domain house price report, whether you want to buy a house or an apartment in Melbourne, it will be more affordable than in Sydney or Brisbane – you see? – because we have a plan for Victoria, not a plan for one or two suburbs, to lock them up – same, same – which basically locks millennials out of the market in perpetuity. But also it means that – and this is a point that my learned colleague from Footscray made – people who may have lived in a particular area all their lives cannot age there, and that is just not fair. I am pleased to say, though, that in the seat of Albert Park there are more and more residential properties being built so people can age in that area and be close to their families, but under the Liberal–National proposals that is just not going to happen. They do not want to deliver on that. They think it is too radical, increasing housing supply and making homes more affordable. It is a bit of a weird narrative. I am not sure why they are going down that track, but it is up to them. If that is the way they want to go, they can, but I know Victorians are going to judge this carefully.

I heard something about 20-storey towers. They were saying in Labor suburbs we do not have towers, et cetera. I live in a 37-storey building in Southbank. That is a Labor seat. There are lots of families in my building and many of the other buildings, and they are choosing to live there because people like

the convenience. They love being in that arts precinct. They love being close to the CBD. They do not necessarily want to have cars. They like being able to use public transport. And, guess what, we are delivering as part of the Melbourne arts precinct project 18,000 square metres of public parkland, because we get amenities. That is why I thought it was laughable when they were talking about all this stuff they are going to deliver – we are already delivering it.

The Pick My Park project is so popular because we are giving choice to the community. They pick the projects that they want and they need. This is not just for the seat of Albert Park but I think more broadly across the state of Victoria. People love their pets, don't they? We have been able to announce recently new dog parks for both the St Kilda botanic gardens and Fennell Reserve near Fishermans Bend. These are much loved, but it is the community who picked them. I think lecturing us about amenity is a bit laughable, particularly because I think it was the member for Caulfield who was talking about all these things that they are going to do. There is no plan; they are just sort of sprouting them off.

Past behaviour is often the best predictor of future behaviour. We know that when they were last in government community infrastructure was not really a priority. They expanded the urban growth boundary without a plan for infrastructure. They allowed skyscrapers to be built at the Joseph Road precinct in Footscray without any way of funding the infrastructure people would need to live there. They did the same thing in Fishermans Bend, and people have long memories of this. But don't you worry about that – we have set up the development contributions scheme. We have delivered Port Melbourne Secondary College, we have delivered Narrarrang Primary School, and there will be a kindergarten there in 2027. We are also delivering a fantastic community space. There will be a futsal court, and it is going to be much loved by the community.

There is also lots of housing going in at Fishermans Bend. I heard the member for Caulfield talking about how we should put housing in Fishermans Bend. Guess what, it is already happening. There are already houses being built there – who knew? And road safety upgrades are being facilitated – yes, I have advocated hard for them; I will concede that – through the development contributions program. This is helping all those things, increasing amenity and safety for the area, to be delivered. Also, we have the beautiful South Melbourne Primary School, delivered by the Labor government. I will say it is also going to be expanded because there are so many people moving into that Southbank, Docklands area, families and otherwise. I know those opposite think people could not possibly live in high-density housing, but they are making those choices. I live among these families, and not only families but households of all sorts of different sizes and shapes, as they should be. People are consciously making these choices, even if people in the handful of suburbs that the Liberals want to protect may think that they are above that or whatever it is. I do not know why there is such judgement.

I will concede change can be uncomfortable. The member for Caulfield also said Labor just does not want to face the truth. The truth is that the population is growing and we need a plan for Victoria, not a plan to lock down three suburbs because it is uncomfortable to go through change. We have to make these decisions, because otherwise where are millennials going to live? What are they going to do? Are we just shoving them out to the edge?

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, off to Berwick. Every time you push that urban growth boundary further and further out you are not doing our environment any favours either. There is only so far you can push it out. We still need land: (1) we need agricultural land, but (2) we also need our bush. Heaven forbid we might need beautiful forests and other plants – flora and fauna more broadly – and we need to sustain them into the future. So you cannot just indefinitely keep pushing out those growth boundaries. It is also a lot more expensive when you have to build infrastructure the further out you go. I do not think they have done the math on that; I think it is just 'Don't worry. We'll protect these three suburbs. You'll be right, Jack. We won't change anything, and we'll just chuck everyone out to

the edge and hope for the best.' That is about as convincing and as compelling as the argument has been from the opposition to date.

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, it would absolutely be. What about renters as well? We know the median sale price of a home in Melbourne over the last five years has stayed steady while it has skyrocketed in Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide. Talking about renters, the latest Domain rental report showed that Melbourne's house rentals are the most affordable of all Australian capital cities, and our apartment rentals remain more affordable than the other large east coast states. I will say that that is not a fluke, that is through our strategic implementation of our Plan for Victoria and also really increasing the supply of homes. We are working hard to build more and better homes for Victorians right across Melbourne and Victoria. Our landmark $6.3 billion Big Housing Build and Regional Housing Fund investment, announced in 2020, has been a major boost to housing delivery in Victoria. So where are we at? Through these programs over 11,900 homes are complete or underway. Each of those dwellings represents a home that a vulnerable household can call their own.

Barak Beacon is a place where we will have over 400 new homes. The site is topped out, so it is well underway. Let me tell you, they are energy efficient and have double glazing, induction cookers and nice wide open accessible spaces for the bathrooms – really pleasant places to live. They are in a beautiful location right near the ocean. They are tenure blind – the only difference will be the benchtop. If we are talking about fairness and equity, whether it is social or affordable or a market rental, the only difference will be the benchtops. In fact they have got the social housing at the front of the site, which has the views of the ocean as well. It is going to be even nicer once they get all the landscaping in there. That is about making sure that people have housing where they want to live but also have the dignity of that housing.

There was a further announcement as a result of state Labor collaborating with federal Labor, and that was at Emerald Hill. There were a whole lot of walk-ups there and, let me tell you, they were not in good condition. Certainly people who lived in those properties were fairly comfortable about going out of them – they were safely relocated, I must say – until the new ones have been built. I am really pleased that the announcement is going ahead. We will be building 131 social homes there. It is a fantastic location right near Clarendon Street. You have got your trams. You have got Metro Tunnel just down the road. It is really an accessible place, a nice place to live, and it has had decades of public housing in that location as well, so it makes good sense. This is all part of our plan to support Victorians to get, one, the dignity of housing but also to have choice and to make sure that they are close to trams, trains and buses and all the things that they need to live a good life.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (12:29): I think members opposite must think that this side of the house and the public have got the memories of goldfish. Do they really think that we do not recall what happened days, weeks, months and even in recent years gone past? To hear the nonsense and the cant coming from members opposite – from the member for Albert Park, from the Minister for Planning – suggesting that only Labor builds and only this side of the house blocks is arrant nonsense. I think every member of Parliament has got the right to stand up for their constituents. I would like to quote from one such member of Parliament, and this is a member of Parliament who wrote to the CEO of their local council. They said, 'I ask that council reject the application in relation to the application cited. They comprise a total of 236 dwellings on land zoned comprehensive development zone.'

I interpolate to note 236 dwellings. I would have thought that a Labor government that talks about wanting to build new homes would be all in favour of the development of 236 new dwellings, but apparently not.

This member also complained that, as opposed to what the normal processes are, this application provided for 'a reduction of car parking spaces from 708 car spaces to 391 car spaces'. Again, I note

that as part of this government's activity centre plans it is going to scrap the minimum requirements for car parks, so we can have 20-storey towers and nowhere to park your car. There is absolute –

Tim Richardson interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: 'Take the train,' said the genius opposite. Guess what, we are Australians. We like to have cars, we like our cars and it is un-Australian, member for Mordialloc, to try and take our cars away from Australians. Labor pretends that Australians and Victorians do not want to have cars, but we all know that they will continue to have cars. What is going to happen is we are going to see clogged suburban side streets. We are going to see side streets with no car parking available for visitors, no car parking available for tradies, no car parking available for small businesses trying to get out there and make a living, because they are all going to be filled up with the cars of the residents of these 20-storey towers that Labor wants to impose.

This member is concerned about 236 new homes and concerned about a lack of car spaces. The member then went on to say, 'It is submitted that there is no precedent for ten storey developments in the local area.' Oh my goodness, can you imagine, a member of this Parliament complaining about 10-storey developments in their own backyard? I thought we were debating a motion about how great this Labor government's planning policies are, which include 20-storey developments. We have a member of Parliament, the Minister for Planning, who is all in favour of 20-storey developments in places like Coburg and 16-storey developments in places like Malvern in my backyard. It is quite extreme. This member of Parliament urged council to reject the application. They have rejected 236 new homes. They have rejected a reduction in car parking spaces, and they have rejected 10 storeys in their suburb.

Who was the member of Parliament who wrote this letter? The state member for Carrum district Sonya Kilkenny – none other than the Minister for Planning herself. The same minister who wants to be a bulldozer in Malvern was a blocker in Carrum. A blocker in Carrum, a bulldozer in Malvern – that is the Minister for Planning. That is the hypocrisy of the Minister for Planning. That is the hypocrisy of the Andrews Labor government. I think this letter is so important because it lays bare the absolute hypocrisy of members opposite and particularly the Minister for Planning, that I will make this letter available to the house because I think every member should read it. Every member should have a good look at it and think very carefully about what they are arguing for now, because, as I said, we are not political goldfish over here. We have memories. We know what has been said, we know what has been done, and we will call out the hypocrisy and the dishonesty where we see it.

My little electorate of Malvern – geographically it is very small – is one of the smaller electorates out of the 88 in this place. Out of the 60 activity centres, do you know how many are being imposed on my Malvern electorate? Fourteen out of 60 – nearly 25 per cent of the entire number of activity centres in Victoria – are being imposed on one electorate alone: Toorak Village, Hawksburn station, Toorak station, Armadale station, Malvern station, Caulfield station, Carnegie station, Chadstone, Holmesglen station, East Malvern station, Darling station, Glen Iris station, Gardiner station and Tooronga. It is a shame I have only got 10 minutes, because just listing all those takes up half my time. Why on earth should one electorate have such a burden of activity centres? Members opposite might say it is because we have some train stations. Guess what, there are train stations in the Carrum electorate. There is Carrum station, there is Bonbeach station and there is Seaford station. How many of those stations in the Minister for Planning's electorate are activity centres? Absolutely none – not one single one. So the Minister for Planning has got train stations and she says, 'No activity centres in my backyard, but I'm going to impose 14 of them on the member for Malvern's electorate.' It is outrageous, it is manipulative, it is disingenuous and it is wrong. That is why the Liberals and Nationals will not stand for it. It is why a Wilson-led government will scrap Labor's unfair burdens of activity centres and actually work to create housing with councils.

I have heard the nonsense from members saying you cannot trust councils. With all the 14 activity centres that Labor wants to impose on the Malvern electorate, they say this will lead to 50,000 new

homes by I think it is 2051 – 50,000 new homes. Unfortunately for Labor, Stonnington council has already done the work. They have already done the homework.

Dylan Wight interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: Well, I am sure you deserved it. Do not break the law in my patch, member for Tarneit. Do not come into my patch with your law-breaking ways.

Stonnington council has actually already released its housing plans, which would lead to 67,000 new homes, 17,000 more than the Labor government's proposals. So here is the choice that the people of Malvern have at the next election: you can vote Labor, get fewer homes, more high-rise, less parking, less choice and no right to object, or you can vote Liberal–Nationals and you can get more homes, more amenity, more heritage protection, more car parking and you do not lose your right to have a say. I am very, very pleased that my successor Amelia Hamer will be going to the election and will be making that choice very, very clear to the good folks of Malvern – very, very clear. I am very keen to make sure that everyone in my electorate knows that is the choice, because it is the choice.

Why would Labor not want to work with councils? What is Labor's problem? I do not understand it. It goes beyond just Malvern because Stonnington council represents 1 per cent of the land mass of urban Melbourne, yet 33 per cent of the activity centres are being imposed on Stonnington council. It is disproportionate and it is unfair. If it is all about train stations, why isn't the member for Carrum's own electorate – Bonbeach station, Chelsea station, Seaford station, Carrum station – why aren't those stations the subjects of activity centres too? The fact is that this is not about new homes; this is about the minister cosying up to property developers. It is about cosying up to property developers, more high-rise developments, so their mates in the CFMEU can get their snouts in the trough again, because that is the rule – once you get over a certain level, the CFMEU get their claws into the project, and we know that is what this government is all about: protecting the crooks in the CFMEU. The more sites they have, the more they can use them as drug distribution centres. We have seen that happen on the Big Build; we see that is what Labor is into.

This government should not be patting itself on the back over its housing policies; it should be giving itself a kick up the backside for its housing policies, because they are horrid. They are not working. They have failed over 12 years. These ones will fail as well because they are ill-thought-through, they are unfair, they are unwarranted and they do not lead to an increase in housing. They simply demonstrate that this is a morally bankrupt government bereft of ideas and ready to be put out to pasture after 12 long years.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (12:39): It is a great pleasure to rise and make a contribution in favour of this motion today. It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Malvern. He will be missed next term. I do not think that champion for renters Ms Hamer will be anywhere near as effective. Watching along in my office on the TV to the hysterical contribution by the member for Caulfield and then coming in here and listening to the member for Malvern – they say they do not have memories like goldfish. Was that right? I think that was the quote. Well, that is good because I am about to take a trip down memory lane, member for Malvern. I am about to take a trip down memory lane and go through some of literally the worst examples of planning policy that this country has ever seen, between 2010 and 2014 when the member for Bulleen – no, do not go anywhere – was the planning minister, here in the state of Victoria.

I will get to that, trust me. I need longer than 10 minutes, but I will get to it. Just recently, I think it must have been Monday, the opposition released their planning and housing policy for Victoria, and it was nothing more than a situation of back to the future. They do not mind about high-density development as long as it is nowhere near their own electorates. They have basically just gone, 'Okay, we don't mind about a bit of higher density. We don't mind a little bit of higher limits, but let's just get out a map and let's just figure out where we don't live, and we can pop them there. Where don't we live? We don't live in Fitzroy, Collingwood or Brunswick, so we'll just pop it all there. And then

what we'll do is we'll smack a whole bunch of houses in the outer suburbs' – without any plans for amenity, without any plans for infrastructure. They have actually come in here and in previous contributions argued against the growth areas infrastructure contribution. That is where they are at – 'We'll just put hundreds of thousands of people in places like Melton, Tarneit, Wyndham Vale, Point Cook, Werribee; in the south-eastern suburbs in Greenvale; in the northern suburbs in Donnybrook and Craigieburn.'

There was another comment about cosying up to developer mates, which is the funniest thing that I have ever heard. Have you ever heard of a bloke called Intaj Khan? I have. He is in here pretty frequently meeting with your mate. So you have got a plan to put high density in electorates that are not yours.

Nicole Werner: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, there have been a number of references to 'you' and to the member for Malvern. It needs to be addressed through the Chair.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): There is no point of order.

Dylan WIGHT: I wish I could talk to the member for Malvern. He is in the chamber. Talk about cosying up to developers; it is just back to the future. 'We'll just pump a whole bunch of houses into the outer suburbs,' which are already at breaking point in terms of infrastructure because of the ridiculous precinct structure plans that were signed by the member for Bulleen when they were last in government, 'and we will do so without any plan to take infrastructure contributions off developers and provide the amenity, the services and the infrastructure that the people in those areas need.' It is one of the worst housing policies I have ever seen. But it is no different to the housing policy they had between 2010 and 2014, which is the root of so many of the problems that we see in Victoria's outer suburbs, because we had an exploding population and the position and plan of the government at the time was just to put a whole bunch of houses in empty paddocks with no amenity and no infrastructure and not hold developers to account, or even councils to account, to deliver that infrastructure.

I am going to touch on a specific issue in my electorate of Tarneit, in essentially a suburb of Tarneit. There is a PSP, a precinct structure plan, called Tarneit North. It sits to the north of the rail line just to the north of the existing Tarneit station. It is the Tarneit North PSP. That PSP was signed during caretaker in 2014 by the former planning minister. It is the worst example of a precinct structure plan that I have ever seen anywhere in Australia, and I would think anywhere in the world it would stack up to how bad it is. I have spoken in this chamber before about the lack of amenity that is there and about the fact that it is planned so poorly that we cannot fit a bus route through it. We cannot get buses in there. That is why we had to do FlexiRide in the area.

Members interjecting.

Dylan WIGHT: Correct. That is the legacy of those opposite. But it does not stop there. The developer contribution plan that was put into this PSP was done so poorly and was done to favour developers, like Intaj Khan, so much so that there are provisions in there that intersections and infrastructure have to be built at the time of subdivision but they have broken the subdivisions up into such small little bits that it is an estate with dead-end roads where residents are landlocked. They cannot get out of their estate because there is no incumbency on the developer to build the infrastructure to allow the residents to get out of their own estate. Now one developer is land banking and will not do the subdivision, so the people that live there will not be able to get out of their estate for some time to come. It is incumbent on the state government to step in, where it should not have to, to fix it. That is the legacy of those opposite, and from the announcement they have made with their housing plan, that is exactly what will happen again. It will happen in the northern suburbs, it will happen in the western suburbs and it will happen in the south-eastern suburbs. The exact same thing will happen again. Developers will get to line their pockets whilst residents are sold a dream that turns into a nightmare, and then it will be incumbent, I have got absolutely no doubt, on a future Labor government to go and fix it.

That is what is happening right now. Those frauds opposite – and frauds are exactly what they are – have the audacity to come in here and try and lecture us on housing because their leafy suburbs are going to get some higher density. I mean, give me a spell. That is the legacy of those opposite when it comes to planning. Those frauds come in here or go out to the outer suburbs and say, 'Labor hasn't had your back. Labor hasn't looked after you. You don't have the things that you need, because of Labor.' Why don't we trace it back to the planning decisions that were made that created the mess that we are in? They are all sitting there with their heads down now. Why don't you go out to the outer suburbs and tell them why this is happening?

Members interjecting.

Dylan WIGHT: I will tell you what we are doing. We are building new train stations. We are building bus routes where we can. We are doing the western roads upgrade to try and help these residents get around the estates that you guys planned so poorly. The funniest part about this is only a few months after this debacle occurred they elected the bloke leader. Then it went on for four years of articles in the *Age* and in the *Guardian* – Mr Skyscraper he was called. They come in here and talk about higher density and higher height limits. The guy was called Mr Skyscraper. There is the Fishermans Bend issue. There is the Phillip Island issue, where there was a secret, out-of-court settlement that had to happen. This was four years –

Members interjecting.

Dylan WIGHT: I told you I would take you down history lane. You have been pretty quiet until now, and I know why: because you spent four years completely destroying Victoria with poor planning decisions. That is exactly what they will do again; the biggest group of NIMBYs of all time. You have got the member for Brighton strutting down the street with some Liberal branch members. They are the biggest NIMBYs of all time: 'We are happy for higher density, just not near us.' They are Greens electorates at the moment, but they will pop them into Collingwood and Brunswick and Fitzroy because they are pretty sure no Liberal voters live there. It is mainly hipsters now, but it used to be working-class people. Then they will expand the outer suburbs like they did four years ago and repeat the mistakes of the past. They could not plan a suburb if their lives depended on it. There is nobody in their caucus that would have an utter clue how to do so, so they will repeat the mistakes of the past. It will be Tarneit North all over again where people are landlocked and cannot move around the community, where you cannot get public transport and where you cannot get amenity. You cannot trust those opposite when it comes to planning or housing, and I commend the motion to the house.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (12:49): Today, here we are, and the government has put on the government business program and seen fit to spend time in the Parliament and time in the chamber to laud themselves, to pat themselves on the back, to talk about how great they are and to talk about all the things they are allegedly doing right, when there are many things that they are doing wrong and many other things that we should be legislating on. But that is by the by today. Today we are being asked to commend the government's housing strategy. We are being asked to congratulate them on their record. But if you step outside this chamber and actually speak to Victorians, which members opposite really do not seem to do, when you speak to renters, when you speak to young Victorians and when you stop wagging your finger and telling your own story, you will hear a very different story.

You will hear the story in the Berwick electorate of young people who cannot afford to buy a home. You will hear from people in my electorate of Warrandyte, where families cannot find a rental. You will hear of builders who are walking away from projects. Yet the government want Parliament to congratulate them for solving the housing crisis, allegedly. They are patting themselves on the back so hard they are dislocating their shoulders when they are simply gaslighting Victorians who actually know the truth. The gap between what the government says and what Victorians are experiencing has never been wider. The truth is simple: the housing crisis in Victoria is getting worse. If the government strategy were actually working, we would see more homes being built, we would see rent stabilising and we would see home ownership becoming easier. But instead we are seeing the very opposite.

Let me debunk what Labor would have you believe. Let me debunk the gaslighting. Let me debunk the PR. Let me debunk the fake stuff that they are putting out there and present the truth here today in the chamber, which is that in the year to September 2025 just 54,323 new homes were completed in Victoria. What is that? It is the lowest annual result since 2014, 12 years ago. After more than a decade of this government being in power, home building has not gone forwards, it has not improved; it has gone backwards and not just gone backwards but gone backwards by 10 years. I do not know what you were doing 12 years ago, Acting Speaker, but that was a long time ago. I do not know what Victorians were doing 12 years ago, but I was 22 years old. It was a long time ago.

The gall of those opposite, standing up and lecturing and wagging their fingers, talking to us about all young people, all the youths, and what they are thinking. No. Standing here as a young person who speaks to young people every single day, who also knows the truth, it was your former Premier that said publicly, 'I've been speaking to young people. I've been speaking to my kids and their friends. They actually don't want to own their own home.' That was the former Premier of the Labor government that said young people do not want to own. That is not the truth. That is simply untrue. While the government set a target of 80,000 homes per year, across the two years since that announcement only 116,025 homes have actually been delivered. That is 43,975 homes short of their own promise, and the future pipeline is collapsing.

Talk about how wonderful your housing strategy is. Talk about this motion, just patting yourselves on the back. But the truth is that they are well short. The truth is that they are behind. The truth is that, year on year, they are well short of delivering on their own promise. In the last year alone approvals for new builds in Victoria have decreased by 26.1 per cent. That means there are going to be less homes starting now, meaning less homes built in the next 12 to 18 months time. Builders are losing confidence. Projects are not stacking up. Developments are being shelved. When all these things happen, homes do not get built for Victorians.

One of the reasons why these projects are not stacking up is because of the sheer weight of taxes and charges being piled onto housing in Victoria. The truth of it is this: you cannot tax your way into more affordable housing. You cannot tax your way into building more homes. You cannot tax your way into making it more affordable for young Victorians to rent or to buy. That is the truth of it. Since 2014, 32 different property taxes and charges have been introduced or increased. Property tax revenue is projected to rise to from $6.2 billion in 2014–15 to $20.5 billion in 2028–29. When the government piles taxes onto housing, it should be a surprise to no-one that fewer homes are being built. That is the truth of it. To this point, the truth of the matter is that housing affordability in this state is now at its lowest level in 30 years. More than 24,000 rental properties disappeared from the market in just one year. Renters know this. Aspiring home owners know this.

They are feeling this in a real way. Vacancy rates remain below 2 per cent, meaning many renters cannot even find a home or a property to apply for. And public confidence in the government's housing strategy is collapsing. Recent polling shows that 62 per cent of Victorians do not trust this government to deliver solutions to the housing crisis – 62 per cent. A 21-year-old young woman in my community wrote to me recently about the housing challenges that she was facing and that she and her generation were facing – at 21 years of age. She said:

> The idea of owning a home in the future is something that may have sounded possible years ago but honestly now, it feels like a distant dream. The reality is that getting into the rental market is hard enough on its own, let alone buying a house and affording a mortgage … at this rate it feels impossible.
>
> The standard amongst my peers is either a sharehouse rental, or staying at our parents place until home ownership feels feasible. Whenever that might be, I'm not sure – But at this rate my hopes aren't high.
>
> I actually remember joking with co-workers at my old job who said "haha well you should have invested back in 2008" when I was literally 3 years old … So I guess the system is majorly disadvantaging young people who don't really know how to get their foot in the door.

Every young person that I speak to knows this as a lived experience. Every young person of my generation and the generation below knows this as a lived experience – that it is impossible to get into

a rental and that the dream of home ownership is so far fetched and beyond their reach. They say it feels impossible. They feel like they are going to be renting forever. That is why I am standing in this place fighting for these young people, fighting for their opportunity to own their own home, fighting for their opportunity to have a go in the rental market. That is why we are standing here, and that is why our plan is simple. It is more homes and more choice, because housing affordability improves when it becomes easier to build homes.

The first part of our plan is to fast-track new housing and growth areas where families want to live. The system that plans new suburbs is badly broken. To break it down, the precinct structure plan, or PSP, is simply the master plan for new suburbs. It sets out where roads will go, where schools will be built and where homes, parks, drains and shops will be located. In other words, it is the blueprint that turns empty land into a new community. But under this government these plans can take up to 10 years to approve when it should be taking two. It used to be that it took two. In normal terms it takes two. But this government has halted and it has delayed, and it is taking up to 10 years. Families wanting to build a home are now told they have to wait until 2030 before land becomes available. That is absolutely absurd.

So here we are with this government. Do you know what else they have done? The second part of our plan is to make sure infrastructure keeps up with housing growth. When developers build in new areas, they pay a charge called a growth areas infrastructure contribution, or GAIC. Put simply, this is a tax paid when land is developed so the government can fund the infrastructure that new communities need – things like roads, schools, drainage and public transport. And, guess what, this government has been sitting on $400 million of it, and it has been unspent. Where is that $400 million? Is it tied up in your CFMEU $15 billion corruption scandal? Is it tied up in the settlement that you had to pay to settle a court case instead of fronting up? No. You just want to spend it on cover-ups, don't you.

These are the places like where my brother lives with his young family, places like Kalkallo, where it takes 45 minutes for him to get out of his estate. These are the people in the growth suburbs that we are fighting for and that we are standing with.

Members interjecting.

Nicole WERNER: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I would just like to raise for your attention that when the minister was at the table she used unparliamentary language, calling me a disgrace. I would just like to raise that for your attention.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): I do not believe there is any point of order. The member can raise it with the Speaker separately should she wish.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Members

Minister for Emergency Services

Absence

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

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Construction industry

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. The Premier failed to make a referral to IBAC until mid-2024 on corruption and misconduct on the Big Build. Given she has admitted to receiving a briefing as Minister for Transport and Infrastructure and was repeatedly warned by her senior infrastructure official, why did the Premier wait until mid-2024 to make a sham referral to IBAC?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): I reject the characterisation put by the Leader of the Opposition. Allegations of criminal activity on worksites are a serious issue and allegations of misconduct on worksites are a serious issue, which is why we have taken strong action, whether it is Victoria Police with extra powers and resources laying 70 charges, whether it is the Labour Hire Authority –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of debating the question, I seek your guidance. Every day the Premier is asked specific questions and reads talking points rather than dealing with the substance of the question. On debating the question, there must be a link to the actual question in the answer, rather than pulling out a word as some kind of faux response.

The SPEAKER: The Premier answered the question at the outset, from my memory.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was outlining to the house, we have taken strong action. We have given those investigative agencies the powers they need. Police are laying 70 charges. The Labour Hire Authority is cancelling construction licences. Also we commissioned a review and are implementing all recommendations of that review, which is seeing a dedicated complaints pathway being put in place. The culture is changing. We have changed the law as well.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: We have. We banned bikies on worksites and those with criminal associations. The Leader of the Opposition referred to previous actions I took. I did write to the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, as has been previously reported. Two years ago I did write to the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police when allegations were raised with me.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question asked why the Premier delayed – sat on these issues – for a year.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): It has been revealed today that in 2023 the CFMEU action resulted in workers being banned from jobs unless they met the CFMEU's demands. How can the Premier claim she only became aware of widespread issues on the Big Build in mid-2024?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:06): The Leader of the Opposition has made some claims in her question, and I will leave it for her to explain where she has sourced that information from, because if you have got evidence, put it to the investigative agencies who have got the powers and the resources to investigate these sorts of allegations.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the Premier for a ministers statement, I would like to acknowledge in the gallery the Deputy Premier of Queensland the Honourable Jarrod Bleijie MP.

Ministers statements: housing

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): Today we released the next stage of our plan to build more homes for more young Victorians – a plan to build homes right across the state but particularly in the inner and middle suburbs of Melbourne, particularly in those locations. You know

what, for too long, for too many years, these suburbs have been blocked for young people moving in and getting their first home. We are not only unblocking the laws, we are unlocking the space for 300,000 more homes, cutting red tape, making it quicker and easier.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: There is too much interjecting across the chamber. I can barely hear the Premier. The member for Caulfield and the Leader of the House will cease having a conversation across the table.

Jacinta ALLAN: We are getting on and getting more millennials and young people into homes, and we are doing that at a time when there are some who have called our plan radical. There are some who have said they would rip it up. I say this to you: what is radical about getting a young person into a home? What is radical about building that home near jobs, near great public transport and near schools for their kids to go and get a great public education? What is radical about giving families a choice about living in the communities they love, near the people that they love? As we have seen today, it is the lovers of the status quo. It is the Liberal Party and those opposite. They love the status quo, but young people do not, because that status quo has stopped them from getting into homes where they want to live. It is only our Labor government who has the new solutions to get homes built more quickly right across Victoria but particularly in those locations that are well serviced by public transport, jobs and services in Melbourne.

Construction industry

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:10): My question is to the Premier. Last year it was revealed that MC Labour was ripping off taxpayers with ghost shifts on taxpayer-funded projects. This rorting labour hire firm linked to bikie Toby Mitchell still has an active labour hire licence. Why?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:10): As a result of the strong action we have taken, we gave –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: This is an important point. We gave the Labour Hire Authority additional powers – powers that were opposed by those opposite. But let us not worry about that level of fact or detail. The Labour Hire Authority have the powers they need to stamp out criminal activity on worksites, and if the Leader of the Opposition or anyone has information that should be referred to them, that should be done immediately.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:11): Premier, how much taxpayer money has been rorted by MC Labour on the Big Build?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): Again, allegations of criminal behaviour on worksites are a serious matter, and allegations that may have evidence attached to them should be put to the relevant investigative authority because, as we have seen through the work of Victoria Police or the work of the Labour Hire Authority, they have the tools and the powers that they need to crack down on this illegal behaviour. So if the Leader of the Opposition or anyone has evidence of claims, they should be putting it immediately to Victoria Police, who have the power to act.

Ministers statements: housing

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:12): The Allan Labor government wants more Victorians to have the opportunity to find a home in places that are well connected, close to great public transport, schools, jobs and services. Today we announced another step toward delivering that opportunity with the release of the final maps for 25 train and tram zone activity centres right across Melbourne. Following extensive community engagement, this program will help unlock capacity for 300,000 new homes in some of our best connected suburbs,

places already served by world-class train and tram networks. These are suburbs where infrastructure already exists but where housing supply has been locked up for far too long, putting them out of reach for many Victorians, especially young Victorians trying to enter the market. We are seeing the consequences. In some of these suburbs the population of children and working-age families is declining. School enrolments are actually falling. Communities that were once full of families risk becoming childless places.

Suburbs like Kew and Hawthorn should never be closed off to the next generation, but that is what those opposite would do. As we heard today, they have made it clear they will rip up these reforms, cutting 300,000 homes from these suburbs and closing the door on Victorians. Did they support our train and tram zones? No. Did they support the townhouse code? No. Did they support infrastructure investment needed to support growth? No. We will build more homes where it makes sense to build them, in the places best connected to jobs, services and public transport, because either you help young Victorians into the housing market by building more homes or you block them. We know where we stand.

Construction industry

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:14): My question is to the Premier. There are a further four MC Labour companies with active labour hire licences: MC Traffic Management, MCLS, MC Security Services and Advance Labour. Why do these five bikie-linked labour hire companies have labour hire licences?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): Again, allegations of criminal behaviour on worksites are a serious matter. Those matters that have been raised by the member for Sandringham need to be put to the Labour Hire Authority, who have the power to act.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:15): According to the Watson report, MC Labour's operations manager Matt Lunedei formed a bond with bikie Toby Mitchell whilst in prison on aggravated burglary and theft charges. This company gained half a billion dollars of Labor government contracts on the Big Build. Why does the government consider an operation managed by a bikie-linked criminal to be fit to hold a labour hire licence?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:15): The member for Sandringham referred to a report produced by Geoffrey Watson. I am not wanting to dismiss Mr Watson's claims, but I must say very clearly that anyone who has evidence, including Mr Watson, of illegal or criminal behaviour on worksites should be referring that to Victoria Police or the other relevant investigative authorities, who have the power to act.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, my question did not invite the Premier to reflect upon Mr Watson. It asked her why the government considers the operation fit to hold a labour hire licence, which is separate to what she was answering.

The SPEAKER: A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: The advice I have from the Minister for Transport Infrastructure is that those entities raised in that report are currently being investigated by the Labour Hire Authority. If the member for Sandringham has anything further to add, he should put it.

Ministers statements: housing

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:17): Too many Victorians have spent their Saturdays at auctions for homes they never had any

chance of buying, and that is why the Allan Labor government is cracking down on underquoting and making the property market fairer and more transparent for homebuyers. Under Labor's new laws, agents will be required to publish reserve prices at least seven days before an auction or fixed-date sale. We will also require sold prices to be made public so buyers can better compare properties for sale in their area, and we will require presale building and pest inspection reports from the vendor so that purchasers are not forced to shell out thousands of dollars on reports when they do not end up buying the property in the first place. These reforms are simple: tell homebuyers the truth, publish the numbers and stop wasting people's time and money. They build on comparable sales rules and a permanent underquoting taskforce that has already issued 238 infringements, amassing $2.7 million in fines.

There are some who oppose these nation-leading reforms. They have landed in the absurd position of arguing that transparency is the problem, and one particular commentator says that publishing the real numbers just tells Victorians how unaffordable it is to buy a home. But that misses the point. These reforms reveal the real market value and make sure homebuyers are not being ripped off. The person who missed the point was the Leader of the Opposition. While those opposite oppose action, the New South Wales Liberals, who I am really starting to like, are calling for stronger measures against underquoting. So happy househunting with our ever-growing reforms, especially for those in the opposition who, once preselection knives are out, may find their new home in One Nation.

Cohealth

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:19): My question is to the Premier. The clock is ticking for community health. Public pressure has forced a temporary reprieve to keep Cohealth GP services in Collingwood, Fitzroy and Kensington open until July. But if Cohealth does not receive confirmation of a long-term sustainable funding solution by the end of April, it has said it has no choice but to start winding up its services and permanently close its Collingwood facility. These clinics provide free wraparound health care to over 12,500 people, many of whom would otherwise have no affordable alternative. Premier, will your government deliver funding before the April deadline so that these clinics are not forced to close?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:20): In order to provide a more fulsome answer to the member's question, under standing orders I am going to ask the Minister for Health to answer.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (14:20): Thank you, Premier, and I thank the member for Richmond for her question. As the member for Richmond well knows, right now the Victorian government is working with the federal government. We are undertaking a review of Cohealth in order to understand what led to the decision that the Cohealth board made. We are all committed to ensuring that Cohealth can continue to deliver a full suite of community health services to people at its various sites. But it is premature to be seeking an answer given that the independent review has not yet been finalised.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:21): Thank you to the minister. The review was handed down on Monday, and while it may be new, the problem certainly is not. Regardless of what the review contains, the patients and the staff deserve certainty and we cannot afford to lose our Cohealth services. Community health relies on state funding for infrastructure and service delivery, and right now they are facing closure. If the Allan Labor government can pull out $400 million for a corporate stand at the grand prix, it can afford 1 per cent of that for our community health centres. Infrastructure for community health centres is clearly a state responsibility, and the Collingwood centre is crumbling after years of government neglect. The government has ample evidence – years of budget requests. Is this Labor government going to stand by while Collingwood loses its community health centre?

The SPEAKER: Member for Richmond, was your question still to the Premier or was it to the Minister for Health?

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: The Minister for Health.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (14:22): I reject the premise of the question. The review has not yet been finalised, and the government, once it is finalised, will consider the findings of that review. But I do remind the member, as I have done on a number of occasions, that the issue at hand at Cohealth went to the provision of primary care services and they of course are funded by the Commonwealth government through Medicare. But of course our government is absolutely committed to our independent community health service system. It is why we support them in the work that they do right across the state.

Gabrielle de Vietri: On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, the question was about health infrastructure, not primary care.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Health was being relevant.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Again, as I have already indicated, once that review is complete and has been received by government, it will be assessed by both the state and federal governments.

Ministers statements: transport infrastructure

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:24): The Allan Labor government is committed to delivering new housing and creating new transport connections along with it. Some in this place want to supercharge urban sprawl without a plan to create communities that people want to live in and without building, for example, the public transport connections or the schools or the hospitals that support local families. On this side of the house we are focused on delivering homes closer to amenities that support livability while also boosting services for those communities. We have added more than 24,000 bus services that operate each week and over 3500 extra train services across metro and regional Victoria. We have delivered the Metro Tunnel, connecting parts of our city to rail for the very first time and boosting connections to major hospitals and major universities in our city as well. The West Gate Tunnel is slashing travel times for people in Melbourne's outer west and taking thousands of trucks off local roads in Melbourne's inner west, improving livability.

Some political parties have an $11 billion black hole and are publicly committing to cuts. Those political parties are telling Victorians loud and clear that they intend to forever push people out to the urban fringes, with no intention of delivering the transport connections, the schools, the hospitals and the early childhood centres that families rely on. Some political parties have a policy position that is effectively 'Out of sight, out of mind'. They are telling Victorians that if you cannot afford to live in Brighton or you cannot afford to live in Kew then you are on your own.

Construction industry

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:26): My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. MC Traffic has been accredited by the government as a traffic management company for state-managed roads. Why has the minister's department accredited a traffic management company associated with underworld figures and the rorting of taxpayer money?

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (14:26): Thank you very much for the question. That would have been accredited by the minister who is responsible for the labour hire firm, and I will refer your question accordingly.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. It is her department that accredits the traffic management.

The SPEAKER: The minister has responded to the Leader of the Nationals. It is not for me to determine how she responds to the question.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:27): Given it is the minister's department that has accredited MC Labour, can the minister guarantee that MC Traffic is not operating on a single government road project?

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (14:27): Again I thank the member for his question. I will seek some advice from the department and come back to him.

Ministers statements: Solar Homes program

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:28): I rise to inform the house that the Allan Labor government is not only helping Victorians get into their own homes but making it more affordable for them to live in their own homes. Our nation-leading Solar Homes program is slashing bills for more and more Victorians every single day. In fact more than 450,000 households across the state – regional, rural and metropolitan – have absolutely enjoyed the benefits of this program. If you are in a home in Tarneit with solar panels, our program is saving you between $500 and $1000 off your power bills every year. For a home in Cranbourne with a hot water heat pump our program is saving hundreds per year off energy bills. These are real savings right now back in the pockets of households right now, and we know that every dollar counts right now more than ever.

What is more, this cheap renewable energy from our rooftop solar systems alone delivered more than 11 per cent of our total electricity into the grid last year, pushing down power prices for every Victorian whether they had panels or not. It is part of why average Victorian household electricity bills are consistently the lowest in the country. As a contrast in policy, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition denounced solar rebates as unnecessary. I do not believe that the 450,000 households who have been supported by our Solar Homes program would agree. They are saving real money off their energy bills every day. That is more money back in their pockets, helping to ease their cost of living. Only the Allan Labor government will back Victorians and their families, back cheaper renewables and help cut the cost of living.

Constituency questions

Evelyn electorate

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:31): (1568) Lilydale residents have raised their concerns and objections to a massive and secretive development of 106 warehouses and 468 car parking spaces within metres of homes, a school and the Nelson Road open drain flood zone. There has been no transparency about the ministerial permit for 65 Quarry Road, Lilydale. It has popped up from nowhere as a state-significant project, part of the government's development facilitation program. The community is shocked by the scale of this mega industrial project, which will result in a significant increase in traffic and large trucks – an estimated additional 1100 vehicles on a quiet residential street. Residents living just metres away were not consulted. Mount Lilydale Mercy College was not consulted. Boral Quarries was not made aware. Yarra Ranges council was bypassed for the approvals process. There is no information about the impact on road safety and congestion, stormwater management, increased flood risk in a flood zone or native vegetation and wildlife. My question for the Minister for Planning is: when will an environment effects statement be required and conducted given there has been no community consultation?

Sunbury electorate

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (14:32): (1569) My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, how will the recently expanded imaging services at Sunbury Community Hospital support local patients in my electorate to access greater care options closer to home? Last week I had the opportunity to join some of the amazing team from Western Health – nurses and radiologists – to chat about how the expanded imaging services will benefit the local community. This of course is a terrific facility – the expansion of the Sunbury Day Hospital into the Sunbury Community Hospital – making for better

imaging services and a whole range of other local health services that are much closer to home. I want to take the opportunity to very briefly thank the amazing team, the terrific staff, who do extraordinary work in the health space at Western Health, and of course the entire team there that are doing great things. I look forward to the minister's response.

Ovens Valley electorate

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (14:33): (1570) My question is to the minister for WorkCover, and I ask on behalf of Mr Brad Swadesir of Wangaratta. Mr Swadesir injured his back in a workplace incident in 2022 and currently is on a disability pension. Mr Swadesir lodged his documents to remove himself from the WorkCover process, and the legislation states that he has 120 days for this process to take its course. Well into the 120 days they sought more clarification, and now there has been a reset for another 120 days. This has gone on on numerous occasions, and I am seeking clarification on when Mr Swadesir will have his claim processed.

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (14:34): (1571) My question is to the Minister for Health. How is the government's investment in the Geelong women's and children's hospital going to improve healthcare services for constituents in the Lara electorate? This project is set to deliver new health, maternity and paediatric facilities, and at $500 million it is the largest healthcare infrastructure investment in the Geelong region ever. From many points across Geelong large cranes can be seen in the sky, signalling that construction is well underway. I am proud that this project is one of many that have been funded thanks to the Victorian Labor government. We have seen major health infrastructure built across Geelong in recent years, including Barwon Health North and University Hospital Geelong's new children's emergency department. Only Labor will invest in health services for the Geelong community, and this project is a great example of that.

Narracan electorate

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (14:35): (1572) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education, and it is in relation to rural and regional schools that are facing a health and safety crisis. I understand there are multiple schools facing an E. coli outbreak in my electorate. These schools are rural, regional and remote. That means they are not on town water – they have no option. Parents have told me that schools are now reliant on emergency water following make-safe arrangements late last year and that drinking water and temporary toilets are also in use. It is an unacceptable situation, and I am fearful that it is putting students at risk. I ask the minister: when will you provide vital funding to these schools to ensure student safety is put front and centre and that no student's health is at risk?

Bass electorate

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (14:35): (1573) My question is for the Premier. How will the violence reduction unit reduce the risk of youth crime in my electorate of Bass? We know the best way to prevent a life of crime is to intervene early, address root causes and support kids and their families. Alongside tough new bail laws that hold offenders to account, VRU youth engagement programs help at-risk young people stay engaged at school and create pathways to work. In Bass Coast Leading Senior Constable Nicholas Carlson from the proactive policing unit has worked with colleagues and local organisations to develop a new program for at-risk 12- to 15-year-olds. The Shift program – 'Shift the mindset, change the story' – uses an adventure therapy model. This initiative needs support through the VRU to get off the ground. Another outstanding service is Nas Recovery in the Casey area. Nyachan Nyak and her team provide alcohol and other drug treatment and mental health support through tailored programs using a theory of change framework.

Polwarth electorate

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:36): (1574) My question this afternoon is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. My question is a simple one: Minister, why can't the appropriate door

locks and safety mechanisms be installed on the Warrnambool line trains so that the people of western Victoria, the people who rely on the Warrnambool line, can have VLocity train services fit for purpose? These locks and door safety mechanisms are installed on other train services in northern Victoria, but they are not installed on the western Victoria line. At the moment people on the Warrnambool train line, which services throughout the Polwarth electorate, currently have 6400 fewer seats a week transporting them to and from Melbourne. It is simply not good enough. It is poor for safety. It is poor for convenience. Elderly, unwell people and people with disabilities and access issues are finding they are having to stand for up to 3 hours on this long train journey of unsatisfactory safety.

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:37): (1575) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. How many passengers boarding trains at Wendouree and Ballarat train stations have trialled tap and go on the Ballarat line? I am delighted that Wendouree constituents are among the first Victorians to use the tap-and-go technology on the Ballarat line. Full-fare passengers travelling to and from Ballarat and city loop stations, including Southern Cross, will be among the first to test the technology. Passengers can now tap on with a Mastercard, a Visa, a debit card, a smartphone or a smartwatch, making travel easier and simpler. Concession card holders and passengers planning to transfer to another train line, tram or bus must use a Myki from the start of their journey to ensure that they are not overcharged. Concession card holders will be able to participate in later stages of the rollout. Participation in the trial is optional. If any passenger needs assistance, please speak to the helpful Ballarat or Wendouree train staff.

Gippsland East electorate

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (14:38): (1576) My constituency question is to the Minister for Environment. The information that I am seeking is whether there is any intention to open up more firewood collection areas, particularly in my electorate of Gippsland East. The situation we have at the moment is the firewood collection area maps have gone out and they are very, very similar to what was in place last year. This means that these areas are already devoid of firewood and it cannot be collected there. What we need are more collection areas to be opened so that we do not have people who require solid-fuel heating to keep warm over this winter sent on a wild goose chase. The question that I am asking is if there is any information around whether consideration is being given to expanding these firewood collection areas.

Mulgrave electorate

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (14:39): (1577) My question is for the Minister for Planning. How many more homes can be built in my electorate of Mulgrave because of the new train and tram activity centre designations for Springvale and Noble Park? I am proud to have two designated activity centres in my community and to be part of a government that is supporting more housing construction so people can live near jobs, live near services and live near their loved ones. The vibrant heart of Springvale and Noble Park is a source of immense pride for my community and my constituents, alongside, I am sure, the member for Dandenong as well. They are excited about the potential for more housing in such a beautiful area, beautiful location, right where the services are.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER (14:40): I have reviewed the constituency questions from yesterday. The member for Eildon asked the minister to provide a guarantee, which is an action, although I believe her intention was to seek information about the timing of completion of certain works. While I will not rule out the member's question on this occasion, I once again implore members to take more care with their language when preparing constituency questions and to check with the clerks if there is any doubt about admissibility. The member for Euroa asked two questions in her contribution yesterday.

Members must only ask a single question during their constituency question. I therefore rule the member's question out of order.

Motions

Housing

Debate resumed.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:41): It is a pleasure to rise and speak on the Allan Labor government's record of delivering for Victorians through our suite of housing policies. From planning through to retirement village reforms to strengthening protection for renters, our government has been working diligently to ensure that Victorians can have the dignity of a place that they can call their own and the security to go with it. The best way to ensure that there is enough housing for everyone is to build it so people can either buy or rent where they want to live, not be pushed out to the fringes somewhere else.

Our policies are in stark contrast to the opposition's Voldemort housing policy – the housing policy that must not be named. To quote our Minister for Planning, it seems that those opposite are a bit more excited about our housing policy than their own. Where is their plan for seniors? Where is their plan for renters? Does it go to that place where – you know when an email is sent to you and it never gets to you? There must be somewhere in the universe where those emails go to die. I am wondering if that is where the policy of the opposition when it comes to housing has actually ended up: in that special black hole.

There is so much that we have been doing. I know the Minister for Planning spoke at length about what we have done in that area, in that space, so I want to actually touch on some other areas. I really want to look at what has happened in the consumer affairs space, because I do think that is actually quite pertinent. These are real reforms that will impact on people and make their lives better for it.

In terms of retirement villages, across my district of Monbulk we do not actually have many retirement villages. We have got a couple but not many because of its nature; the topography of the area does not lend itself to too many of them, but they are there. I know that we have many seniors who are thinking of where they will go next in the autumn of their years. For a long, long time there has been a lot of concern about retirement villages fleecing people, actually taking advantage of people through terrible, terrible contracts that were convoluted. The fine print was too small and too voluminous for people. Even lawyers who had worked all their lives said that they were very difficult to understand and interpret. We have made some real reforms in that area, through the Retirement Villages Amendment Act of last year. It has been the most significant reform to the retirement village sector in decades. I was championing that back at the time, and I will continue to champion that now, because it just helps people make more informed choices about where they enter, how they live there and what happens when they exit, whichever form that may take.

The new principles are focused on dignity, respect and resident choice. There are simpler exit entitlement calculations. We are requiring operators to be more transparent in their reporting. There are annual financial checks of contracts, stronger dispute resolution, a new standard form contract, a code of practice, and enhanced monitoring and enforcement powers for Consumer Affairs Victoria. I know that seniors I have spoken to have long hesitated on whether or not to enter a retirement village, because they feared they would lose what they might have, which they really wanted to hold on to, and not be able to pass on to their children that bit of property wealth for them, especially people who did not have a lot to start with. There was a lot of reluctance for them to enter into retirement village contracts, because they had heard of the nightmare scenarios which had plagued and befallen others. I know that the changes we made last year have created more confidence in the system and more confidence that they are not going to end up being taken advantage of, and that is a wonderful testament to the work of the minister and the department who made that happen.

As I said before, the opposition came out in February and announced a housing policy, and nowhere were seniors or renters mentioned at all. Yet we have made renters a core area for us to focus on because we know not everyone wants to buy a house or is in a position to buy a house, for a whole host of reasons, not always financial. It may be that they are only living here for a few years and they do not want to buy a house with the costs that come with it and they would prefer to rent. Renting can be a choice as well. We have understood that and we have made significant reforms to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, and the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Act 2025 repealed all remaining no-reason notices to vacate. That was incredibly important. I have several friends who rent, and that was always like a sword of Damocles, a threat that loomed over them that they may have been required to vacate their home for absolutely no reason at all.

In Australia for a long, long time we really have lacked good protections for renters. For the longest of times it has definitely been in the landlord's favour. As you would well know, I have a lot of family living over in Italy, and many of them rented for life because that was just what happened. It was not unusual for that to be the circumstance, as it is not unusual in other parts of the world to actually be a lifelong renter. But they had a security that went with it. They knew that that place was their home, and even though they did not own it, they did not have the title in their name – a landlord did – in their apartment they knew that was their place. My uncle actually just passed away a couple of months ago, and he and his wife, my Zia Maria, had lived in that home for over 60 years, in their apartment. They knew it was theirs until the end.

We are not in that situation here in Australia, because the capacity for people to have bought their house means that things are a bit different here in terms of the framework for housing, but we have recognised that more and more people need greater certainty in renting. That is why we brought in those reforms last year, and that gives greater assurance to people who are renting that they are not just going to be booted out for no reason at all.

We have actually banned all types of rental bidding. It was getting to a point that was just extraordinary at one stage where people were outbidding each other to be able to rent a place, and that has gone now. We extended notice periods for rent increases and certain notices to vacate from 60 days to 90 days. We standardised rental applications and strengthened protections for renters' personal information, because personal information should remain that way. It should be personal. It should not be able to be shared out or sold. We ensured that when people are in the rental system there is dignity for them in that and they are not there to be exploited.

A home is one of the most important things for all of us, a stable place that we call our own in whatever format it might be: house, apartment, rented or bought. We have understood as a government that people need that assurance that (a) they can afford a home and (b) once they are in it they can feel assured that they have got that security. It has been extraordinary listening at length to a number of the contributions earlier. I was listening to some of the opposition's contributions, and one would think, if one only heard the contributions from those opposite, that we have done absolutely nothing in this space. There was a figure quoted by the member for Caulfield that we have only built 36 public homes in 10 years, completely ignoring all the social housing but by another name. There has been some disingenuous information bandied about, which is quite disturbing because we are, as a state, leading the nation in both growth of housing supply and housing affordability more generally.

That is not to be sniffed at. Melbourne is now one of the more affordable cities to buy and rent in. We are building and approving and starting building more homes than both New South Wales and Queensland. We are issuing more first home buyer loans in Victoria – 11,900 more than New South Wales and 16,200 more than Queensland. The figures speak for themselves. I know sometimes facts can be a little bit inconvenient for those opposite, especially when they support what we say and they fly in the face of what gets thrown our way.

As I say, our housing policies – there is no one way to solve a housing issue at all. Housing issues are multilayered. They are complex. It is really, really easy to be in opposition and to simply decry

everything that is done. It is really easy to be negative and it is really easy to oppose. It is very hard to govern. It is very hard to look at a complex situation and go 'We have to tackle this in so many various ways to achieve good outcomes.' But we have done the work. Our government, through a whole host of different ministers and different portfolios that all intersect, have been doing the work, and we know there is more to do. We have a vision for this state and we are enacting that vision for this state, unlike those opposite, who, as I say, produced a housing policy that can only be called the Voldemort of policies – the one that must not be named.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:51): I rise to speak on this motion. Obviously, being a person who represents a growth area in Victoria, and one of the rare ones who lives in the growth area in Victoria in the area that he represents, I have been very proud to grow up and see the changes through the Berwick area. At the moment in this house I think I have the second-fastest growing by electors electorate across the entire state, so we are taking our fair degree of numbers of people moving in. Where I am going to focus on this is particularly around where Victorians live, work and access transport.

I note that in the growth areas out our way history is something that we can look at on how we ended up where we are today and why we are trying to fix some of these problems. If you look down through the areas of Berwick South, through Clyde North and Clyde, that used to be some of the best farming land. We had studs down there. We have Ramlegh estate, which was Ramlegh stud –

Members interjecting.

Brad BATTIN: I will not refer to myself there, thank you very much, member for Frankston. Some may or may not know, but we had a Melbourne Cup winner come from down that way with the Ramlegh stud. Some of the land down there has been developed, and some of it is still market gardens, so there is still plenty of it down there that is still going to be developed moving forward. All of this area, if you want to talk about livability and protecting the future, the quality of the soil was known and is still known in some of those areas because of the fruit and vegetables that it can supply for all Victorians.

I know I have got the Shadow Minister for Agriculture at the table, who lives in an area that does produce a lot of food and fibre for Victoria. This used to be produced through many of these communities. In 2002, under the then Labor government, at the stroke of midnight, with the stroke of a pen, we all of a sudden moved the urban growth boundary and we took away all these areas that were the farm areas of Clyde, Clyde North et cetera. The farmers thought this was not bad because the value of their land increased dramatically, and a lot of them have onsold since then. But we have lost that land forever. We will never get that opportunity again. When the plan came out, the part the government failed to do was to plan for what happens as we get the growth. We see history repeating itself right now, where the government talks about putting in new houses, but they have failed to put the infrastructure in for those new houses so people can continue to live that lifestyle that we have come to know and love here in Australia.

If you live in Clyde North at the moment and you want to get to work, your choices are very, very limited. I know there will be some occasional bus services, but those bus services do not go where you need to go at the times you need to get there, and every single person down there just knows the simple fact that it would take too long to get from Clyde North to a job, whether it was in Dandenong or all the way in the city, if you had to use public transport. It is just not viable. The amount of hours away from home would not be viable for each person that lives within that community. The only alternative then is to drive. The government promised back in 1999 that they were going to bring the railway back to Clyde. That was in 1999. Just to put it in perspective, I have just celebrated my 27th wedding anniversary – I got married in 1999 – and the railway station is still not there. Twenty-seven years on, it has been committed to four or five times by the Labor government and it still has not been delivered. What that means is the people there have to then buy another car, so we have got more cars in the community, more cars on the roads, and the government are not delivering the roads.

Gabrielle Williams interjected.

Brad BATTIN: I note the minister sitting at the table said, 'Why didn't you commit to it? Why didn't you do it?' In four years since 1999, are the government honestly going to turn around and try to pass the buck? Wait till we get to the other parts of the issues down there. But this is an issue of this government. Nothing is their fault – nothing. They are the ones that promised this railway, and they have never delivered it. So each household now buys more cars. With more cars comes more traffic, and yet they have not put the funding into roads, like Thompsons Road. They have not properly invested in Clyde Road. This is the third tranche where we are upgrading Clyde Road, because it is already at capacity, because on three separate occasions the government has failed to plan properly when they were putting housing out in the southern end of Berwick and all the way through to Clyde and Clyde North. So if you are in a car, you have got to go onto Clyde Road to get onto the freeway. That travel in itself in the morning can be around about 40 minutes just to get to the freeway before you get stuck on what is known as the Monash car park, and anyone out in our area knows what the Monash car park is. That is the one that you get on in the morning, you get all excited you are going to get into work, and then you have got to stop, and you want to hope you have got a pretty long podcast, because there is going to be plenty of time sitting in that car doing 5 and 10 k's an hour until you get into the city. That is the planning failure of this government.

But it goes further than just the infrastructure of what they have delivered when it comes to the roads and the rail – or failed to deliver. It means that families out there now are missing out on the services that protect them. Clyde North, just this week in Orana estate, was on the news again. A father had to come out of his house because of young kids running around in the street with bats at the time. He confronted them and more came back with machetes. The amount of crime – violent crime, aggravated burglaries, stolen cars – happening through Clyde and Clyde North at the moment is horrendous, and it is because the crooks know two things: they know that, one, if they get caught, they are probably going to get away with it, but two, only this government, in their failure to plan, could build a police station and fail to put police in it. We have actually approached the government now and asked, 'Can you guarantee you're not going to try and take services away from Cranbourne to fill in those positions?', because the reality is all that does is make Cranbourne less safe. In Clyde North itself, too many residents are speaking to us each and every day about the safety issues, because the government is more than happy to put the houses in and take the taxes on all of the buildings, but they do not supply the services that keep the community safe.

We have also seen in recent years a unit fire in Clyde North that was attached to a garage and ended up going through multiple garages pretty quickly. One of the biggest issues around that – and the career firefighters and the volunteer firefighters came out in equal force on this – is that they have not got the funding for the Clyde North fire station. Moving a truck from Clyde to Clyde North is not what you would call service delivery for that community. The Clyde North community has paid their taxes each and every year to ensure that they get the services that they deserve, like each and every other Victorian, yet a block of land was bought, a promise for a Fire Rescue Victoria station was put in place, and again it failed to be delivered. If it was there, the truck could have responded within 90 seconds from that station and been out to that fire, and it may have prevented it going through other homes. That is what happens when you fail to plan here in the community.

We also know that these communities are paying their fair share in tax. The GAIC funding here in Victoria, the growth area infrastructure contribution, currently holds nearly half a billion dollars. Half a billion dollars is sitting in an account holding up the coffers for the Victorian government, the Victorian Labor Party, probably sitting there just to hold off against some debt that they have got backing up at the moment. One of the biggest concerns about that is it should have been invested in infrastructure, and this government is now using it to deliver services like buses through these communities and not for the infrastructure that the government had promised those communities for such a long period of time.

I wish I had a lot more time on this. I was not planning to speak on it, but I did not even get to the precinct structure plan delays that have been delaying our community for so long. There is no better example than the Officer town centre, which, 10 years on, sits empty. The PSP that was originally put in place prior to 2010 took so long to get through. They were arguing over some grass that did not exist but that some university students said may exist. They never actually found it, but it delayed the entire project and housing projects through that area. It took a Liberal government – in 2010 to 2014 – to come in and go, 'Seriously, just pull your head in and get these things going,' because we wanted to make sure the development in Officer could happen.

Since then the government changed in 2014, and nothing has happened when it comes to the Officer town centre. Communities have moved to Officer after all these promises about services that will be supplied and guarantees of things that will be in place, and none of them have been delivered. The problem is the failure of the Labor government to ensure that these PSPs are delivered and that funding goes to the projects that were promised to those communities. These communities pay exceptional amounts in tax. The taxes on property here have gone up so much in the last 10 years. But the problem we have got is our growth areas, where I proudly live, are the ones that continue to be neglected by the Allan Labor government, and they will continue to be neglected as this government racks up debt and tries to find money for its pet projects in the city.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (15:01): I am delighted to rise to speak on the housing motion. On this side of the house we know how important safe and secure housing is to people in our communities right across Victoria, but in particular in my community of Geelong. As someone that grew up in public housing, I know how important secure and affordable housing is and what a difference it makes particularly for families with children, not having to take them out of schools because they are forced to move for a whole range of reasons. That secure and affordable housing that we see in our social housing sector now is so important to so many individuals but also to families. As I said, it provides that security that enables you to continue and settle into your community. You are not having to move around, take kids out of school or travel long distances to employment – all those things that are impacted by the insecure housing issue that we know is a problem in our state. It is a problem everywhere, and we need to continue to build on the investments that we already have made. We have worked hard on building more social housing and building housing where people can afford to buy. There are so many different aspects to our housing agenda that I am really proud that this government has initiated, and it has continued that major investment.

We know housing affordability and supply are critical issues for Victoria and for my community as well. As I said, with social housing the investment that we have put into Geelong has been significant. We have three major apartment developments underway right now – in fact one is already complete, and tenants are starting to move in – around central Geelong. I was so excited to hear that we were actually building housing where people need it. People live in the city and want to live in the city because they work in the city. They should not have to be forced out to the suburbs because of housing availability or affordability and needing to find something that is suitable for their budgets. For this social housing we have three major developments, which equates to around 250 new apartments. That is extraordinary for Geelong. We have never seen such a big investment, and that is not to mention other opportunities for housing being built across Geelong through infill and within new developments. So this is really significant for Geelong. We are seeing 250 families and individuals moving or having the opportunity to move into these incredible new apartments that are providing the environmentally sustainable housing that is very much needed. Geelong's population is growing rapidly, and we are having people move into our community every single day.

When I talk to people who have moved into Geelong, whether it be from Melbourne or other parts of the state, they are amazed at just how incredible Geelong is. But also, having access to affordable and secure housing makes a huge difference to them and their families. Once families are settled in that secure and affordable housing, the kids are attending school. They are not being pulled out of school

because they have to move. The cost-of-living factors come into play when they are not travelling some distance to go to work and for a whole range of things.

The exciting thing about these major developments around the CBD area of Geelong is it means that they have access to all the services. The services are there. The infrastructure is there for people to live in our beautiful city of Geelong, but the housing has to be there as well. For these 250 units or apartments – as I said, almost half of them are available right now – tenants have started to move in and are expressing how excited they are that they are actually moving into the city area because they either work in that area or study in that area and they have networks in that area. To me it is so exciting that we are actually getting people where they want to live, which is a really important part of providing housing to our community. As I said, not everybody wants to live out in the suburbs. The Geelong region is growing. We have huge new estates and areas right across the region. But to have people living where they want to live is really important. The huge growth in Geelong is having an impact on housing availability and affordability, and we have been working right across Geelong to ensure that that housing is being delivered. We know that within the CBD area the more people we get living in that area, the more revitalised our inner-city area will be. This government has really focused on revitalising the City of Greater Geelong.

Our $5.3 billion Big Housing Build is delivering more than 12,000 social and affordable houses across metropolitan and regional Victoria. As I said, in regional Victoria we have just the same demands as metro Melbourne does, and we are very focused on making sure our regions are getting the housing that they need. I know that other regions are experiencing the same input from the delivery of more social and affordable housing in their areas. More than 7600 homes have been completed or are underway, with more than 2800 homes already completed and welcoming renters. What is really exciting about our housing agenda is that we are making sure we are building the houses and that people are moving into them and enjoying peace of mind and consistency, enabling them to make themselves a home that they know is secure and affordable.

Every new social and affordable home built through government investment is a home that is taking pressure out of the housing market. Like in many regional areas, private rental is not easily available, so having this influx of, for example, 250 homes into central Geelong is taking pressure off the private rental market. It means that people are living in more affordable and secure housing, which is what our government agenda is. As well as providing a home to a family in need, this investment puts downward pressure on overall rental prices in the private rental market and improves housing affordability. Focusing on more homes in Geelong's CBD, again, is really important in terms of providing that security of tenure. We have seen so much in our rental reforms that is really supporting people in the private rental market. We know there have been issues out there. The Minister for Consumer Affairs has done an enormous amount of work on improving the rights of private tenants and making sure that they are getting a fair deal.

But we know that more public and social housing is what we need in our communities and what this government has been doing for quite some years now. Our affordable housing rental scheme will deliver 2400 affordable homes across metro and regional Victoria. The first development, which is in Kensington, has welcomed renters, and renters are moving into Markham Avenue in Ashburton and Dunlop Avenue in Ascot Vale. Additionally the $1 billion regional fund will deliver more than 1300 social and affordable homes to Victoria's regions. It is really important to understand just how significant and important these housing additions to regional Victoria are to our communities. Having spoken to many people that have moved into these apartments, which are brand new, environmentally sound and sustainable and have air conditioning – all those things that you would expect, and some even have bay views, I have to say – they are so excited at the opportunity of having access to this secure and affordable housing. The work that we are doing as a government has been unprecedented, particularly in my region of Geelong, and I commend this to the house.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (15:11): I also rise to address the government's motion relating to the government's housing strategy, as moved by the member for Carrum. I note that there

are some of our next generation home owners in the chamber gallery today from St Patrick's, Stawell, represented by the incredibly wonderful member for Lowan, and of course everyone is welcome in the people's house.

This is an important motion. It is an important motion because it gives everyone the opportunity to speak about something that should be a fundamental. Every person, every Victorian, deserves the opportunity, should they wish, to own their own home. It is a fundamental to have a roof over your head, four walls around you and a solid footing, a solid base. The opportunity for people to have the independence of home ownership, to have the security of home ownership and to have the security of housing is not just something that should be spoken about in the abstract; it actually makes a real difference in the lives of people. It enables them to be their very best. It enables them to have the opportunity to contribute back to their community, to consider the possibility of employment and to consider the possibility of having fruitful relationships, life-giving relationships. It enables them the opportunity to have the stability that every human deserves. So I think that whether you are a member of the government, a member of the opposition or a member who sits in this part of the chamber, whoever you are, we should agree that housing is an important human fundamental.

My critique, though, is this: the government has been here for 11, almost 12, years, and the cost of housing in that time has increased. It has not decreased and it has not stabilised; it has increased. The amount of state government taxes, fees and charges that are being applied to housing has increased, yet the members of the government have the cheek to come in here and lecture the opposition about the fact that we need more affordable housing and that we need greater options for housing. They seek to characterise us in a way that is simply untrue, false and most certainly misleading. We will not stand for that. We will stand on our own two feet, and we will argue the case ourselves.

The cost of building a new home is made up of Victorian government taxes, fees and charges totalling 43 per cent of the cost of a new home. Property taxes in Victoria under this government are the highest property taxes of any state in the country. There are 32 property-based taxes and charges that have been introduced or increased since this government was first elected in 2014. This is something which is impacting the lives of Victorians and their ability – or inability, as the case may be – to own their own home. Yet they stand here as if snow would not melt in their mouths after the taxes, the fees and the charges that they have overseen or enabled by their actions as members of the ministry or their passive consent as members of the backbench. They stand here purer than snow. They are responsible. They have had an opportunity. They have been in government. They have been elected to high office. And what have they done? Gone backwards. They have made home ownership further out of reach than it has ever been before for Victorians.

I think Victorians know the truth of this, because the Victorians who are on the receiving end of it do not look at what this government say, they look at what they do. They look at what they have done. By contrast, this side of the house, the Liberals and the Nationals, have thought about this. We have not just thought about it, we have listened. We do not just think about things in an isolated room and then seek to impose it on a community like this government does. No, we have listened. We have sought advice from our communities, we have engaged with our communities, we have engaged with our local councils and we have engaged with those in the sector, and we have put together what we believe to be a credible alternative, an alternative that will deliver and restore the dream of home ownership for Victorians. We will do a number of things, including fast-tracking home building.

Dylan Wight interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: If the member for Tarneit wishes to sleep, he can. That is not a worry. He just suggested that this was a yawn fest. Well, if he is not interested in restoring the dream of home ownership in Victoria, then that is on him, and he will be accountable for that. Where are you? There you are. He will be accountable for that to the people in his electorate who wish to own their own home and who cannot own their own home because of the actions and inactions of this government. I mean, if this is a yawn –

Dylan Wight interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: If a credible plan for restoring the dream of home ownership is something that the member for Tarneit considers a yawn fest, then that is on him. That is on him, and he will be judged for that. He will be judged for that by the response of those people in his electorate that do wish to own their own home and that by his action, or inaction, are not able to.

Our plan is quite simple. We will fast-track home building in existing identified growth areas, clearing Labor's backlog of 27 precinct structure plans to get more homes built sooner. We will rejuvenate Melbourne's CBD as a place to live and to work, expanding the capital city zone to enable more development, housing and economic opportunity. We will focus on livable middle and outer suburbs by restoring the local voice to planning and supporting the local voice to guide the future of neighbourhoods through community-led structure plans.

In relation to building new homes, we will do so in our regional centres, working directly with local councils to support sustainable growth across regional Victoria. If you listen to members of the Labor government, they will have you believe that we are against home ownership. Well, that is not right. In fact that is an untruth. That is misleading. We are very much for home ownership. We want Victorians to own their own piece of this great state, and we will restore that dream for Victorians. That is our hope, that is our aspiration and that is our plan. By contrast – after 11, almost 12, years of this Labor government, who have had an opportunity to do this time and time and time again – they have failed. Victorians know that because they are on the receiving end of it. We want our communities to be respected. We want the voice of our communities to be respected.

We have more faith in local government than this government does. Local government, as the closest level of government to the people, has done a lot more work in engaging with local communities than this mob, this Labor government, has. They have engaged with their local communities. They understand the need to have more housing and to have choice in housing, not just apartments but townhouses and family homes. They have already undertaken that work. In many cases those local government areas have identified more housing opportunities than the government have in the plans that they have introduced. We want to restore the ability for Victorians to be engaged in this process and to have a say in what their suburbs and communities look like in the future.

This government is investing in the Suburban Rail Loop, without any thought about the infrastructure that is needed in terms of roads, hospitals, policing and housing in those communities, at a time when regional communities are crying out for infrastructure, are crying out for more housing and are crying out for more certainty. Unlike this Labor government, which has had an opportunity and has simply failed, a Wilson and O'Brien led government in this state will govern not just for some but for every Victorian.

John LISTER (Werribee) (15:21): I want to pick up on what the member for Sandringham said about listening to some of those voices that they have been consulting with, those voices from those middle suburbs, those long and oft green leafy, protected species that they have been for so long when it comes to planning. One of those colleagues of theirs, Ms Lovell in the other place, had a sentiment around the plan that we have around building more homes in those middle-ring suburbs: that there is no point putting a very low-income, probably welfare-dependent, family in the best street in Brighton, where the children cannot mix with others. What kinds of sentiments are you listening to? I beg your pardon, Acting Speaker. What are they listening to? It is absolutely abhorrent.

I have ripped into the Liberals since they made this announcement around whatever semi-plan they had three weeks ago when they decided that their leader needed some kind of announcement for a *Herald Sun* conference and they put out this thought bubble, this back to the future 'housing plan', as they call it, which essentially does what they did back in 2014. My learned colleague for Tarneit went into great detail on that, and I will also touch on it. Back to the future, in 2014 precinct structure plans were put out en masse with no planning for infrastructure. They talk and complain, 'You've had all

these years to do it.' We have been doing it. We have been removing the level crossings in the areas where these precinct plans were afforded. We had to order trains to run the regional rail link because they forgot to order trains to stop at Tarneit, where they approved all these precinct structure plans. These people do not understand how to plan for growth.

We have a plan for growth. It is our greenfields plan. Our greenfields plan makes it clear that in my communities of Wyndham Vale, Manor Lakes and Werribee there will be no new precinct structure plans until 2029–30. My community has embraced this timeframe. That timeframe means three or so years of infrastructure delivery: finishing the Wyndham ring-road and building that link between Wyndham Vale and Tarneit, which is so important for all those people in the Manor Lakes North precinct structure plan and the Westbrook precinct structure plan – all those ones that were signed off by the previous Liberal Minister for Planning. We are going to finish Ison Road and the extension this year. We are going to have an uplift to our train services. We are going to have more train services on the regional rail link. We are going to have that infrastructure come online in these next two or three years so that when we get to 2029–30, as per our greenfields plan, we will have infrastructure ready to meet the demand.

That is something that those opposite cannot offer. They have had two election cycles in the western suburbs to offer any idea about how they will plan for growth and infrastructure in the western suburbs and offered nothing. There was literally a by-election where they had no policies. The person was told he was not even allowed to have a policy. Because it was a by-election, 'What's the point?' There is a point. It is setting out an alternative to the people of the western suburbs. At the moment the alternative is that they are going to fast-track more houses. What does fast-tracking more houses mean? The City of Wyndham issued building permits in the last financial year for 4295 dwellings. When we look at some of the places where this government has proposed building that density – in places like the City of Stonnington, out in those leafy green suburbs – you could count on your hand the amount of approvals that they have done. It is absurd to think that they can fast-track more development in the outer suburbs when other suburbs are not doing their fair share.

Those opposite are blockers when it comes to good housing options, particularly for people in my generation who want to live in a townhouse in the same suburbs where they grew up, in places like Kew, Brighton and Malvern. A few weeks ago this so-called plan that was announced sounded alarm bells out in my community. If they actually came and spoke to the people in Wyndham, they would know that having that timeframe of 2029–30 for those future precinct structure plans is welcomed. They do not necessarily want more precinct structure plans in our area, because we are still trying to finish the ones that they stuffed up all those years ago.

I will give you one really good example. There is a road called Ison Road. At the northern end at the intersection of Ison Road and Greens Road there is literally 300 metres of road that is missing because the developers cannot agree who will build it. To their credit, Wyndham City Council have been working hard to try and get everyone to the table and get this intersection delivered, because at the moment you get to one end of Ison Road and it stops. You have got a paddock and you have got to go all the way around through poor Rondo Drive – I had a conversation with people in Rondo Drive about this last week – to get back onto Ison Road again. This is because developers have not been able to get it together and deliver what is an important gap in our infrastructure. We cannot run our bus through Ison Road because of this.

This is because of planning decisions made by those opposite when they somehow fast-tracked all these different precinct structure plans in the dying hours of their government. I will read out a couple of examples of these precinct structure plans. Those different ones were Westbrook in July 2014; Ballan Road, July 2014; Tarneit North, November 2014; Truganina, November 2014; and Riverdale, which is where we are looking to build our new bridge, November 2014. How can we have five precinct structure plans approved in six months with no plan for infrastructure? Meanwhile they have the gall to say there are all these taxes on houses. What they do not realise is a lot of that cost is for developer contributions – for our growth area infrastructure contributions, through the prices of those

houses – so that we can build the bus routes and so we can build the community centres. I have been to so many ceremonies to open community centres these last 12 months. I have only been here for a short time, but we have been delivering these things.

But it is made even harder with poor planning decisions. That is because there is this legacy of nimbyism that has crept into the way that our planning system has worked, where it is okay to throw thousands and thousands of people into central Melbourne, it is okay to throw them all the way out in my patch, out into paddocks towards Little River, but it is not okay to build in the leafy green suburbs that prop up the Liberal Party. It is disgraceful. They want to build more estates in communities that are already doing their part of growing housing. We know that we need to have a sustainable way of growing housing in our community. These tram and train activity zones are so important. They give people options. They give younger people options to live in places where they want to be.

What is worse is that they then start dancing and flirting with the idea of working with One Nation. There is a reason why I raise One Nation. We are talking about housing. One of the most frequently commented things in the diatribes of some of these Facebook groups that seem to be taken over by One Nation trolls from Queensland, basically, is equating housing with immigration. The people who have moved to our community of Wyndham – whether they be from India, whether they be from Karen State, whether they be from the Philippines or whether they be from all around the world – have made our community the beautiful place it is. In fact the services that we need are being delivered by people from these backgrounds.

In fact one of the gentlemen who lives in one of the estates that has problems with not getting a bus route in – an estate approved by the member for Bulleen – literally helped switch on the Metro Tunnel. He is helping to build our city, and I cannot tell you the countless people who have moved from overseas to build their lives in Wyndham that are helping to build Wyndham itself. So to go and flirt with One Nation like they have on the other side and then put out this housing – not even a plan – thought bubble is just absurd, and the people of Wyndham understand this. For them to say that they have been listening – they have not gone out to our part of the world and listened, because they would know that the idea of fast-tracking precinct structure plans is absurd.

A member interjected.

John LISTER: They are able to get there a lot more easily. I will take that interjection. They are able to get to the western suburbs a lot more easily because they can choose to use the West Gate Tunnel, which is helping people in the outer suburbs – all that sort of delivery. Last time those precinct structure plans were shocking. The member for Tarneit mentioned those gaps on his side of the river. I know I have many gaps on my side of the river, which were formed out of poor planning. We have our plan. It is the greenfields plan and *Plan for Victoria*. It is about building that middle ring while having sustainable growth in the outer suburbs. Because do not get me wrong, it is a beautiful place to live. You get a beautiful view of the You Yangs. We have got the sunsets in the afternoon. I love my side of the river. But the thing is we need to make sure growth is sustainable, and it will not be sustainable if those opposite get their hands on it again.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:31): I rise to speak on the Labor government's motion where they are boasting about how successful they have been building houses in Victoria. This is actually laughable, because we have got people who cannot afford to buy homes. We have got rental properties that are non-existent; people are desperate for houses and cannot find a rental property. We have got people on the street. This is an absolute debacle, what we are finding in Victoria, because of the poor management of a government for the last 11, nearly 12, years. I have been listening to those on the other side of the house who put this motion forward because they wanted to boast about how successful they have been with their housing strategy. What I keep hearing from them is 'We have a plan.' Well, as I said, for the last 11 years, nearly 12, what have they been doing? We have got people on waitlists for houses; public housing waitlists have blown out enormously. We have homeless people on the street, women fleeing family violence living in their cars, young people desperate for home

ownership feeling like they will never be able to achieve that, and people wanting to rent whilst rental providers are fleeing the state due to all the taxes that this government has introduced. Making a home now is just so not affordable.

So this government – let us go back a bit and see what they were doing. They realised after 10 years that they probably should have set a goal, so they set a goal of 800,000 homes over the next 10 years. They had already been in for 10, but I have said that. In the first year they failed to reach their target – so the very first year, not enough planning to reach their target. They only got 62,000 homes instead of the 80,000. But then they said, 'Oh no, we didn't mean that. We meant over 10 years we'll get 800,000.' So they moved the goalposts. But let me take you back even further. The Victorian government began with its Big Housing Build announcement in 2020, with a grand promise of 12,000 new public or community houses. However, the Auditor-General reported that as of March 2024 the government had already spent $2.9 billion of the planned $5.6 billion only to see – wait for it – a net decrease in the amount of homes available, and that was by 446 homes. It is extraordinary how anyone could set out to spend $2.9 billion and actually end up with less than they started with in the way of public or community houses. In this last decade we have seen a government that has actually only built 36 new public housing homes. You might think I just made a mistake and I meant to say 36,000. Nope, I did not. I meant 36, like one street full of houses. That is it.

Michaela Settle interjected.

Roma BRITNELL: I just talked about social housing prior to that. You might have misheard, but I talked about your big build strategy. If you have missed that, that is because you probably do not know how to do maths and cannot figure out how you ended up in a net decrease position. I will move on from the interjection from the member for Eureka, who is trying to claim that she thinks they have done a great job.

In 2023, with the promise of $25 million for social housing in Warrnambool, I said that with the increase in the number of homeless people that will not have an impact and would not touch the sides. Here we are three years later in 2026, and that prediction was profoundly and sadly very correct. There are so many more people who are homeless and so many people on the waiting list. In fact we are seeing people on the waiting list for six years, and that is a disgrace. Thirty-six homes in the public housing sector is a disgrace.

Not only are the waitlists long but the public houses are very poorly managed. I get complaints all the time that there is rubbish everywhere and that there are people who are abusive. Women in particular are very frightened in some of the situations where the government is providing public housing, and there is nothing we can do. The police have not got any tools they can use to help. But do not take my word for it, listen to the email I got last night from a woman who lives in a public housing complex. She said:

> I can't live here, it's unsafe and the stress levels are affecting my own health.
>
> … the system is broken. Intermingling known drug users, especially with the emergence of chemically damaged drug users with aggressive mental health problems in amongst elderly people with health issues is akin to Elder Abuse.
>
> There needs to be DFFS officer liaisons between Police, Social … workers for some people.
>
> To house them in the right place.
>
> Bring back a modern day form of institutionalised living where people can get help for addictions and mental health issues.
>
> DFFS is being used as a dumping ground for people who need assisted living or institutionalised living.
>
> The Housing Officers aren't Social or Mental health professionals. They're Government real estate agents.
>
> The pressure they are being put under having to deal with the emergence of chemically damaged and dangerous behaviours in their tenants is unfair.
>
> The system is broken

> The housing officers need to have more vetting powers over housing placements.
>
> Yearly Inspections need to be made along the lines of rentals.
>
> They dont do that by the way.

That is a poor woman that I have been dealing with for some time who is terrified in her own home and whose life is drastically affected by living in a situation where it is simply dangerous, and there is nothing she can do. That is just disgraceful.

Here we have, as I said, a government which has changed so many rental laws and continues to boast that it has done good for the rental market, yet what we are seeing is the introduction of land taxes. One of the 60 taxes that this government has introduced, for example, has seen rental providers flee – flee to Queensland, flee to New South Wales. We have seen 24,000 rental properties in a single year lost from the stockpile. In South-West Coast you have got Buckley's and none of being able to rent a house. Less than 1 per cent of properties are vacant and able to be rented. This is what this government's housing policy that they talk about has achieved: zilch, nothing.

The Grattan Institute pointed out to the government that because of all the taxes, because of all the changes that this government has made, of the 600,000 homes planned by this government, only 18 per cent, or around 110,000, are economically feasible to build. This is typical of a government which does not understand economics – 'Oh, surely people will build them, even if it's not affordable to build them. Why wouldn't they?' It is mind-numbingly stupid economics. This government continues to spit out these ideas which are just not ever going to happen, because the economics do not stack up.

Housing affordability is at its lowest level for 30 years, driven by supply shortages and rising costs. Planning processes can take up to a decade. I hear that all the time in South-West Coast, how much bureaucracy and red tape there is. That is in our plan exactly what we will do. We talk about fast-tracking, and the member for Tarneit had no idea what fast-tracking meant. It means getting bureaucracy out of the way. It means making sure that it does not take up to a decade to get permits approved. There were 120,000 unactioned permits in 2025. That is because they cannot get through the process and it is too expensive to build. That is because of the failures of this government. At a system level, approvals are slowing. Dwelling approvals fell by 26.1 per cent in one year. Even small-scale projects are facing delays, with planning applications sitting unresolved for months and years.

This is a government who has not planned properly, but our plan is: we will get rid of the government by telling the community of Victoria that we will make it better, get more families and young Victorians into homes, reduce red tape, reduce the cost of building, give people the hope they need, support regions, work with communities and help them with the fast-tracking process by delivering infrastructure for these precincts, with roads, schools, utilities and community facilities, which is something this government has completely missed the boat on. It has left facilities to become tired and not kept up. So fast-tracking permits and ensuring infrastructure is delivered are in the plan that we released last week and that the Property Council of Australia have endorsed, because many of the things they have suggested on their wish list fit quite in line with what our planned proposal is. We know how to do business. We know how to make sure that the economy thrives and that people have hope again of being able to afford housing. That is why a Liberal–National government will actually lead Victoria back into a housing affordability situation where the rental properties will flow and homelessness will become less of a feature, when we have people able to get into homes and be given the supports they need in the precincts that have the utilities and the infrastructure to support families.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (15:41): I too rise to speak on this important motion. When I think about housing, I think of it as not just about housing; it is about access, and it is about how people of all generations are going to access the services and the jobs that they need in the future. I was having a look at some of the data in the census. The census is an enormously rich source of data, particularly in terms of analysing where people live, where people work and how they travel to work. Obviously the 2021 census was a little bit different, having taken place during COVID, but their place of work was still their place of work at the time. I was having a look at those figures, as I was saying. We know the

City of Melbourne is a huge economic hub, an economic generator, and as at the 2021 census it accounted for about half a million jobs in terms of people's places of work. Also accounting for about half a million jobs was that big swathe of eastern and south-eastern suburbs pretty much correlating with where the Suburban Rail Loop is going to go. So if you think of the suburbs, you think of the municipalities stretching from places like Bayside – the member for Brighton's and the member for Sandringham's electorates – right through those middle suburbs, between 10 and 20 kilometres from the city going through Monash and then ending in Whitehorse in the electorate of Box Hill. That accounts for about another half a million jobs – so the same number of jobs as are in the City of Melbourne we have in those eastern and south-eastern suburbs.

In my 20s, after I left home, I did live in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, and for me it was very convenient to do that because I was working in the city. Many of my friends had moved into similar locations. It was not too far from family but close to friends, and most importantly, close to work. It was convenient; I could walk home from work. But many people are not working in the city. Whether it is professional services jobs, whether it is retail, whether it is education or whether it is health, we have all of those facilities which require workers, and many of those workers want to live not only close to where they grew up but close to where they can access their jobs. They do not want to spend hours commuting to their jobs.

This is also borne out when you look at each particular electorate and where people in the electorate actually work. In my electorate, for example, 20 per cent work in the City of Melbourne, and a greater bulk than that actually work within the City of Whitehorse. Some of those would be working from home; they might have a home-based business. But many of the others would work elsewhere in Box Hill or in the City of Whitehorse. It might be at Deakin University. It might be at Box Hill Institute. It might be at Box Hill hospital. And this is replicated across almost every electorate. If any member were to look at their electorate, they would see how many of their electors are working relatively close to home, either in their home municipality or in the immediately adjacent municipality. It far outstrips the number that are actually working in the inner city. The irony of the policy that the coalition are proposing is they want the status quo to exist in the middle suburbs and are pushing for turbocharging – I think those were the words that they used; the member for Sandringham used those words – the development in the inner suburbs as well as turbocharging the development in the outer suburbs, in the fringe areas of Melbourne. But that is not where the jobs are. We should have a conversation more broadly, particularly about the outer suburbs and making sure that we have good, well-paying jobs in the outer suburbs. But as I said, there are a huge number of jobs in the eastern and south-eastern corridor. If you look at the projections under the Suburban Rail Loop, those jobs are going to multiply over time.

In 2021 Monash had just over 100,000 jobs in the municipality. I think that Monash cluster is predicted to have about 250,000 jobs by 2050–51, driven in large part by access through the Suburban Rail Loop. Where there is access to jobs and where there are jobs, that means that people want to live in close proximity and with easy access to those jobs. People are not going to want to be living in Fitzroy and Collingwood, notwithstanding what zoning the coalition might put in there, if they are trying to get to places like Monash and places like Whitehorse to their jobs. And it is the same for the residents of the outer suburbs. Currently many residents of the outer suburbs are doing a longer commute because there is that mismatch of jobs with where the housing is. But the answer is not just to put all of the housing into those two areas and just return to the status quo in our existing suburbs. Obviously in the electorate of Box Hill we have sustained quite a large amount of housing in recent years, particularly in the centre of Box Hill. It is probably the one centre of Melbourne that you can see from the Melbourne CBD. It does stand out quite a lot. That has brought in a whole different range of cultures and environments over the years, but it has also brought with it better access, and we are going to see that through investment in infrastructure such as the Suburban Rail Loop.

I also want to touch on another point that was raised by the member for Caulfield in his initial response. He made the point that as part of this turbocharging of outer suburban growth the coalition would be

investing in infrastructure first. That is a very noble idea, but the proof is in the pudding in this respect. If we look at the history of coalition investment in the outer suburbs, it has been non-existent. If you look at the history of infrastructure investment across the whole metropolitan area, I would say it is non-existent as well.

I think we had a very sound contribution from the member for Werribee, who outlined the complete lack of interest in infrastructure investment in suburbs such as Werribee over multiple election cycles. If you are not investing in that infrastructure, how can you be turbocharging the housing in those areas? Then when we look at the middle suburbs, they talk about removing the infrastructure contribution. They say 'We need the infrastructure. We're still going to have more homes, but we're not going to get the developers to make the contributions that are needed to make the infrastructure.' It is all a magic pudding. Somehow the housing will be just created. They are going to restrict it with one hand, but somehow they will magically be able to also provide all the infrastructure. It just does not make sense. What this government has always realised is that if we are going to be accommodating the population growth that is forecast and has been predicted, we need to be looking at the city and at the state as a whole about 'Where can the houses go? Where can our population be housed so that they do have access to services and jobs in the future?' I commend the motion to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (15:51): It is pretty amusing that the government has put forward a motion that they are absolutely hopeless at. Something they have absolutely failed at is housing, and this is the motion we are debating, which I am fine with. I am happy to debate this motion because this government has failed in every aspect when it comes to housing. The government's own commitment was 800,000 over 10 years – 'No, we had to change that.' It was 80,000 a year. They failed the first year. Then they changed it to 800,000 over 10 years, and already the government has failed on that target. Well and truly, right out of the gate, they are pretty well about 50,000 short in the first two years, and it is projected that they will fall short by 200,000 homes over the 10-year period. This is the problem with the government. They do not understand housing; they really do not. They do not understand development, and they do not understand housing.

What is humorous about this motion is the Minister for Planning – or 'I will refer to A, B, C anywhere but Carrum' – is one of the biggest blockers when it comes to housing. She blocked development in her own electorate. They are happy to stand up there and call us all blockers, but there are a lot of members over that side that have very short memories. The Minister for Planning is one. She blocked development in Carrum. Just last year she blocked a 400-lot subdivision in Cape Paterson – for 200 votes – because they know Bass is a very, very marginal seat, the most marginal seat in the state. What did the planning minister do? She blocked a 400-lot subdivision for a couple of hundred votes. Do not worry about affordable land for first home buyers – for gen Zs, for millennials – 'No, no, we're going to block that,' just so they could try and win Bass.

The problem the government has got now is that there is no way they are winning Bass. I can tell you right now: you lost the MotoGP; you have lost that seat. You might as well write it off now. Do not worry about it. Bass is going to be over. Bass will be a Liberal seat come the next election.

Martha Haylett interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: Bass will be a Liberal seat come the next election. I am more than happy to debate it all the time. Let us talk about government ministers. The Minister for Local Government, the member for Bentleigh, his whole 2014 campaign was on blocking development. It was his whole campaign. He got elected off the back of that, and now he is 'Oh, I'm pro development.' No, he is not. He will not be happy with this in his electorate. This is where the government is so hypocritical. They get up there and they are the white knights of everything. Even the member for Broadmeadows was anti-development when the member for Broadmeadows was on council. The member for Broadmeadows was anti-development.

A member interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: It is true. I am not going to read the whole transcripts. I do not have to. The member for Broadmeadows knows it. We have had so many over that side be anti-development over the years, and now they are saying, 'Nah, it's all good, we're happy with it.'

But the biggest problem this government is going to have when it comes to housing is that there are some pretty important aspects you need to build houses: you need building surveyors, you need builders and you need tradies. They are three things you need. You cannot build a house without any of those. But the government over the last 12 months has beat the living hell out of the building industry, beat them from pillar to post. We have lost over 21,000 tradies. Only 50 per cent of our apprentices are completing their apprenticeships. We have lost over a thousand builders in 12 months, and you watch that figure keep going up because of the legislation and the regulation that this government has brought into this place. Builders have had enough. The construction industry has had enough. They are leaving in droves because of what the government has put the construction industry through, and this is what you need. I am not going to pre-empt debate, but there is a cladding bill that is going to come into this place, and that is going to shift liability to building surveyors who did nothing wrong, and do you think they are going to sit back and stay in that industry?

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, he is discussing a bill before the bill is before the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe): I think that is relevant to what we are discussing.

Wayne FARNHAM: When you keep shifting liability sideways, people have enough, and they will leave in droves. The building surveying industry at the moment is already down on numbers. We do not have enough building surveyors in this state. You start putting them under pressure, you start losing building surveyors and you will not be able to build. You lose builders – you will not be able to build. You lose tradies – you will not be able to build. It is that simple, and this is where the government is getting the whole construction industry wrong.

I have heard people lean into the growth areas infrastructure contribution funding today. The government passed legislation just the other month to say that it does not have to stay in the local government area anymore – they can take that funding and put it elsewhere. Their own legislation passed through the other month. So there is no guarantee that the GAIC funding will be in the LGAs where the development or the infrastructure is required. I know where they will probably put it; they will put it all into the SRL because they have got to fill up that black hole of money. No-one knows how much that is going to cost; that is still on a TBC. We do not know how much corruption is going to come out of that. How many more billions of dollars will go to the CFMEU through that project? We have no idea.

This is where the government has failed. I cannot believe we are debating a motion that they have failed on for so long. Even when we talk about social housing – in 2014 there were about 10,000 to 11,000 applications for social housing. Now there are 65,000 – that is a failure. You want to talk about a housing motion – there is a motion. Let us put up something on that. That is an outright failure of this government in the delivery of social housing in this state. And when we get a knock on our door in our electorate offices and people say, 'I can't get a rental, I can't get a house', every MP in this chamber knows they cannot help. You can ring the providers, you can ring everyone, and there is no stock. So for the government to just stand up here and spruik that they are going to be the saviours of housing in this state is ridiculous. They are not the saviours. They have savaged it. They have savaged the industry, they have savaged housing across the state, and everybody knows it.

So, yes, I am happy to debate this motion. I would love to keep debating this motion, but I am nearly out of time, and I can see the Speaker hopping into the chair. I will keep going. What I am saying is, for the government to put this motion forward on something that they have failed so dismally on is absolutely nuts. And that is about it from me. Cheers.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Grievance debate

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Housing

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (16:01): I grieve about the extreme cost-of-living pressures facing so many people in my electorate and across Victoria. This is so real and something not to be laughed about at all when it comes to paying the rent or paying the mortgage just to keep a roof over one's head or even the cost of getting into a home or a rental to begin with, with ever-increasing rental costs and the cost of loans, and when it comes to putting food on the table or paying the bills – electricity, gas, water and more – not to mention especially filling up one's tank at the moment or the cost of getting to and from study, work, community, health care and shopping in cars or in public transport if that is even an option for you. It is now meaning more and more people are lining up at food banks; it is meaning so much pressure on support organisations like Mornington Community Support Centre, who are all doing a great job but are bursting at the seams; and it is leading to ever-increasing homelessness affecting men, women and, sadly, children – children who are losing opportunity, children who are losing hope.

This goes to the fundamentals of why many of us are in this place. It is why I am in this place – to give freedom, opportunity and hope to children and any person no matter their background, postcode, family or socioeconomic situation. These are the issues we should be debating in bills before this house today. But instead of bills, for much of today we have been debating a housing motion that really bigs up this Labor government. Instead of talking about bills that would actually resolve these issues, it is a government that is trying to commend its own housing strategy, which is totally failing, whether it comes to new housing builds, housing affordability, public housing or homelessness. Housing and shelter are crucial to human survival and to going from a situation of survival through to thriving, as are food and other essentials.

Let me address homelessness to begin with as one of the crucial issues relating to cost-of-living pressures. Homelessness really is becoming worse and worse and worse. We have an absolute crisis here in Victoria. Across Victoria this is going up and up and up, and my own local area is an example. On the peninsula we have the highest rates of rough sleeping in the state. So many people are passionate and have angst about this issue in my electorate and across Victoria. It is palpable. The other night in Mornington there was an event run by the Council to Homeless Persons which saw over 350 people attend, where I spoke on a panel that included Minister Harriet Shing from the other place, Rosie Batty, Ben Smith from the Mornington Community Support Centre and Gemma Hughes from Fusion Mornington Peninsula.

We heard about lived experience. I spoke about locals that I and my office have been trying to help over this term and in particular over the last few months. I spoke about one gentleman who called my office on Melbourne Cup Day and left multiple messages. He had been made homeless a few weeks before. He was in a tent near some shops. He was moved on from that location, like many are, to live on the foreshore in Mornington. There are many, many people living on the foreshore along the Mornington Peninsula. I sent many emails to the minister, to authorities, to support organisations and more, but there was no sufficient response. There was nothing from this Labor government to actually help this gentleman when it came to public housing, crisis accommodation or more. Actual help came from my community. When I put out a call via social media, community members donated bedding, they donated food, they donated a tent and they donated more for this gentleman. The Mornington Community Support Centre helped him out as well. They currently receive nothing from this state government. He is a gentleman, as one example, that had been homeless since October. He only managed to get accommodation in a rooming house in the last two weeks. That was five months where we were helping this gentleman, actively helping him, and trying to get him into accommodation. That

is an example of someone we have been advocating for, let alone the many people who are not in contact with a local MP, who are not getting help and who are not getting support.

On this panel the other night I also spoke about my own lived experience, which I have rarely talked about in this place or anywhere, as it is not about me, it is about the many people who are in a much worse situation than I have experienced in the past. But I will say it here: I have slept under a bush; I have slept in a car in the freezing cold, not of my own choice; I have couch surfed; I have stayed in a place for several weeks where I had to sneak in late at night and leave early in the morning so I would not be noticed. I have had $2 in the bank. I have applied for 50-plus rentals with another bloke, before we finally got a place. I have dealt with bureaucracy, whether it was Centrelink or whether it was state authorities such as bond management and so much more. All of that was not through lack of trying and lack of applying. Many people find themselves in this situation. It can really happen to anyone, and it can happen to people with a simple change in their situation. It could be loss of their rental, loss of their job, health situations, domestic violence, family breakdown and more. But here in Victoria we have barely enough support to cope.

I will go into some local examples. Ranch and Ranch 2.0 are the only crisis accommodation on the whole of the Mornington Peninsula, and that is provided through philanthropic funding, not through the state. Public housing numbers have barely gone up on the peninsula over the last 10 years. There may be investment across Victoria, but it has not happened on the peninsula. We see many local public housing premises in disrepair. As the member for Narracan mentioned before, we have over 65,000 people on the public housing waitlist. We have over 30,000 on the priority waitlist. On the Mornington Peninsula we have 2600 or so locals on the waitlist versus 1300 or so dwellings, so more than double are on the waitlist locally compared with what is available. For many people the waitlist is long; it can be five years if not more.

We also need support for groups and organisations providing supported accommodation. One example is Fusion Mornington Peninsula, based at the old Balcombe army barracks, which provides housing support for young people and also young parents experiencing homelessness. It is a place that used to host the army apprentice scheme, where my father actually started at the age of 16. He was living at the place which is now used to house young people from the age of 16. I know that without that opportunity for him to join the army and get housing at the same time, mind you, he might have gone astray as well, because he was in a situation where his mother, my grandmother, had died at the age of 23. He was sent to live at multiple different relatives' houses. He had a very rough upbringing. His younger sister was sent to Kew Cottages and died at a young age, basically through neglect.

That opportunity to live at that place, which is now used to this day for 16-year-olds and others experiencing homelessness, can be crucial, but they are getting insufficient funding. They have ideas and proposals as well for young mums and young parents, to provide housing for them as well, but they need investment from this state government. They have asked for that investment, but they do not have it at this time. I used to be on the board of Zoe Support Australia in Mildura, which was originally set up by Anne Webster, who is now the member for Mallee. That is a place that provides supported accommodation to young mothers to help them get back into housing, to help them with parenting, to help them with education and more. These are the sorts of things that we need amongst the mix of housing that is available to support people, particularly young parents and particularly young people.

We have places like the Mornington Community Support Centre, which is getting busier and busier and busier, but they get zero state funding, despite the crisis and despite more and more people coming to their door every single day. We have food banks as well, with lines out the door. An example is Theodora's Cheerful Givers, which has been run for decades off the smell of an oily rag. And I must acknowledge Gina Poulos, who unfortunately, after decades of tireless work, passed away a couple of weeks ago. She is a person that deserves an AO, an Order of Australia, because she is a person who has dedicated her time, her energy and her resources to helping people who are doing it rough, who are on the streets, who have a lack of food and more, and it is this support that people need.

We also have unmet needs across Victoria and on the Mornington Peninsula for those fleeing domestic violence. A proposal that has been put forward for the peninsula is the Moonah House women's community shelter. I must acknowledge Despi O'Connor, a former local councillor. We have not seen eye to eye on many issues over the past few years – we have different political views – but she is a person who has really spearheaded this project, and I must commend her for what she is doing, because these are the projects that we need. I know the member for Narracan, before he was a member of Parliament, put a significant amount of work and effort and his own resources, money and time into providing accommodation and housing for those who are fleeing and who have experienced family violence. These are the sorts of initiatives that we need, but these all need state government support as well.

We also need innovative programs, like I have suggested for a number of years now, such as a matching program linking people who could offer a home or a room with those who need it, making better use of existing spaces, such as homes and rooms, and we can do that with incentives as well. Housing First must become both a policy and a mindset. We must move to get people into housing as soon as possible. Yes, the up-front cost is higher, but the massive prevention of hopelessness, loss of purpose, antisocial behaviour, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, mental ill health, family breakdown and loss of opportunity make that up-front preventative investment worth it. We will have much bigger benefits both socially and economically if we invest in this prevention. Stability, even if it is just for a few months, can make a huge difference to a person's life, whether it comes to hygiene, applying for rentals, getting food, looking after their family, getting a job, going to study, getting a car and so much more.

I use my local area as an example as well. The peninsula as a subset has 1.4 per cent social housing, and this is a figure that has remained largely at this percentage for decades. We are not getting our fair share of investment in public housing and social housing more generally on the Mornington Peninsula, and this was made greatly apparent recently through the benchmarking report done by the Committee for Frankston and Mornington Peninsula, where they compared Greater Geelong versus Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula. On the Mornington Peninsula we are paying much more when it comes to property taxes and payroll taxes, which affect young people and their ability as well to get employment. On payroll tax, for example, we are paying $290 million versus $65 million in Greater Geelong just because of our classification of metropolitan versus regional.

But we are not getting the funds back to our local area. We are getting about $6000 for every single person in Frankston and on the Peninsula, versus about $14,000 for people in Greater Geelong. That means less when it comes to housing, public housing, homelessness support services, public transport and more. It means that housing can often be far from where there are support networks when it does become available. It means that older residents are being pushed out. It means that homelessness services, as I mentioned, are being overwhelmed.

I know this government has talked about building more homes where Victorians live, work and access transport in the motion that they have been discussing today. But what if you cannot access transport? Eighty-two per cent of Peninsula residents have no public transport. Nepean and Mornington electorates are the only couple that I can think of in metropolitan Melbourne that have no passenger rail whatsoever. Does that mean no public housing or insufficient investment in public housing because there is not the access to public transport nearby? I know what it does mean. It means that people are spending more and more time in their cars. That is costing people money, particularly at the moment given the fuel prices. The cost-of-living pressures that people are facing are enormous. This government needs to take urgent action.

Housing

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (16:16): I too rise to grieve for Victorians today, and I grieve for Victorians looking to find a home should those opposite ever, unfortunately, return to government and implement their so-called housing policy. One of my favourite colleagues here in this place earlier on

the housing motion talked very eloquently and sensibly about the impact of the Liberal Party's housing policy and the ramifications that would have in the outer suburbs, including in our favourite shared community of Wyndham. But I want to talk about something else that is incredibly serious and affecting my community as we speak when it comes to the Liberal Party's so-called housing policy. It is something that I see and that we need to address here in this place, because we are seeing it more and more and it must be called out. When it comes to housing, we are seeing people starting to blame migrant communities for the lack of housing and the housing crisis, blaming them for the rising house prices and blaming them for the pressure on housing. But let us be clear: this side of the house and many, many people around us know that is absolutely not true. It is not right, and today I want to talk a bit about that.

Families who come to this state are not the cause of the housing challenge. They are part of building and improving this great state of ours. They are focused on real solutions, but we are seeing the Liberal Party – those opposite, including the opposition leader – continually siding with Pauline Hanson and One Nation. I call them the Liberal–One Nation misinformation coalition. That is exactly what they are, and they must be called out for it. What is happening is that they are trying to shift the conversation to blaming migrant communities for the lack of housing supply. Instead of fixing housing, they are blaming migrants. In my patch in Melbourne's west we are a community that is built by families from all over the world – every corner of the globe. You could probably see someone in Melbourne's outer west and give them a wave, and they are from far-off lands. But they come together to call Wyndham home, to call Melbourne and Victoria home. And yes, many, many of them are Australian citizens and many of them in coming months will become Australian citizens. Their children who are born here are born Australian citizens. They are people who have come here. They are people who have worked hard. They are people who are raising their kids. They are people building a life. They sound kind of like people like us. You see it in our schools and you see it in our shops and our workplaces each and every single day, and that is what makes this place what it is. Melbourne, Victoria, Australia – an incredible place to live. I say to my community, 'I will always stand up for you. I will always stand up for that.' But right now families in my community are telling me that something is not quite right. It does not feel quite right, and I know exactly what it is.

I am going to tell you a story. I always tell stories in the matters of public importance and the grievance debates. I have a great local school, Truganina P–9, and they came up here at the end of last year and they had the most incredible group of leaders there at the school. Due to really unfair, unfortunate circumstances, they had – on their own initiative, not their principal's, but their own – they had gotten together and they had set up an anti-racism taskforce. I am talking about children aged 13, 14, 15 years old. Racism that they see at school and out of school was so bad, they set up an anti-racism taskforce on their own initiative, and the goal is to stamp out racism in their school, to call it out and encourage people to call it out, and let people know what to do when it happens to them, to report it. Because what we know is many of our migrant community, when they are adults, they actually do not know what to do when it happens to them and it happens to them far too often. So it is teaching them at a young age what to do.

I was so proud of these kids and their teachers. I was so proud. But I was actually devastated that young teens have to go ahead and set up an anti-racism taskforce. It is something that should never have to happen. Kids were being picked on and harassed at school just because of their name, because their name was different. Their name was not Sarah or a Connolly. Their name was different. Their background was a bit different, and they wanted to be who they are. If you are a parent like me, that hits you and it hits you hard. Because what I know is that this does not just stay at school and the kids have worked it out. It seeps out into the community. It comes home with you. You are sitting there at dinner and they are having to talk about it at night-time with their parents. We have had kids asking, 'Why does this happen? Why is this happening to me?' And we know that these kids are still sitting there at school thinking about it the next day and the next day and the next day. Because let us face it, as adults, we know that is exactly what hate does. Racism is hate. That is exactly what hate does. That is what fear does, and that is not who we are. That is not who we are here in Victoria. It is not who we

are in Wyndham. These kids, they were standing up for themselves. They were learning to find their voice and call it out. I think it is important that leaders here in this place start to call it out, because if you have got kids being taught from prep – like I said, Truganina P–9 College is from prep to year 9 – you have really young kids learning how to call it out. It is time that leaders in this place start to call it out for what it is.

In my patch of Melbourne's west, it is our Vietnamese family that works hard for their kids. That is who we are. It is our Indian small business owner backing themselves in. That is who we are. It is the Filipino workers who have helped build the community that makes it so wonderful. That is who we are. They are this community. They are welcome here. But all of this kind of racism stuff, it does not just come out of nowhere. Let us be honest, it is people like Pauline Hanson – and we have had openly people in the federal Liberal Party come out and blame migrant communities. They blame them for everything, constantly. But the real problem is this: when the Liberals keep standing alongside Pauline Hanson and One Nation, and they do not come here to this place – this is a very special place, and our migrant communities need to hear its leaders call it out for what it is. It is racism in its most blatant form. Time and time again, I have come to this place and I always feel sad having to do it, calling out those opposite for doing secret deals and standing alongside –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, 'The grievance debate is not an occasion to personally attack members of the opposition.' I refer to Speaker Maddigan's ruling at page 83 of the *Rulings from the Chair*.

The SPEAKER: The member has not referred to any particular member.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Let me say that again, and let me say it very clearly, because I think my community deserves to hear this. Not once has the Leader of the Opposition stood here in this place and called out racist behaviour and racism in our community and called it for what it is.

Bridget Vallence: Speaker, on a point of order, again I refer to *Rulings from the Chair*, Speaker Maddigan, page 83. 'The grievance debate is not an occasion to personally attack members of the opposition' with baseless accusations, which the member on her feet has been doing to the Leader of the Opposition and to members on this side generally. I would ask you to ask her to desist from doing so. They are baseless accusations.

The SPEAKER: I remind members that *Rulings from the Chair* is proportionate to rulings from the Chair from other Speakers. The member was not necessarily making an accusation; she was making a point. But I do remind members about reflections on other members in the chamber.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Sadly we saw it when Peter Dutton – remember him – singled out Lebanese Muslims; we saw it when Jacinta Price singled out Indian Australians; and we saw it only weeks ago when Renee Heath from the other place stood in this Parliament talking about who is a good Muslim and who is a bad Muslim. Can you believe that? It is that kind of language from those opposite that is divisive and divides people. It feeds exactly the same kind of politics that One Nation thrives upon. One Nation spreads fear and it spreads division, and those opposite continue to stand behind them by not calling it out for what it is. They might use softer words, but they are chasing the same votes.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I really think that the member on her feet has not considered the advice that you provided before. She is making reflections yet again on members of the opposition which are seeking to attack members of the opposition and which are baseless.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold that point of order, and I would ask you not to resume on the same point of order. I have ruled on it.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Let me make this crystal clear to the multicultural communities here in Victoria: they might use softer words, but they are still chasing the same votes, they will rely on the same preferences and when you chase the same votes as One Nation you give life to the same politics: the politics of fear, the politics of division, the politics of blaming communities. One Nation shouts

it – it screams it – and it has for far too long. The Liberal Party softens it, but the direction, let me make this clear, is still the same: division and fear. I want to say this to my fabulous and diverse community in Melbourne's mighty west: you should never feel like you have to hide who you are. Your children should feel safe, and they should feel proud of who they are. I want you to hear this clearly: you belong here. That is something that this side of the chamber has only ever talked about. You belong here. This is your home, and we will not let the Leader of the Opposition and the Liberal–One Nation misinformation divide our community. We will not. We will fight back. Labor will stand with you. We will stand up against hate, and we will stand against haters. We will stand up for your safety. We will stand up for your children. We will stand up for your grandchildren. This is exactly why I am speaking on this grievance debate in relation to the housing policy and what those opposite fail to address: the blatant racism in blaming migrants here in this country for Australia's housing crisis. They might blame Labor but they also blame migrants, and it needs to be called out.

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Speaker, I am starting to find this offensive, as my partner is actually from the Philippines. I would ask her to refrain from –

The SPEAKER: It is not a point of order. It is a point of debate.

Sarah CONNOLLY: What I will say is at any time those opposite can call out racism for what it is. Call it out. Join us. Stand with multicultural communities here in Victoria. Stand up for Melbourne's west. You talk a lot about Melbourne's west. Open your eyes. It is multicultural. Stand up. The answer to housing is not blaming migrants. It is about building more homes. It is about planning properly. It is having a plan; it is executing that plan. Do you know what else it is? It is also backing families, supporting families, supporting the families of the kids – I will come back to them again because they are just so wonderful, and I cannot wait to share this video with them – and students at Truganina P–9 College that are part of that anti-racism taskforce. That taskforce does not dissolve as those kids go on to their senior college. It will be passed down to future leaders for many, many years until we finally stamp out racism in this state, and that is exactly what the Labor government is doing.

I would welcome those opposite at any stage today calling it out for what it is and calling it out when they see it, because it seems to be happening a lot. It is intertwined with their policies and their values, who they are and what sits in their DNA. Labor will always stand up for our multicultural communities here in Victoria. We will always have their backs. We will always stand up for their families and to ensure that Victoria is a safe place for them to live and raise their children for many, many generations to come.

Government performance

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (16:31): Today I rise to grieve for the state of Victoria and the slippery slope that we are on, not for what we are capable of, because in all honesty I love Victoria – this is a state of extraordinary people, resilient communities and immense potential – but for what it is and has become under a government that increasingly treats transparency not as a duty of public service but as a mere inconvenience. What we are witnessing is not just poor governance now. This is governance conducted behind a curtain – some might say an iron curtain – and every time Victorians try to pull it back and ask questions, we are met with statements like 'Let me be clear.'

I want to address a few issues in this grievance debate today, and I will start where public concern is most acute, and that is the ongoing and deeply, deeply troubling revelations surrounding the CFMEU and the Big Build. Victorians have watched with growing alarm and frustration as allegations of corruption, coercion and criminal infiltration have emerged on major infrastructure sites – projects that are funded by the taxpayer, projects that have been sold to the public as nation-building that now appear to have been not only compromised but completely rorted. And the response of this government is reluctance, delay, evasion and that catchcry 'I want to be clear. Let me be clear.'

We have seen a government dragged kicking and screaming while we are trying to hold them to account, and governments should be able to be held to account and should step up to scrutiny. We

have seen questions met with not just deflection but complete and utter evasion, investigations resisted and handballs all around the place. The government appears more concerned with managing the political damage than actually confronting the truth, and it is disgusting. Transparency is not optional when billions of dollars of taxpayer money is at stake. It is not optional when there are allegations of state-sponsored strippers, coercion, abuse and control, and it is certainly not optional when public confidence is on the line, although that has nearly completely eroded now.

This is not an isolated incident either. This is a pattern of behaviour from this government. Let us consider the Suburban Rail Loop, a project of staggering scale and cost – a train line from nowhere to somewhere no-one wants to go. And at what cost? We do not really know, because despite its magnitude we have seen business cases withheld, costings drip-fed – no-one really knows; they have not been updated in several years – and scrutiny resisted at every single turn. Victorians are effectively being asked to sign a blank cheque, look the other way and trust that everything is going to be fine for a project whose true cost we still actually do not know. It is shrouded in layers of secrecy, and again, this is a pattern of behaviour.

Let us go now to the Commonwealth Games. We should be happily watching the Commonwealth Games, with screens screening the regional Commonwealth Games all around this precinct right now. It was announced with great fanfare and abandoned with even greater haste. There was nearly smoke on the heels of the Premier at the time to abandon that – billions of dollars in costs sunk into planning, contracts, dinners, compensation, trying to get it and then trying to get out of it. And still Victorians are left without clarity, without clear answers and without transparency. It is so important. Most of the time if you actually say something to people of substance with some honesty, people will accept that. It is the lack of transparency that has left Victorians incredibly frustrated.

We will talk about the ballooning state debt, but while all this is going on in cabinet rooms, on Big Build sites and in press conferences, out in the regions we are dealing with something far more immediate, despite the beliefs of those on the other side. This is immediate, it is happening now, it is practical, it is alarming and it will affect every single Victorian in this state. In Sunraysia, the Mallee and the Wimmera, across rural Victoria and into South Australia, there is a very real concern, and we have seen – again, despite claims of the other side that we are being alarmist – that we are having severe fuel shortages. That is just a fact. That is not alarmist. On Saturday Robinvale not only ran out of unleaded but ran out of diesel in all of the service stations. Facts: yesterday when the Premier was questioned here in question time and then accused this side of the house of making alarmist claims, right then I was notified that Robinvale had once again run out of diesel, despite an answer to the supplementary question from the Leader of the Nationals that Robinvale had fuel. Sorry, incorrect – they did not have unleaded fuel. The Happy Valley Store had 300 litres left, which will fill 2½ cars. They had 1200 litres of diesel; for some context, 1200 litres of diesel will fill one truck and about six cars. That is it.

This is not a hypothetical concern. It is not alarmist. This is real. And like I said, this will affect every single Victorian, including those who will be unable to get medicines and medications – because that is what it is coming to. I am hearing from pharmacists now who are concerned about their deliveries of medications that save lives. Do I need to mention food security? I would certainly hope not. But maybe those members on the government side would like a little refresher on where food does actually come from. Farmers cannot afford disruptions like this during harvest anyway. I was talking with another grower today, Cos Cirillo is his name, who has 600 or 700 acres, runs his own trucks and has farms at Paringi and Mildura and all over. He knows a thing or two; he has done it his whole life and now does it with his sons. He is just at breaking point along with a lot of other families – and I spoke earlier today about the need for Lifeline fundraising and how vital it is, because already this government has blood on its hands because it is ignoring what is happening out in the regions, not only in our ag sector but in the towns and the regional cities that are built on the backbone of our agriculture sector. Suicides are already happening. And when you look at the broader picture here – and I know this will make zero sense to anyone on that side of the house, but hear me out – when you

have water at $550 a megalitre that you have had to lease to put on vines through a heatwave, that is already putting you under stress. Then when you have rain, an entire year's rainfall over a weekend like we did two weeks ago, you cannot get in to spray. And you think you are through it because you can get pesticides to help fight the grey mould and the diseases that come after that on table grapes and every other crop they are trying to get off, and trying to get them is now expensive. And what happens? The price skyrockets.

Then you have to be able to get in there. You have got disease, you have got the price of water and you have got the audits. In my region we are growing a huge amount of export-quality food. The amount of audits and the regulatory burden that has been placed on growers and farmers by this government is strangling them. It is not only the time that it takes to complete these audits when it would be just as simple to have someone like GLOBALG.A.P. or Freshcare take care of it all – we cannot do that – but the cost physically to do an audit is ridiculous. Then you have a government who refuses to admit that there is a problem here. All the growers are looking for is a bit of accountability and a bit of transparency, and if the government is not aware that there is a crisis here, that in and of itself is a huge problem. All we are asking for is a bit of transparency, and you know what we need you to do then: get out of the way so we can get back to business. It is as simple as that.

You can understand why growers in my region and right around regional Victoria need fuel – and their workers, mind you, because the workers cannot get to work if there is no fuel to get them to work. They might have to travel 40, 50, 60 k's to get to work and then home again. That is why they are buying it, and they are getting no clarity from the government at all. They are getting assurances that everything is okay. Guess what, the food is not harvested with assurances. There is no detailed plan. There is no clarity whatsoever. That is all we are asking for, just some clear communication and some contingencies. That logistics chain is so fragile, if one part of it breaks, we are all in a huge amount of trouble. You cannot run a regional economy on reassurances and you cannot harvest food with a press release, and to think you can is again holding regional Victorians and all Victorians in contempt. It is absolutely disgusting. Victorians are sick of it, and we deserve better.

I know those on the other side think that this is just a joke, and they sigh and think that I am being alarmist. The Premier said to me yesterday that we had alarmist claims. Honestly, the contempt that we are treated with is disgusting, and the public can see it. They can see it now, thank goodness, and they are all telling us that waiting until November is too long. It will be too late. There will be too many more suicides from those on the land because they cannot take the pressure. They cannot take it. We are resilient people. There is nothing tougher than a Mallee farmer. But I tell you what, you keep piling it on, using us as cash cows. I did not even talk about the emergency services levy. There is another one. These things just keep popping up. When we have CFA volunteers who are more often than not food producers, fibre producers, being taxed for a free service that they provide and where they are paying for their own diesel usually to get to the jobs and then they get taxed for the very pleasure of doing so, is it any wonder that they are going to the media and saying this is an absolute kick in the guts?

They have had enough, and they know that traditional channels of trying to communicate with this government fall on deaf ears if they even get there. They know that the media is their only hope, and then they have to hope that the media is gentle with them. It is tough out there, and everyone in the city is about to find out exactly how tough, because it will not take long before everything stops and the logistics chain is broken. We need transparency and we need to keep this state moving. I am sorry, it does not run on renewable energy and electric vehicles. It runs on the back of crumbling roads and diesel-powered trucks. It is as simple as that.

Today I grieve for a state where too often the truth arrives late if it arrives at all and more often than not it arrives in the *Herald Sun* or the *Age* after an investigation – that is embarrassing, quite frankly – and only after sustained pressure. I grieve for a government who has normalised secrecy and called it strategy. I grieve for regional communities, who are continually left in the dark, used as cash cows and treated with utter contempt on issues that affect not only their livelihoods and their industry but their

families, their children, their environment and their land, which we are now happy to compulsorily acquire. I grieve for the state of Victoria under this Labor government. This Labor government has sent regional Victoria down a slippery slope, and I would certainly hope that everyone remembers this come November. You might be hungry and cold by then, but that is what the socialists want, isn't it? They want us all to be hungry, cold and miserable because that is the socialist way. Thriving communities are happy communities, and that is what the Nationals want regional Victoria to be.

Housing

Katie HALL (Footscray) (16:46): Wow. We have heard some good and some bad reflections in today's grievance debate. I too join the grievance debate and I will get to what I am grieving about in a minute, but I would like to acknowledge the member for Mornington, who made a thoughtful contribution about public housing and the importance of homelessness services. That is actually the first time I have heard a member of the Liberal Party speak at that length with that sort of compassion for vulnerable people. In contrast, the member for Mildura before was conflating this government's position with mental health challenges in the regions and a war that we have nothing to do with in the Middle East and the impact on petrol and diesel prices.

Jade Benham interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mildura will come to order.

Jade Benham interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mildura can leave the chamber.

Member for Mildura withdrew from chamber.

Katie HALL: Saying that this government does not care is appalling. I was really disappointed to hear that contribution because we have a great number of regional members on this side of the chamber who care deeply about the impact of this global situation on farmers and farming communities. It went from criticism of the suburbs, saying, 'Why would anyone want to live in Cheltenham?' to talking about really serious issues of mental health and this war in Iran that was most certainly not started from Victoria. To say that we are not concerned is appalling, and I think it was a pretty shameful contribution.

My grievance contribution today is adjacent to those of the member for Mornington and the member for Laverton around housing. I am very proud of our record on housing. I am proud that as a government we are doing something really brave in reforming the way we build housing in Melbourne and across Victoria. I am also proud of the work we are doing in social and public housing. To pick up the point of the member for Mornington, there is a lot to do in social housing, but the Victorian people should be assured that on this side of the chamber we care deeply about vulnerable people and we care deeply about housing affordability in what is now a really tough time for people in terms of their cost-of-living situations at home and the budget decisions that every family is having to make. The opposition's position has been consistent for some time – for decades – and that is that young people will continue to be locked out of the housing market in Victoria because there is an unwillingness to build in the middle ring of suburbs. Every great city in the world has medium-density housing in the middle ring and the inner suburbs and is not scared of it. So today I am really proud that we have continued our work on the activity centres program. It is hard, it is detailed and complex policy work, but that is what this housing crisis requires.

I know that young people in my electorate of Footscray are struggling to get into the housing market. There is not enough supply. I am pleased that we are doing the work in the activity centres, in places like my community, to make sure that people that have grown up in Footscray, whose families live in Footscray, can continue to live there and are not forced out beyond the urban growth boundary – which is where the opposition would like us to be building housing – to places where there is no infrastructure. We do not ever want to be in a situation where we are continually retrofitting

infrastructure in places that have none. We have a richness of infrastructure in Melbourne, but for too long it has been locked up, and young people have been locked out. So today we have released another 25 of our tram and train activity centre proposals to reform the way we deliver housing in this state. I commend the Minister for Planning on her detailed work, because people deserve to have the opportunity to live where they grew up, near their friends, near their families and close to where they work.

I heard a caller on the ABC this week talk about a teacher who was travelling from Melton to Blackburn to get to work, because the teacher could not afford to live on the other side of town. I thought, one of the things we keep talking about is housing supply and the importance of delivering more homes so that people have the opportunity to either downsize, if perhaps they have been in a bigger house and the kids have moved out, or to move into a house for a growing family. It is easy to say all of these things, but it is actually a lot harder to deliver them. Luckily for the people of Victoria the Allan Labor government has a vision, and we are doing exactly that: we are getting on with the job of delivering more housing.

The Premier has spoken a lot about millennials. I know for a lot of my friends, millennials, it is a real challenge to get out there and to be able to buy your own home. Many people also feel like they are trapped in a cycle of renting, and we have done so much. The Minister for Consumer Affairs is leading a reform agenda, where we have delivered more than 100 reforms to make renting fairer. I know in my community in the suburb of Footscray alone we have more than double the state average of renters. We have a young community that wants to live in Melbourne's inner west, but we need to deliver the opportunities for those young people to get on and buy a new home. That is why we have undertaken extensive legislative reform across the consumer affairs, planning, transport and building portfolios to provide a solid foundation for the future of Victoria. We have legislated changes to the Victorian Building Authority, which is now the Building and Plumbing Commission, to provide greater consumer protections to weed out dodgy builders. We have streamlined the approval process to essentially prevent nimbyism from blocking housing developments where they need to be. But we know that communities deserve high-quality builds as well. People deserve a high-quality public realm and high-quality urban design, and we are ensuring that with our design standards.

We have introduced the tram and train zone activity centres, which the opposition have said, if they ever have the enormous privilege of being in government, they will scrap. The intent of that policy reform is to ensure that people can live close to transport and services. We have legislated more than 100 rental reforms, making Victoria the most renter-friendly state in the nation. We have begun work on Australia's largest housing project – the one the member for Mildura referred to when she was saying, 'Why would anyone want to live there?' It is the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL), and it is going to transform the way Victorians live and move around Melbourne. As someone who travelled from Footscray to get to Monash University when I was studying, it was a pretty hard slog in my 1982 Mitsubishi Sigma. It was not a great car, but my poor old man rebuilt that engine a couple of times. That public transport connection to our largest university is absolutely crucial, not just for the people that live on that side of town but for people across Melbourne.

There is so much more that we are doing. What this all means, as the member for Polwarth graciously mentioned in October last year, is that Victoria is building more homes than any other state. I am not sure that he had all of the numbers at hand, but I can fill the chamber in on where we are at. In the 12 months to January 2026 there were 52,000 residential building approvals in Victoria, which is 10,000 more than Queensland and 2200 more than New South Wales. In the 12 months to September 2025 there were 55,000 residential building commencements and 54,000 completions. Not only are we building more homes, but the Allan Labor government's reforms will also mean that we are building homes faster and to a higher standard. Victoria currently rates second in the nation for the shortest average time from approval to completion. With completion time sitting at around 9.8 months, this is in contrast to New South Wales, where the average completion time is just over 12 months. Completion times have continued on a downward trend over the last few years. Since 2023 they have

reduced by about a month for detached houses, by about three months for townhouses and by about 1½ months for apartments.

The only transport policy those opposite have is to cancel the SRL. I think they referred to the Metro Tunnel project as a sham. Scrapping the SRL would mean that thousands of homes in developed communities close to schools, jobs, services and universities, as I mentioned, would go. 'Aspiration' used to be in the Liberal Party's motto, but unless you aspire to live hours from your job, your mates and your family, you are on your own when it comes to home ownership under the Liberal Party's so-called plan. Fundamentally, our housing strategy is about giving Victorians choice. Should someone growing up in Footscray decide they want to live locally, or maybe they want to live over in Malvern or Brighton, that is up to them. The Allan Labor government will make sure they have the opportunity to do so. Little has changed, actually, since the Kennett era, and even today, after years of political irrelevancy and lack of vision, the Liberals just cannot bring themselves to put the interests of young Victorians ahead of this stale policy position that they cannot possibly allow anyone to live in the middle ring of suburbs – that everything must stay as it was in the 1950s.

We have delivered a smart plan for the best city in the world to grow in a fair way, and fairness is at the core of this. We have delivered a plan to tackle the intergenerational disadvantage that has emerged in the housing market, which is a national problem. It is a national problem that we all have to come to grips with. If we continue going the way we are going, young people will always be locked out. That is not the kind of state or country I want to live in. I want to know that young people will have every opportunity to buy a home if they should wish to, and if they want to rent, that they are going to have a fair environment to do so as well. That is what I am so proud of with this government: we have done the hard policy work. The work over on the other side has been absolutely lazy. It is exactly the same as it was 20 years ago, 50 years ago – let us just keep pushing people further out, where they have no infrastructure, and let us hope for the best. That is not the Labor Party's way.

Government performance

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (17:01): I grieve for Victorians because they just had to listen to 15 minutes of rubbish from the member for Footscray, and absolute rubbish it was. I am going to go straight into it. I am going to rebut the member for Footscray straight off the bat. She said we have lost sight of aspiration when it comes to home ownership.

Members interjecting.

Wayne FARNHAM: They are the member for Footscray's words, not mine. Isn't it interesting that the former Premier of this state said people would rather rent than buy a home? The government's whole policy is 'rent to build'. Rent: that is their policy. You see it on everything. So for the member for Footscray to jump up and say the Liberal Party has lost sight of aspiration for millennials and gen Zs is the biggest load of rubbish I have ever heard. This is why we grieve for Victoria, because those on that side of the chamber just keep regurgitating the same rubbish over and over again when the facts are completely different. Those on that side of the chamber have talked themselves into believing that this state is in a good condition. They do. They have talked themselves into it. If this state is in such a good position and in a good condition, why are so many people struggling? Riddle me that, Batman: why are so many people struggling? Why is the cost of living out of control if this government is doing such a sterling job of running this state? Why are our housing targets in the toilet? Why is it that our millennials and gen Zs cannot afford to get into a home? Because 43 per cent of the cost of our homes is made up of taxes and levies that this government introduced – 32 of them since 2014.

The member for Mornington rightly pointed out earlier our homelessness crisis, and he is 100 per cent correct. When we had back in 2014, 10,000 or 11,000 applicants and today we have over 65,000 applicants, how can that side get up and say, 'We're doing such a great job with housing?' They have failed. The government has failed to deliver housing to this state. They did not have an idea of what to do till 2020. It took them six years to figure out a housing policy – six years. Call that paralysis by analysis. They absolutely failed housing at every turn. They are failing the construction

industry and they will not have enough builders to deliver what they want. Targets are already down – 46,000 homes short in the first two years. Oh, yes, they are doing a sterling job; they are doing a ripping job. That is why I grieve for Victoria.

I grieve for Victoria because the cost of living is out of control. Baw Baw Food Relief is in my electorate. You go talk to them about the people coming through their door – people that have never, ever been there before – because they cannot afford to live anymore. And they are humiliated. They sit in a car deciding whether to go in or not. Yes, this government is doing a great job. That is why there are so many people attending food banks now, because everything this government does is costing Victorians more, and they cannot afford to live. Olivia's Place is a not-for-profit charity in my electorate that supplies clothes to new families. They supply baby formula and nappies and all those types of things. It is a fantastic organisation. The area they cover now – it was just Warragul and Drouin, but they now cover from Morwell all the way down to Berwick. People are driving to Olivia's Place to get help with the basic essentials associated with having a new baby. If this government is doing such a good job, why are so many people going there? Why are so many people going to Olivia's Place because they cannot afford the basic essentials for a child? Yes, they are doing a great job.

Everything has gone up. Gas is up, water is up and power is up. Council rates are up, interest rates are up. Fuel is through the roof, and the basic, basic thing that people need – food – is up. This government is doing such a good job that everything is out of control, but they sit there and they go, 'Oh no, there's nothing to see here. We're doing a great job. We're doing a really good job.' The fact is that we are paying $1 million per hour in interest. This government are great fiscal managers. I have said it before: they do not know how to make money; they just know how to spend money. And when they have spent it all, they come after you again and again and again.

This government is criminal the way they treat Victorians. We are heading to $190 billion in debt, and remember that interest bill is if we keep the current credit rating. I asked in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee whether they have done any modelling on if we lose the credit rating. There has been no modelling. What will that interest be per hour then? $24 million a day in interest is the absolute epitome of mismanagement. You cannot be that incompetent and still be in government – it absolutely astounds me – and that is why most Victorians cannot wait till 28 November. They cannot wait to get rid of this absolutely incompetent government, a government that has not been honest with Victorians. It has not been, like the member for Mildura stated earlier, transparent with Victorians. That is what Victorians deserve but they do not get under this government. There is no transparency at all.

Then the worst kept secret of all: $15 billion of corruption payments through the CFMEU to criminal organisations. I said it last week: the government keeps denying this, saying it is a made-up figure and it is subjective. Then have the investigation into it. Be transparent. Give IBAC more powers. It is a pretty simple solution if you believe it did not happen. But what do we get out of the government? The same old line. They are not answering any questions on this in question time. It is just the regurgitated line time and time again. They will not answer the questions. They will not have an investigation into it. They will not be transparent with Victorians to let them know where their money went – their $15 billion. And if it is not $15 billion, how much is it? If it is only $1.5 billion, that is just as bad, but they do not want anyone to know. The Premier has quite often stated that she referred it on. Great. I will tell you what, why don't you do this: grab the documents from when the Premier was told and then produce the documents from when you referred it. Let us find out the timeline. Would it have been the next day? I would have. Or is it a year later? We are never going to know.

I grieve for regional Victoria because we are the ones who get screwed over all the time, shafted all the time. That is as good as I can put it, because it is the truth. When we have 25 per cent of our population living in regional Victoria and we only get 12 per cent of infrastructure funding, at what point in time is that fair? At what point in time is that reasonable? Our roads are crumbling. In my electorate in Narracan I have had not one new government school for over 50 years, yet I hear the Minister for Education stand up there and spout 'built a school here, built a school there, built a school there' – in Labor seats. The ultimate in pork-barrelling is this government, but not one new school in

Narracan – not one. How is that fair? How is 12 per cent of the infrastructure spending in regional Victoria fair?

That is not even getting to the West Gippsland Hospital. A commitment made by this government in 2022 was 'We will start this hospital in 2023' – their words, not mine. 'We will start this hospital in 2023' – and even as I stand here today, I have still not had an update from the Minister for Health on where the hospital is at. The Minister for Health tried to refer me off to the Minister for Health Infrastructure. It is not her responsibility if the Minister for Health has not done her job. So do not sit there and defer me off – answer the question. The community deserves to know. They are happy to see $15 billion float out the door, and I cannot get one answer to a very simple question to update my community on where the hospital is at.

Of course I grieve for this state. I grieve for this state because of the incompetence of this government. $13 million on machete bins, for goodness sake, that we are going to put outside a police station where a criminal is going to walk up and go, 'Oh, sorry. I hit someone with this. You can take it now.' How stupid – absolutely stupid. There was another way to do it, but they did not think of that. And it has not helped our machete problem in this state. Crime is rampant. It is out of control. In my electorate it has gone up by 12 per cent. Coming back to the infrastructure spending, I have got one 24-hour police station for 4500 square kilometres in my electorate – one 24/7 station. Drouin's police station was built in 1974, when they had a population of 4000 people. The two towns of Warragul and Drouin now have a combined population of 43,000. No investment into Drouin for a 24-hour police station – none – but 'Oh, no, we're doing a great job'.

Of course I grieve for Victoria. I grieve for Victoria because this government is so incompetent. Let us look at what they did to the timber industry. They decimated the timber industry. It was meant to run through to 2030, and the government pulled the rug right out from underneath them. They suffered, and they went through so much rubbish with this government for the best part of a decade. Then when the government said, 'Okay, we'll shut you down in 2030,' they lied about that. They pulled the rug out from them in 2023. Timber workers had millions and millions invested in machinery, but that did not matter to the government. They did not care. They were not working, were not getting paid. It took them ages to get their payouts.

Then we go to the Commonwealth Games. Oh, my goodness, this is how good this government is: $600 million to hold the games in another country – $589 million, $600 million, to have the games in another country. They still have not delivered the infrastructure they promised when they cancelled the games. But not only that, they lied about that. They basically said, 'The Comm Games are begging us. They are begging Melbourne to have it.' They did not beg Melbourne. Melbourne took them out. They bought them dinners. They courted them to have the Commonwealth Games. They did not beg them. What a load of rubbish.

Then the reason was because it was going to cost $7 billion, but there has not been one document to substantiate that figure. It was an inflated figure. It was even admitted that they doubled the figures so it looked like it was justifiable to cancel the games at $7 billion. That was a lie. The government lied. They misled. I can use heaps of ways to describe it, but at the end of the day what the government did was blatant. Fancy doubling the figures to justify cancelling the games. As the member for Bulleen rightly pointed out the other day, thank goodness British Airways are flying directly to London now; it will be quicker for us to get to the Glasgow games. How utterly incompetent this government is. That is why we grieve for Victoria, because we have to put up with this incompetence, but not for very much longer, because I feel the mood in Victoria is changing very rapidly. I feel Victorians have had enough. They have had enough of the corruption, they have had enough of the secrecy and they have had enough of the misleading of the Victorian public. The reason I really grieve for this state is because Labor have stuffed it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Northcote, I remind members again about parliamentary language.

Housing

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (17:16): There is no conversation right now that is more important than the one that we are collectively having on housing. It is one of the defining challenges facing Victoria as our population grows, and it goes to the heart of how we support people right now and how we plan for the future. Victoria is set to exceed 10 million people by 2050, and Melbourne is expected to remain Australia's fastest growing city. Communities feel this inevitable growth in their everyday lives, with housing affordability and availability squeezing people to make really difficult decisions. So people in my community and across Victoria are rightly having deep discussions about how we build more homes, services and infrastructure over these next decades. We are talking about what it means to have a stable home in the suburb you love and how it gives you a base to hold down a job, get a good education and provide for your family. We are talking about what makes our suburbs work and, crucially, how to grow them in a way that supports affordability, sustainability and livability.

People are really alive to the fact that the status quo is not an option here. We know that meeting housing need means increasing the supply of housing. We know that we have to give people more options, whether that is social housing, affordable housing, private rental housing or stronger pathways into home ownership. People want housing choice in the suburbs that they know and love – close to public transport, jobs and services, close to their friends and family and connected in with great health care and great schools. That happens when we increase supply, and that is exactly what our Labor government is doing. Victoria is building and approving thousands more homes than any other state. We continue to be number one in home approvals, number one in home starts and number one in home completions, and we are making the planning system work so it is easier and more affordable for young people to find their first home. We are changing our rental system so renters have more certainty and security. Whether you want to buy or rent a home or a house or an apartment in Melbourne, the data shows it will be more affordable than in Sydney or Brisbane.

This is a grievance debate, so what I rise to grieve for are the millions of Victorians who would be left bereft of housing options under the Liberal Party's catastrophic housing plan. This so-called plan concentrates density into the CBD and the outer urban fringe. It cuts 300,000 homes and locks people out of established suburbs. Let us be really clear about what that means. It means millions of Victorians lose their dream of owning a home. It means family and friends are separated and people on lower incomes are pushed into greater disadvantage. It means longer commutes, more dependence on cars, less access to schools and health care and encroachment into crucial agricultural land as people are pushed further and further out with urban sprawl.

The social and environmental impacts are appalling, yet this is the Liberal Party's answer to the housing crisis. But do not worry, their prized suburbs of Brighton, Hawthorn, Kew and Sandringham will not feel the impact because part of their plan is to revoke our reforms to enable more homes in places that are well established with services. Some of those suburbs are losing people under 65 at a rapid rate. They are becoming childless suburbs, and still that is not enough incentive for the Liberal Party to support a basic townhouse code or more apartments near train stations. The Liberal Party's plan explicitly avoids the suburbs they represent, effectively reserving those suburbs for existing landholders while locking out young people and millennials. That is not a housing policy, that is political strategy masquerading as planning reform. It is reckless because when we fail to plan for growth we do not stop growth, we simply push people further away from opportunity.

What is most striking about the Liberal housing plan is not just what it includes but whom it leaves out. Renters are nowhere to be found in their plan. They are completely ignored. It is typical of their playbook really. Last year we ended no-fault evictions so renters could no longer simply be told to leave their home without a genuine reason. That reform has given people stability. It has allowed people to stay close to their kids' schools, to keep connected to their jobs and to embed themselves in their communities. Yet when that reform came before this Parliament, those opposite opposed it. They tried to amend the legislation to strip it out. One-third of Victorians rent, yet for the Liberal Party it is

like they do not exist. They are happy to protest apartments being built in their suburbs, but when it comes to protecting renters from being pushed out of their communities it is crickets.

As Parliamentary Secretary for Renters I am really proud that Victoria now has the strongest renter protection framework in the country. Through steady practical reform we have strengthened security, improved conditions and helped stabilise the rental market. We ended no-fault evictions so renters cannot simply be asked to leave. We banned rental bidding outright, ending secret price wars that forced renters to outbid each other just to secure a home. We extended notice periods for rent rises and notices to vacate from 60 days to 90, giving renters more time and certainty to plan their lives. We strengthened protections against unfair rent increases and banned the extra fees platforms were charging just to pay rent. We tackled discrimination in the application process with a standardised rental application form, removing invasive questions and requiring agents to properly manage renters' personal information. We have established a free rental dispute resolution service to help resolve issues, and we are doubling funding for renter support services. For the first time we also introduced registration and training requirements for real estate agents and property managers, raising standards across the sector.

But we are not stopping there. We have plans to cap lease-break fees so renters are not paying months of rent on properties they have had to leave. From 2027 rentals will have another significant uplift in minimum standards, with the need to have efficient electric cooling alongside improved insulation and draughtproofing. That means reducing energy bills, improving comfort and making homes more resilient to extreme heat. In a fantastic change we will soon have a portable bond scheme so renters no longer have to find two bonds when they are moving between homes. Instead the government will temporarily cover the new bond until the previous one is released, removing one of the biggest financial barriers renters face when relocating. These are tangible real-life changes that bring greater stability to people's lives, and they are working. The latest *Domain* rental report showed that Melbourne's house rentals are the most affordable of all Australian capital cities, and our apartment rentals remain more affordable than those in Brisbane and Sydney.

This is the difference between those who talk about renters to boost their election campaigns and a Labor government that has been steadily delivering reforms that make renting fairer every single year. It is fair to say that I could have spent my whole 15 minutes grieving about the Greens political party and their utter hypocrisy on housing policy or their highly manipulative approach to rental reform, and it certainly bears mentioning because renters need one other crucial element beyond our legislative and regulatory reforms, and that element is more homes.

This is why it is so abhorrent that the Greens continue to try to gaslight Victorians that they are the champions of renters, all while their track record shows them blocking housing supply. Time and again, when housing projects come forward, the Greens seem indistinguishable from the Liberal Party in opposing them. I have seen it in my own community in Northcote: project after project in my inner-north community being blocked and delayed because of Greens votes on council. This includes 99 homes in Preston that they set back by about a year until the Minister for Housing had to call it in. At the time Minister Wynne said:

> If not for this unnecessarily protracted process with council for no avail, the construction of the 99 social housing dwellings for the most vulnerable members of the community would have already commenced.

That is just one example, but it is emblematic of the appalling attitude the Greens political party have to housing and the contempt that they show people who need that housing.

At Walker Street in Northcote they tried for years to block the renewal of outdated, decaying buildings. Lidia Thorpe used it as a campaign platform, and the Greens who came after her continued the trend. We were not deterred. There are now another 99 warm, dignified, modern homes giving Victorians a secure place to live. I visited one of those social homes with the Premier recently. We met with Shadya, who welcomed us with warmth into her apartment, brewing traditional Eritrean coffee from scratch and serving it with ambasha bread. Shadya is a mother of five and works hard as a cleaner. She spoke

with such pride about her home and what it has meant for her and her youngest son to live at Walker Street in Northcote. When you speak to someone like Shadya, you understand that these are not just buildings, they are places of belonging and hope. The Greens opposed Shadya's home being built. On social media they still voice opposition to this project, completely out of touch with the real people living there in our community, completely out of touch with the essential workers who make our suburbs vibrant and who deserve a home. The Greens opposed both the Northcote and the Preston sites, which now have 198 new social homes, a 75 per cent uplift on what was available before. Alongside those social homes are hundreds of private homes too, because meeting housing needs means increasing supply across the board. Twenty per cent of those private homes were reserved for first home buyers so they did not have to compete with investors. These are real quality homes that change lives for the better, and the Greens oppose them to their shame.

The hard truth about the Greens is that they are a blunt instrument incapable of seeing the nuance in public policy, because they are too focused on sloganeering. It is why we see appalling positions like blocking the Housing Australia Future Fund in the federal Senate or demonising the not-for-profit community housing sector, which provides social homes and social support to so many vulnerable people. Increasingly, though, their cynical tactics are being exposed. The former Greens member for Griffith let that cat out of the bag. After months of teaming up with the coalition to refuse to pass the crucial HAFF legislation, he penned an article effectively admitting that it was part of a strategy to sow disaffection to mobilise disadvantaged sections of society in support of the Greens, basically using people's lives as a campaign recruitment tool. This is the disingenuous, mean-spirited contempt with which the Greens treat vulnerable people. It does not matter to them whether homes get built or not. They will block it if it means they can shake out a few votes. Like I said, the cat is out of the bag. The member for Griffith was ousted, as was the Greens member for Melbourne. People are realising just how fraudulent they actually are. They can see the protest politics and the simplistic slogans, the obstructiveness and the divisiveness, the political gymnastics they perform to take credit for Labor's reforms. People are fed up with it.

There are real challenges facing our community, real cost-of-living pressures, real housing pressures. People need real reforms that make their lives easier and fairer. In my own community in the inner north we want our young people to stay; we do not want to push them out. We want our schoolteachers, our bus drivers, our nurses, our hospo workers, our creatives, the people who make us a community to be able to build a life in our suburbs, to have choice and opportunity and stability.

That means more quality homes. It means investing in new health services, better schools, quality open spaces and easier transport. That is exactly what Labor is focused on delivering – giving Victorians more homes, more choice and more opportunity – and we are doing that right now in our suburbs. We have a train and tram zone in Thornbury, and it will deliver more homes for our community gradually over time. Coupled with those homes will be investment into our schools, into our transport networks and into our parks and public spaces – the things that make our suburbs thrive. But we cannot accept a policy that pushes young people, millennials and anyone who is disadvantaged out of our suburbs onto the urban fringe. That is not a policy, that is a disaster. That is not a plan for the future and it is not something that we can or should accept. It does not speak to equity. It does not speak to fairness. We want to give Victorians more hope and more opportunity. We want to make their lives easier. The unholy alliance of Liberal and Greens blockers needs to do some serious soul-searching and stop ripping housing options away from Victorians. That is it.

Cost of living

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (17:31): I grieve for Victorians who are feeling the significant pressure of the cost-of-living crisis. Every family in Prahran knows what it feels like right now – in fact every Victorian knows what it feels like right now. The weekly shop costs more. You go to the supermarket, you look at your bill, and there are very few people that could honestly say they walk away being pleasantly surprised. The energy bills arrive – the DLs, the window-faced envelopes – and you wince before you open them. You wonder whether your lease renewal is going to break you. The

question people are asking quietly around kitchen tables, in the queue at the supermarket and across the state is a simple one: why is it this hard and who is responsible? The cost-of-living crisis in Victoria is not an act of God, it is an act of this government. The truth is that this government has made deliberate choices, not bad luck and not global headwinds but choices: a decision to spend without discipline, a decision to tax without restraint and a decision to borrow without consequence, at least for those making the decisions rather than those left paying for them.

Let us start with where we actually are. Victoria's net debt is projected to reach $165.8 billion by June this year. By 2029 it will climb to $192.6 billion. Interest payments on the debt are already running at more than $1 million every single hour – $1 million every single hour in debt – every hour, day and night. That is not an abstraction, that is money that cannot go to hospitals, cannot go to schools, cannot go to public transport and cannot go to the services that the families in Prahran and across the state rely on. This government is not helping families, it is mortgaging their children's futures to pay for its own mistakes. When the Treasurer stands at the dispatch box and talks about fiscal responsibility, Victorians are entitled to look at those numbers and ask a straightforward question: if the management has been responsible, why is the debt higher than in any comparable jurisdiction on earth? Why did the credit rating agency S&P Global find that Victoria is the most indebted subnational government across Australia, Canada and Germany combined? Victoria's public service has expanded by 59 per cent over the past 15 years. The state's population grew by 29 per cent over the same period, so how does that make sense? The public sector wage bill has increased by 152 per cent. That is not an investment, that is expansion without accountability, and every Victorian family is now servicing that bill.

Victoria's debt has grown by 415 per cent since 2014. The economy grew by 29 per cent. Someone has to pay the difference, and that someone is us. The government is going to say that it is focused on cost of living. It has said that in every single budget. It said it when it introduced the mental health and wellbeing levy. It said it when it introduced the COVID debt levy. It said it when it doubled the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund charge from July of last year. And it is saying it again now, while interest payments consume more of the budget every single quarter.

Victorian state and local government taxes now sit at $6348 per person per year. That is $654 more than the national average. That is 11.5 per cent above every other state and territory. Victorians are the most heavily taxed people in this country, and the gap is simply not narrowing. Tax revenue is forecast to grow at 4.7 per cent per year over the forward estimates. Wages are not growing at 4.7 per cent. Household budgets simply are not growing at 4.7 per cent. Social services or security payments are not growing at that amount, and most Victorians will say that their salaries simply are not growing at that amount. Victorians pay $654 more in state taxes every year than the national average, and this government wants more.

What does that look like in practice? Let me give this chamber a concrete and recent example: the congestion levy. From January of this year this government has nearly doubled the parking levy in inner Melbourne. The category 1 rate for the CBD has jumped from $1750 to $3030 per space. The category 2 rate, which now captures part of South Yarra, Richmond and Prahran, has risen from $1240 to $2150 – that is a 73 per cent increase – and it has been expanded into suburbs that were never previously covered. The government says that this is about reducing traffic congestion and about encouraging people to go onto public transport and use that. The argument might have some merit if it were 2019, but parking volumes across 16 key Melbourne CBD sites have already come down 12.3 per cent since then. Fewer people are driving in. The congestion that this levy was designed to address has already been significantly reduced, but the revenue collection continues regardless. They have nearly doubled the parking tax and dragged Prahran into it. Less congestion, more tax – draw your own conclusion.

This is not about congestion; the numbers make that clear. Since the congestion levy was introduced in 2005 and 2006, revenue from it has increased by 1162 per cent, from $19.1 million to a projected $222 million this financial year. Not one dollar of that extraordinary revenue increase has been

directed to local councils to fund genuine transport alternatives, cycling infrastructure or community services. Every dollar flows to Treasury to service debt that this government has created. The Property Council of Australia has put it plainly. The City of Melbourne, the City of Yarra and the City of Stonnington have all publicly opposed this increase in levy. The Lord Mayor of Melbourne said it directly: this is the wrong time for a tax increase in Melbourne. Stonnington has calculated that the levy will cost their municipality more than $4 million in this financial year alone. That is $4 million not going to local parks. It is not going to local community programs or aged care services that residents in my electorate depend on.

The congestion levy revenue has increased by 1162 per cent since 2005. Not one dollar goes back to the communities paying for it, and that is simply not fair. It is what I grieve for. And who ultimately pays for this? Not the building owner, not in the end. This cost flows through to the tenant. It flows through to the business, and when it flows to the business, it flows on to the price of everything that business sells. It flows to the consumer. It flows to the family trying to get through the week.

The small business owner on Chapel Street is already navigating vacancy rates that have become a genuine crisis. They are operating in an environment where foot traffic is recovering, but costs are not easing, and now they face higher outgoings from a parking levy that their landlord must pass on – on top of the emergency services and volunteer fund levy that effectively doubled the variable charge on their property from July last year and on top of the short-stay levy, a COVID debt land tax surcharge and an expanded vacant residential land tax. Since 2022 this government has introduced or expanded at least five new taxes and levies on households and businesses. Every single one flows through to the consumer. Every new levy on business is a new cost for families. Since 2022 this government has introduced or expanded at least five new taxes and levies. Every single one ends up in your shopping basket.

Let us now turn to payroll tax, because the picture there is, simply, complex and similarly unfair for businesses trying to grow and employ people in this state. The government has pointed to its increase in the payroll tax–free threshold to $1 million from July of last year as evidence that they are on the side of small business. And yes, approximately 6000 businesses will no longer pay payroll tax as a result and a further 22,500 will pay less. I acknowledge that it is a step in the right direction, but context matters. Victoria currently operates with 33 separate state-based taxes, levies and charges. Eighteen of those sit specifically on property ownership, investment and transactions. No other jurisdiction in this country comes close to that level of complexity or that combined burden. For any business with a payroll of above $5 million, there is no threshold relief at all, with two additional surcharges applying on top of the standard rate once Australian wages exceed $10 million. Victoria has 33 state taxes; 18 of them are just on owning a property. This is not a tax system. It is an absolute ambush.

These are not abstract numbers. They are the businesses that employ our neighbours, the businesses that anchor our high streets and activity centres. When those businesses face a tax environment that is materially more expensive than New South Wales or Queensland, they face a question that has a very clear answer. Analysis consistently shows payroll tax costs in Victoria are higher than those of states at comparable wage levels, and the consequences are absolutely visible. In 2023 and 2024 Victoria recorded a net interstate migration loss of 15,847 people – that many people leaving our state. That was the worst result of any state in the country. Queensland gained 34,788 interstate migrants in the same period. Western Australia attracted 11,000. Capital is growing people; businesses are following people. This government's response when people and businesses choose to leave – what is it? To add another levy to those who remain. Victoria lost 15,847 people to interstate migration last year, the worst result in the country. People are voting with their feet.

I want to be very direct about what all of this means for the people that I represent. Prahran is a community of extraordinary diversity and energy. It includes South Yarra, St Kilda, Windsor, parts of Southbank and parts of Armadale. It has high streets, markets and community facilities and small businesses that define the character of inner Melbourne. It is a community with people at every stage of life, of every kind of income and in every kind of housing arrangement. Right now, across all of

these different circumstances, the single most consistent thing I hear is it is getting harder for all of us. It is getting harder, and they cannot budget – not easier, harder. The weekly budget is tighter, the lease renewal came with a shock, the energy bill was higher than expected and the car trip to work costs more than it should. People are asking whether any of it is going to get better. Across Prahran, South Yarra, St Kilda and Windsor the single thing I hear most is this: 'It's getting harder, it's not getting easier. We can't afford it. How much more do we absolutely have to chop from our budget?'

This government wants to take credit for cost-of-living support, but $2.3 billion in cost-of-living measures in a budget where interest payments alone are running at more than $1 million every single hour is simply not a relief. It is not even keeping pace. It is a public relations exercise funded by the same families it claims to be helping. The most damning evidence is not the debt number or the tax rating, it is the migration data that I mentioned before, it is the business insolvency data, it is the investment data. When people have the choice and the means, they are choosing to be somewhere else. This is the clearest possible signal that the policies of this government are failing the people of this state, seeing Victorians leave the state and businesses leave the state. When people have the choice, they are choosing to leave Victoria. That is not a statistic; it is a verdict, and it is fact.

The Liberal Party will offer a different path, and it starts with fixing the finances, because if we do not fix the finances in this state, we cannot fix the crime issues and we cannot fix property investment or even proper health issues.

Community safety

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (17:46): I rise to grieve for Victorians, those from faith communities and those without, whose values, beliefs and congregations have been weaponised and used as a tool of division. In the debates we have in this place, in the policies we enact and in the leadership we provide, or we seek to provide, community safety comes first – not politics, not headlines: safety. People should – people must – feel safe walking down the street. They should feel safe sending their kids to school. They should feel safe at their place of worship. They should feel safe at a Hanukkah celebration. They should feel safe at a Christmas vigil in Campbellfield and at a mass in Coolaroo. They should feel safe celebrating Eid, and they should feel safe in their own neighbourhoods. This means standing up against all hate, ignorance and bigotry: antisemitic hate, Christian hate, Muslim hate – all irrational, destructive and toxic hatreds that demean our common humanity, that undermine the confidence people have in their community and that limit the capacity of Victorians to be themselves and to live peacefully, because every Victorian deserves to feel safe. Christians, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, Chinese, Indians, Greeks, Irish and Welsh – every Victorian deserves to feel safe.

Most Victorians understand this. They are good people, decent and fair, and they do not fall for that rubbish of division and hate. They want their families to be safe. They want their neighbours to be treated with respect. They want to know that if someone is targeted because of who they are, leaders will stand up. If a synagogue is targeted, leaders should stand up. If a church is targeted, leaders should stand up. If a mosque or a temple is targeted, leaders should stand up. If an Indian student, a Chinese family or a Sikh taxidriver face hate, leaders should stand up. They should not dodge the issue, not play politics but stand up, because when hate spreads it does not just hurt one person. It hurts families, it hurts communities, it makes people feel like they do not belong, and that hurts the whole state. That is why leadership matters.

There are politicians, though, who think division is a sport and who think blaming communities and stoking separatism will help them win elections. That is exactly how Pauline Hanson and One Nation operate. It is how they have operated for 30 years. When they are not seeking to unpick the workplace rights of Australians, division is their game. They pick a group, they blame them. They try to make people feel afraid, because fear is what keeps their politics alive, and we have seen what kind of politics that leads to. When Asian communities are blamed, Chinese Australians feel it on the street. When

people are told there are no good Muslims, women wearing headscarves in public are abused. That is what fear politics does. It legitimates attacks on others.

It corrodes shared values. It pits groups against each other. This is the kind of politics that exploits faith communities for political gain. It is a corrosive form of politics that deepens social divisions. It weakens our collective identity as Victorians. The Liberal Party is standing beside Pauline Hanson, chasing the same votes, relying on the same preferences. The Victorian Liberals will say they support multicultural communities, but when it suits them politically they will throw those same communities under the bus. We have seen it before. We saw it when Peter Dutton singled out Lebanese Muslims. We saw it when Jacinta Price singled out Indian Australians. We saw it in this Parliament when one of their own members sorted Muslims into good and bad categories based on their own narrow, subjective assessment. This kind of language divides people. It diminishes proud Australians in their own country, and it makes them feel like they do not belong. It feeds the same politics One Nation thrives on, because One Nation spreads fear and division through hate. The Liberal Party might use softer words, but it is the same politics and it is starting to show up in other ways too.

There is another troubling trend in Victorian politics in this very building, and it needs to be called out. Some are trying to mislead faith communities. They are using religion as a political tool, trying to push the idea that if you are a person of faith you must belong to one political side. That is not true. Faith is not a political brand. It is not a campaign strategy, and it should never be used to win votes. For millions of Victorians faith is deeply personal. It shapes how we care for neighbours, how we pursue economic and social justice, how we show compassion, how we conceive and act upon our responsibilities in society. It does not belong to any political party, but some act and speak like they own the faith vote, like they speak for everybody. They do not, and when they do that they reduce whole communities, each with its own richness and diversity, down to politics. They divide people. That is not leadership, that is manipulation. All faith traditions are grounded in deep moral philosophy: caring for the poor, protecting the vulnerable, welcoming the stranger, seeking peace, walking humbly and acting justly. People of faith do not all think the same. They will sometimes disagree on how best to live those values in public life. They do not all vote the same, and that is a good thing. That is what a healthy democracy looks like. But when someone claims one party owns faith, even stepping into places of worship to say it, they are not defending religion; they are exploiting it and turning something personal into political leverage.

Let us be honest: this place, all sides of it, is made up of people from all backgrounds – different faiths and people with no faith at all. No one side owns that; no one side speaks for all of it. But we have seen where that kind of politics leads. The dangers of that sectarianism have been clear in Victoria's own political history. It divides people. It creates mistrust. It makes neighbours look at each other differently. A lot of people came to this country, to our state, to my community, to get away from exactly that. They do not want it here. Here is the part that we cannot ignore. This kind of division does not just appear out of nowhere. It is pushed. It is fed. It is encouraged. That is exactly how Pauline Hanson and One Nation operate. They pick a group, they blame them and they stir fear. It is their whole model. But the problem is those in the Liberal Party keep standing beside them. They use those softer words but they are chasing the same votes and the same preferences, and when you stand with Pauline Hanson you are backing the same politics: fear, division and blaming communities. You do not get to say you support faith communities and then stand next to the people dividing them. People can see that.

There is also something troubling about the way that some politicians push petitions – dodgy questions built on the flimsiest of pretexts, half the story, trying to stir people up, trying to create outrage. It is not honest. If you have got a case, make it properly. Do not mislead people into signing something that does not reflect the truth; people deserve better than that. Democracy only actually works when people are told the truth, when arguments are made openly and in good faith. When we see politicians trying to mislead faith communities, trying to stir fear, trying to claim faith belongs to one side of

politics, we should call it out, because protecting faith actually means not letting it be used like that, and we will not let the Liberal Party and Pauline Hanson divide our communities.

Events that celebrate this state's different faiths and cultures are special. They are about community. They bring families together. They celebrate culture, tradition and faith. They show the best of Victoria. When people come together for Diwali, Lunar New Year, Eid, Christmas, Easter, Vaisakhi or Greek festivals, that is what you see: different traditions, different cultures, all sharing the same home, the same state. And when politicians go to those events it matters how they show up. They should come with respect for the culture, respect for the community, respect for the people in the room.

We have had plenty of these events where the Premier has used that moment to make something clear: people of faith are not just welcome in this state but a big part of it – they are pillars of it. There is something pretty hard to ignore here, because it does not make sense to turn around and call an iftar dinner political while at the same time trying to turn that exact event into a political fight in the media. People can see that, and the shadow minister knows it too, because he, like me, has heard directly from the people who were actually there. Leaders from Islamic Charity Projects Australia, people who said it was important, that it meant something, that it was a moment of healing and of real connection, not about politics, not about one party or another, but about the Premier as the leader of this state, as its head of government, saying to Muslim Victorians last week, 'You are welcome here, you belong here, you are Victorian.' And Muslim leaders have said the same thing. They have said that the iftar showed the kind of leadership we should be encouraging – something genuine, something empathetic, something bigger than politics.

It should have been a moment to clearly stand up against anti-Muslim hate, but instead those opposite turned it into politics. And let us be honest, it takes a fair bit of nerve and cant to spend years stirring division in communities and then turn around and say a community event is political. People can see through that. Respect in communities is something you cannot demand, it is something you earn. Standing up against hate earns it. Standing up for communities earns it. Begging for a microphone does not earn it. Leadership earns it. Leadership means standing up against the politics of hate, not saying one thing to one group and something else somewhere else, not showing up but staying silent when it matters and not pretending Pauline Hanson does not exist.

I want to say something directly to families across Victoria. To the Jewish mum who feels anxious about sending her child to school because of antisemitic hate, to the Muslim parents who worry when their daughter wears a hijab on the train, to the Sikh father who wonders whether his son will be teased at school because he wears a turban, to the Christian families who worry when they hear hate directed at people simply because of their faith, to the Chinese family who have told their kids to ignore the abuse they hear on the street, to the Indian parents whose children have been mocked for their name or their accent, to the parents who worry their child might face abuse simply because they are gay, I want you to hear this clearly: you belong here. Victoria is your home. We will not let any political party, Liberals or Pauline Hanson, divide our communities. The Labor Party will always stand with you. I will stand with you as a representative of our state's most diverse community, Greenvale. We will stand up against hate. We will stand up for your safety, because every Victorian deserves to feel safe.

When one party spreads division and intolerance born of ignorance and another fails to repudiate it, that is not good enough. This government will always take a different approach. We will stand up against hate unambiguously and we will stand up for communities. We will stand with every Victorian – Christian, Muslim, Jew, Hindu, people of all faiths, people of all national and ethnic backgrounds – because they are our state, and Victoria is strongest when we stand together, not when politicians try to divide us, not when politicians seek to portray one party above all as the home of people of faith. That is the Victoria we in the Labor Party will always fight for.

Question agreed to.

Motions

Housing

Debate resumed.

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (17:59): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Bills

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

Introduction and first reading

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (18:00): I have received a message from the Council sending a bill for an act to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 to expand the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission's jurisdiction and provide further for public hearings and for other purposes, for which they request the agreement of the Legislative Assembly. I understand that the member for Brighton will take charge of this bill. The question is:

That this bill be now read a first time.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (29): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Noes (47): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Ella George, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

Question defeated.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, can the house note the Premier was too gutless to be here for the vote.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order and you know it, member for Brighton.

Motions

Housing

Debate resumed on motion of Sonya Kilkenny:

That this house commends the Allan Labor government's housing strategy, including the Big Housing Build, housing targets for councils, planning and rental reforms and activity centre planning and recognises that

improving affordability requires clear planning direction and building more homes where Victorians live, work and access transport.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (18:09): It is great to rise and speak on a critical motion on the housing of people in our state. The member for South-West Coast made reference to it being critical. It is a critical motion, absolutely. The housing of Victorians is so significant. We have like never before a contrast of housing policy in our state and our community. There might be those opposite who are excitable about housing at the moment, because effectively they have got a five-suburb strategy within the Melbourne CBD – or punting people out 60 k's into the growth corridors, where there is already significant land supply and impact today. No mowing of the lawn or jumping into the pool is going to change the fact that the Liberals have sold out millennials and gen Zs like we have never seen before.

The so-called Leader of the Opposition for millennials basically told all millennials that they have no future – no future in housing unless it is 65 k's from the CBD or in four suburbs in the CBD. That is literally the policy that has been put forward. So to the gen Zs and millennials in Mordialloc who are looking to stay in their community in the City of Greater Dandenong or the City of Kingston, the Liberals are not on your side. You will have to go well out of your community – no more support for you. How is that a hopeful and aspirational policy for the future, to tell residents in my community, anyone that is a millennial or a gen Z, that they are not valued to stay in the City of Kingston, that we should not build any more homes in their community?

We heard it today when the member for Mildura said, 'Why would you ever want to be in suburbs along the Suburban Rail Loop? Why would you ever want to live in those communities? No-one wants to go there and no-one wants to be there.' What an outrageous description of the suburbs and communities that will have the housing for residents in the cities of Kingston, Monash and Greater Dandenong into the future. That is the disdain for housing policy that we had. We got it open. If it was not enough that four suburbs in the CBD was the housing policy of the member for Kew, the Leader of the Opposition, then one of the Nationals members of Parliament said, 'Why on earth would you want to live in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne? Why would anyone want to go there?' That is the community that I have loved and cherished and grown up in. That is the community that my friends, my family and my community should have a right to live in in the future – and that is what our policy does. It creates activity centres that do not price people out, that do not say, 'Go well beyond where you have lived and grown up'. We want to say to people, 'You get to live in the place that you're in, and we'll price you in. You won't be priced out, you'll be priced into your community,' rather than being in Chelsea and seeing your rental price going up or your mortgage going up so you need to chop out and go out further, like the member for Kew would tell my constituents. We are saying that the housing and activity centres along the Frankston train line will support you into the future.

That is the difference here. Any gen Z or millennial living in Brighton, living in Sandringham, living in Kew or living in Malvern – those communities right there – are being told, 'You don't have a place in this community anymore,' because the member for Brighton exposed it all. Which millennials and gen Zs are able to afford the $2.5 million median price in Brighton? Which ones? What communities are there on the Suburban Rail Loop, when the median price in the City of Kingston, up through those communities, is about 1½ mill? The member for Kew says to gen Zs and millennials in her own electorate that they are not valued, that they are not worth living in their community anymore, because fundamentally the numbers do not stack up. Did you see that selfie video in Collingwood after the lawn-mowing of awesomeness? Who wants to live in the CBD? I mean, she was basically telling all of those electorates that over 55 per cent of the constituency that lives there – the millennials and gen Zs – and make up the voting roll do not have a place in the Liberal future.

At least with the member for Bulleen rezoning was just a like a bit of confetti: 'Fishermans Bend, that'll be all right. Footscray? Yeah, wherever. Let's go.' It was just party time, numbers on a map and playing a bit of Monopoly. At least there was some sort of scale that was delivered. Its strategic intent – well, who knows, Fishermans Bend – a bit of water, maybe some factories and then basically housing;

no schools, no health care, no fundamental infrastructure to support communities. Remember that? Remember the Deputy Premier and the Premier at the time having to go to a number of doorstops saying they had to buy back land that they sold to developers just to build a school? That was strategic!

But to the member for Bulleen's credit, there was at least a little bit of extra housing. Right now there is no plan from them. In Warrandyte, where the median price is well over $1 million, what is the message to those gen Zs and millennials that the member for Warrandyte is defending? The answer is: 'You don't have a place in my electorate. You can go to Collingwood or you can go to Pakenham. You can go to Mernda, you can go to Werribee, but you can't live in Warrandyte.' That is clearly the message that is put forward here – four suburbs in the CBD put forward right there.

Nicole Werner: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I think there is misrepresentation from the member opposite. You cannot characterise people and just make things up.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): That is not a point of order. It is a matter of debate.

Nicole Werner: It must be factual. The member for Mordialloc must be factual.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): I expect everybody to be factual.

Tim RICHARDSON: Facts – you know, Ferraris, machete bins. Turn it up; we have had a few lectures. If it is not scripted from the member for Warrandyte, it does not happen. Those opposite know that they are vulnerable here. They are vulnerable here because they do not have a plan to support 55 per cent of the electorate. But they tussle, because everything is about an over-55s demographic. Gen Xs have walked so thunderously away from the Liberal Party, it is absolutely carnage on their voting prospects. This is only about the electoral fortune of the Liberal members that live in that seat. Let us call it for what it is.

When the member for Brighton interjected before, what did he say? 'Let's see what happens on election night.' Guess what, he belled the cat there. Acting Speaker, I know you are a close observer of politics here. This is exactly what it is about. It has never been about housing anyone. It has never been about supporting more houses for people who need them most. It has never been about housing being a fundamental right for people to keep them safe and secure and give them a pathway. It is not about that at all. It is about their election fortunes on 28 November. We have known that all along, but at least the member for Brighton was kind enough to interject and say the quiet bit out loud.

The housing policy of shadow cabinet and the member for Kew is defined by political fortunes, not by doing the right thing for the state. It is defined by those opposite trying to lock down their council areas and ensure that no-one in their area has that opportunity to live where they have grown up. Remember those aspirants over there – aspiration for the people working their way up, getting ahead, trying on their own. They have lost it. They do not have a values compass anymore. It is whatever Pauline Hanson does or Matt Canavan does. They sort of shudder. They rock in awe. They look then to what Angus Taylor might say if he retweets himself or comments to himself, and then they take their lead. That is basically their policy offering. It is an astonishing betrayal.

In comes the member for Brighton. We are just commentating, member for Brighton, on your belling the cat that it is about election fortunes – let us see what happens on election night. Rather than building the houses for gen Zs and millennials, it is about what happens on election night. What will happen in building in Hawthorn? We want to see what happens with housing policy through those communities. We see the price go up and up, and that is a significant impact; it means that people cannot even get ahead. The federal Labor government is supporting people with deposits. But the 5 per cent deposit will not get you anywhere near some of the areas where people are now living with their parents in these communities. They are wanting to see the hope and aspiration right there.

People are being forced to live in their family homes up to the age of 30 and beyond. That is just the nature of it now more and more. There are real haves and have-nots. The parents might be the bank of mum and dad that we hear about; they might be able to provide a guarantee and might be able to

support family, their children, to find their way into the housing market. But for so many, the majority, in the community that is not their story. They are either renting or have a 5 per cent deposit that sends them well out into growth corridors, 60 to 70 k's beyond where they have grown up. That cannot be the policy offering. That is not our offering with our activity centres, our housing and our townhouse policies. Those opposite are abandoning Victorians like we have never seen before, and it will be a clear choice: more houses in the communities you have grown up and lived in to be priced in, or to be priced out by those opposite and told that your future is well beyond reach.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (18:19): I have got to give the member for Mordialloc credit. I mean, if you told him to come in and argue that the world is flat and that Mars is about to careen into Jupiter, he would do it, and he would do it with his own self-conviction unwavering. I have got to give him that credit. He comes in and just says what he says, and he seems to believe every word of it no matter how much factual ridiculousness comes out of his mouth. I have got to give him credit – he sounds like it. But I have to say, through you, Acting Speaker, that my old Ukrainian grandmother would have said, 'Yak po mokrii kurkiy'. He is just like being hit with a wet chook, that guy. He just gets so far and then you have to soak it. You have to get the hose out and spray that chook to calm it down because it is just going wild into the henhouse and back out. Anyway, that is what would happen in Ukraine.

But not speaking of Ukraine, how about speaking of Melbourne? I find it quizzical. I find it really quizzical, you know, of the Australian Labor Party – I have got a good memory on all of this. I have been here a lot longer than most, quite stunningly. But I find it amazing to hear from people – some of the galahs opposite. I can hear some squawking now. They come in like a multicoloured bird, squawking away, saying what they do about planning – you know, 'We've got this great idea and plan.' These are the people that opposed high-rise development in activities areas going into 2014. These are the people who opposed zone reform going into 2014, which would see greater density than what is being proposed by the current government at this point in time. These people opposed it and fundamentally did nothing for the best part of a decade. And as a consequence, when you flush no supply into a market that is growing at 150,000 for that decade each and every year, lo and behold, you get to what? It is called a housing crisis, because we are short on supply.

The government can say, 'Oh, we're going to fix supply,' as most members in the Labor Party have got up and said – 'Oh, we're going to deal with supply in existing urban areas.' But there are multiple markets to metropolitan Melbourne and to Victoria as a whole. The government is talking about one market, but they are not talking about growth areas. They are not talking about urban renewal. They are not talking about CBD supply. They are talking about one politicised market in Liberal-held seats in the eastern and southern suburbs in order to create some kind of clash before the election because their Premier is the most unpopular Premier in the country. Their own members are in the bar talking about her future, right as we have this debate now, right?

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: Laugh as you like. You are in here, buddy. And what I find stunning is that the government ignored councils, who could have given twice the supply on their own structure plans in inner Melbourne. The coalition's policy is to take councils and their structure plans and work with them to get supply through existing structure plans – 400,000 in the inner suburbs of Melbourne versus 200,000 with the current government. It was the current government, the Labor Party, who criticised me as a minister for intervening when we could not get supply. Remember when Daniel Andrews ran around with that guy – what was his name? – Martin Foley, saying, 'There'll be a forest of towers, and no-one will live in them.' A forest of towers – this is the guy who then went away and approved taller buildings than I had ever approved. I mean, you cannot buy this kind of hypocrisy. You just could not make it up. The current member for Broadmeadows, who sat on the council, said there would be vertical slums because we wanted to put high rise in central Broadmeadows – vertical slums. The current member for Bentleigh, who literally was elected against the then Liberal government's new residential zones, which would – wait for it – get 'medium range density' through parts of his electorate, is now advocating for high density. I mean, you cannot buy this stuff. The Minister for

Planning launched a 30-minute motion earlier today and failed to mention she blocked developments at Cape Paterson and in her own seat. I mean, you have got to have some level of credibility. You have got to have some –

David Southwick interjected.

Matthew GUY: Well, the Minister for Police is here, but I do not mind him today. He has helped me out on one thing. But you have got to come into the chamber with some level of credibility. If you are going to come in on a sledge motion, yes, all right, give it your best shot. We are here to have a go back at you, and you want to find that. But actually have some level of credibility, particularly from the person who is launching the motion, the Minister for Planning. She runs in with this term 'blocker'.

David Southwick interjected.

Matthew GUY: Then, as the member for Caulfield says, the biggest NIMBY on the block blocked I think it was three storeys in her own seat. People like me have said you are welcome to come into central Doncaster and take off the mandatory height controls that exist in Doncaster to get supply in central Doncaster if, as Liberal policy advocates, it takes pressure off existing areas through neighbourhood residential and schedules in general residential that have a lower density aspect to them. We are happy to accommodate that growth through the central Doncaster region. That is sensible policy. That is the policy we are putting forward, as opposed to the government with a blunt force instrument saying – wait for it – 'Oh, we're going to take powers off councils.' Oh, my God, remember that? That was the evil Mr Skyscraper's policy – 'He's going to take it off councils and approve a forest of towers' – which the government now wants to do in literally every suburb.

I also find this stunning in growth areas, because I heard the member for Tarneit – he comes in and he is very passionate; he has obviously had a few hits on the football field. He comes in and he is very passionate about his area: 'Matthew Guy approved this and Matthew Guy approved that.' In fact let me just tell you about land in the member for Tarneit's area. When I was the minister, I brought 1550 hectares into the urban growth boundary. But he fails to mention that in 2010 the Labor government in the City of Wyndham brought 17,738 hectares into the growth boundary. So the estates he is talking about were actually brought in by his own mob. The only freeway interchange at Sneydes Road that has been built in the last 20 years was built by – wait for it – the Liberal government, me, with funding out of central city development. We did it. What has he done since he has been there? Nothing. Then I heard the member for Yan Yean. She came in and said at one stage that the Liberal government had rezoned land in the green wedge in her area like it was tropical rainforest. It could have been featured on an ad: 'Put another shrimp on the barbie and look at this tropical rainforest.' In fact, the Liberal government through the Whittlesea–Mitchell area – I might add, none in the seat of Yan Yean – brought in 1010 hectares. Justin Madden and the Labor Party brought 15,542 hectares of land into the urban growth boundary. If you are going to come in and have a sledge motion, at least have a semblance of believability and accuracy to your argument. Again, I do not mind if you want to have a sledge; go for it. The Liberals brought in, when we were in – I did – 6000 hectares into the growth boundary. 43,000 hectares under the Australian Labor Party –

A member interjected.

Matthew GUY: One of the members opposite – I do not know which galah it is – is interjecting. But what it says is credibility on this argument, because we had policy in growth areas, in central city development, which brought Melbourne's central city population to 54,900, compared to Sydney's 16,000, Brisbane's 12,000, Perth's 13,000 and Darwin's 7000. So people could live where they do not need to own a car, where they could walk to open space, where they could walk to the shops, where they could walk to the supermarket and where they could have their life without a motor vehicle necessitating it. That was our policy, and that is why the member for Caulfield is saying we must do more of this to get people off car-based developments.

Sure, we had that policy on activity areas as well, if it was not then criticised by – which Labor member do you want me to mention? Footscray, Carrum, Glen Waverley, Broadmeadows – I mean, they were all bagging it. Yet this is a policy they are now bringing in and trying to argue for, saying, 'Look, we're the saviours of gen Zs.' Well, you are the ones, Labor, who locked out gen Zs for the last decade because the then member for Albert Park sat in his office and did absolutely nothing for a decade. He put in control after control after control to prohibit development in Melbourne's central city areas and to prohibit development in activities areas. This government unionised development throughout the suburbs, which made it so expensive. Along the Suburban Rail Loop, they are all talking up how they are going to get development. No, you will not, because the cost of land, the cost of construction and the cost of materials is going to blow that through the roof. It will be affordable to only the top end of the market, which is what none of us are trying to seek. So when you come in with a sledge motion, I say to the government, at least have a semblance of believability. Otherwise, like the member for Carrum, your credibility goes down in flames.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (18:29): Phew, let us take a deep breath. My heart is racing there with the tone of the speaker that was on his feet just before. I am so proud and happy to speak today on this incredible, important motion and the opportunity to discuss one of the most important issues, not only for my community of Mulgrave but for the whole state of Victoria. We all know how important housing is as a topic right now. We know it has never been harder to put together a deposit and own a small part of this world for oneself. That is why I am so proud to be part of a government that treats this seriously and that has implemented bold reforms to tackle this crisis. I am keenly aware of the risks to Victoria and my community in particular if a Liberal–National, God forbid, One Nation government is elected later this year.

The bold reforms that this government is implementing will make real, material differences for people in my electorate. Our train and tram activity centres are giving more people the ability to live where they want to, near jobs, near services and close to loved ones. I am very lucky to have two train and tram activity centres in my electorate at Springvale and Noble Park. I am also very lucky to have a cooperative council in Greater Dandenong when it comes to welcoming investment and improving housing. There are many areas in our city, however, where councils block housing at every turn, turning entire suburbs into de facto gated communities that do not allow new residents. As someone who has been on council before, I know that sometimes there might be one voice in the community that opposes a housing development, and sometimes this puts fear into councillors about supporting or not supporting a particular planning permit. We need to avoid this nimbyism because it is costing our communities significantly. Our train and tram activity centres deal with this challenge. It stops privileged Liberal councils from preventing any new developments.

I have had many conversations with community groups, locals and businesses in my community on their views on the allocation of train and tram activity centres. Thoughts are overwhelmingly positive, to the extent that when the initial list of activity centres was announced the Springvale Asian Business Association reached out to me and asked me to encourage the minister in my discussions with her to include Springvale in the second tranche. We all know the moment we start talking about changes to planning or zoning we kind of lose people. It is a very dry topic and sometimes can be hard to understand. I want to put things really simply: these changes mean more housing for people in my community. It means more investment into public spaces and businesses in my electorate. It means more jobs in my community, and it means that more people who grew up in my community, just like me, have the opportunity to purchase a home of their own. No longer are people in my community going to have to make the wicked choice between renting far longer than they want to and being forced to move to the outermost fringes of Melbourne, where housing is more plentiful and affordable but it takes them longer to get to work, it takes them longer to see their family and it takes them longer to get to places they are familiar with.

Victoria is building and approving thousands more homes than any other state. We are pulling every lever to build more homes. Victoria continues to be number one in home approvals, number one in

home starts and number one in home completions, and that is thanks to policies that have been implemented under this government. Making housing affordable is not just about making the purchase of a home realistic; it is about also ensuring that renters have the opportunity to save money to build up a deposit. The latest *Domain* rental report showed that Melbourne's house rentals are the most affordable of all Australian capital cities, and our apartment rentals remain more affordable than the other large east coast states. This means that a renter in Melbourne is going to be able to put aside more of their pay cheque towards a deposit than a renter in other capital cities. To quote Brendan Coates of the Grattan Institute:

> Melbourne's got some of the most affordable housing in the country now … And that is in large part a success of building more homes.

I would also just like to shout out a specific development in my electorate. As part of the social housing accelerator, an eight-storey social housing project has been approved in Springvale within walking distance of schools, doctors, buses and trains. This is the exact kind of housing we need that supports communities that are in need the most.

It is really important that we discuss alternative policies and what will happen to communities like mine in the event of a coalition government. We know that those opposite have always been against building more homes in communities where people want to live. Their solution is to build up even more in the CBD and to sprawl out even further in the outer suburbs. I will put it really simply: if you want to live in the CBD, you can. There is an existing glut of apartments available in the CBD, which is a good thing. It is very important that people have the option available to them to live that lifestyle if they want to. In the same way, housing supply is not anywhere near as much of a concern in the fringes of Melbourne. New greenfield sites are being developed, and we know housing is more affordable in the outer suburbs compared to communities like mine that are a bit closer to the city. Also, how far are we really going to go? How far are people going to move out to purchase their own home? Of course, if a family wants to make that choice and they understand the trade-offs, they should have the option available to them, but the main problem is that right now if you want to own your own home, that is one of your only options.

I want to also mention what those opposite plan to do to my community if they get their way at the end of this year. I mentioned earlier the immense community support for the train and tram activity zone designation for Springvale and Noble Park. If those opposite get elected, they will scrap these zones and my community will suffer. There are really, really big consequences if this happens. It means stripping investment from my community. It means fewer houses in my community. It means it will be more difficult for families to remain in my community and to perhaps live close to their family. Those opposite literally want to break up families in my community. They like to call themselves the party of business, but the reality is that they want to do the complete opposite of what businesses in my community want. They are saying to my business community that their views do not matter and that they do not want to see my community grow and prosper. I would think that this would trigger some deep reflection by the Liberal Party in particular and the whole coalition about what they stand for. Clearly they would rather spend their time appealing to the base of One Nation and NIMBYs in their communities.

I also want to finally touch on a very sad reality that my community would be heading towards if those opposite got their way. There was a good article recently in the *Age* that discussed councils and suburbs that have had big declines in school-aged children over the last few decades. We know that if we are not providing young people opportunities to move into communities, then those areas age and there are fewer and fewer families that live there. If housing is unaffordable, then young people that are putting together what they can for a deposit will not be able to live in communities like mine, which are comparatively closer to the city. I do not want those opposite to make my community an area that has zero kids or families. I want my community to be a hub for all kinds of people to live and thrive, in particular my multicultural community, who traditionally live next to family members. They will break up families by taking away these tram and train activity zones if they were to get in, but we will

prevent that. I will fight hard for my community because my community deserves it. My community deserves housing in the tram and train activity centre; Springvale deserves it; Noble Park deserves it. My community is my family. My community deserves to stay with their families and to stay in places where they feel comfortable and where they feel they know their neighbours, they know the shop owners and they know the services. I support this motion, and I am just – well, no, I know what to say. I am speechless because I love my community. When I speak from the heart I speak for my community. I do not want this thing taken away.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (18:39): I rise tonight wanting to start by assuring the people of my electorate of Hawthorn that the reason I am standing to speak on this motion tonight is because the Allan Labor government is apparently turning this chamber into the equivalent of improv at the comedy club. It wants to be congratulated for a housing policy that is delivering less homes this year by way of completions than it did last year. Let us go back a step in history to when the then Premier announced the housing statement in late 2023. The government was in a panic. Everybody was talking about the housing crisis but this government, so they needed to put something out. As we will all remember, they issued this statement. There had been no consultation. There had been no background work. They just issued a statement with a target of 80,000 homes a year and a target of 800,000 over the decade, out to 2034.

We were all surprised, thinking, 'Where has all of this come from?' There had been no process leading up to this; they just announced it. When you break it down, the housing statement and everything that has followed since have been nothing less than a fugazi. Remember the fugazi that the famous Matthew McConaughey character talked about in *Wolf of Wall Street*? It is just a fugazi: it just looks like a housing statement and it looks like it is delivering housing, but it is not. Those opposite say that in Victoria we are completing more homes than the rest of the country. But here is the kicker. When you compare the data in other jurisdictions, here is the difference: they are growing; we are going backwards. There are reasons for that, and I will come to those.

Let me begin. There is not enough time to talk about all of the shortcomings of the housing statement and everything that has followed since, but here is the top line for people: when the government announced the housing statement and everything it has done since, there has never, ever been a cent extra for infrastructure. As I told the good people who turned up to a community forum in Ashburton just the other day, if you look at budget paper 4 and look, say, in my area of Boroondara, for all of the infrastructure that the government under this Premier Jacinta Allan is going to deliver to support the extra housing that she and her colleagues want to impose on the people of Boroondara – do you know how much money this government has committed to the extra infrastructure we all know must accompany the extra tens of thousands of houses? Zero, not a cent. I look at all of the Labor members around this chamber and I say: I bet if you go through budget paper 4 and look for all the money that this government is going to commit to support the housing in your municipalities and in your towns and communities you will find zero, because that is the reality. They want all of this delivered, but apparently, like a fugazi, it is going to come out of nowhere – not a cent for infrastructure.

The government was so panicked back in 2023 when it issued the housing statement that it did not even complete the better apartment design guidelines. It wants tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of apartments being built from now not just till 2034 but right out to 2051 with no commitments to ensure good quality outcomes for people. When it made the housing statement in late 2023 and in everything since, have you heard the government talk about reforms to owners corporations? As a lot of members in this place will know, there are more and more problems that more and more owner-occupiers and tenants are finding in these large complexes. When they released the housing statement, was there a step taken by this government to reduce the costs of construction? It costs about 30 per cent more to deliver new stock to the market in this state than in other states. The government has done nothing to reduce the costs of construction; it just came along and it said it was going to impose these targets.

These targets are really just generic precinct typology assessments. That is all they are. Somebody behind a desk in Spring Street somewhere in one of the departmental offices simply said they want that much for that precinct and that much for that precinct over there – no consultation, no local context, no place-based consideration of any of these targets. As the member for Bulleen and others have pointed out, the reality is, when you actually sit down and collaboratively work through with councils their aspirations for their local communities, along with our own, it is clear that there is more than enough zoned land to deliver more than the targets this government is trying to impose. But what local councils and local communities are saying is, 'Let us work together.' We can deliver better outcomes that will protect amenity, protect livability, protect character and ensure that we deliver more housing in a way which does not destroy our standards of living across the state.

But the biggest offence by this government and the biggest insult to the people of my electorate and the people of Victoria with the government wanting to move such a completely self-congratulatory and insulting motion as this one is that the government fails to understand, and it never will understand, that the only way to address the housing crisis in this state is to have a vision for the state, one that recognises that there are parts of our state – parts represented by many of those opposite – that have to deal with the inequities, and I go as far as to say the injustices, of not having basic facilities.

I will never forget the day I was in Yan Yean and I saw what appeared to me to be a young mum walking through a field of long grass – no footpath – on a busy road, carrying two bags of shopping. Many times I have been to communities that talk about their grievances at not having basic public transport and having no community facilities, yet this government pretends that we can go on ignoring that. There is a burning requirement to ensure that we deliver housing right across – that is in the capital city zone and in areas like the one I represent, but also in the growth suburbs and the corridors right around metropolitan Melbourne. According to the government's own numbers, which members opposite continue to ignore, the population in those growth suburbs is between three and four times greater than the population growth in established suburbs.

They can talk about urban sprawl all they like, but I say to those opposite: that ship has sailed. Many more people are moving and trying to live in the growth suburbs, and you can ignore it by leaving these precinct structure plans in the freezer or you can take them out and bring them to completion, which is what we will do, because we recognise that. Our plan recognises that the whole state needs to be developed and that we need to see the capital portfolio spread more evenly across the state, with important productivity-enhancing investments – whether it is portside infrastructure, landside infrastructure or the many overpasses and interchanges that need to be constructed and delivered right across metropolitan Melbourne and in particular in those growth corridors – to unlock not only the opportunities for more housing but, importantly, the opportunities to grow our state's economy. Without that our state's growth will be stymied and we will see a tale of two cities where some suburbs will continue to enjoy relatively good services in public transport, access to community infrastructure, health and education and a huge swathe, particularly of outer metropolitan Melbourne, where so many new and emerging communities are struggling with the dearth of facilities and support and people are continuing to suffer. It is not fair, and it is not right, and the government is taking us all for a ride.

There is a way through this housing crisis, but this government is not up to the task of leading this state out of that. Our plan would see the entire economy develop and housing spread evenly across established suburbs, the capital city zone, growth corridors and the regions. As many on our side have talked about, it would be a state of cities supported by growing communities around them, not a state which sees more than 90 per cent of people who come here cram into the metropolitan zones when there are so many great opportunities – and should be great opportunities – for those who want to live elsewhere in the state. This motion is a sham, and it is an insult to the people of Victoria.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (18:49): I am shocked at the ignorance displayed by the opposition when talking about housing policy in this state. The fact is that the Allan Labor government does have a vision. It has a policy on housing and how to develop further the infrastructure and the housing that we need for young Victorians and coming generations. When we talk about why it is that

the inner and middle suburbs have a lower population, it is not because people are leaving there because they want to go, necessarily, to the outer suburbs; it is because they cannot afford to live there, which is exactly what the Allan Labor government's policies are designed to change – and they are working. Yes, it is slow. Yes, it is not happening overnight, but all the data and many of the commentators who are the experts in housing are telling us that the Victorian government and the policies being used are creating more affordable housing. In fact we are building more homes in the state of Victoria than in any other state, including Queensland and New South Wales, which are of course the states that we look at in terms of the east coast. The policies are working. Yes, we would all like to see them work much faster, much quicker, but if the idea of the government is to use policy levers to support the coming generations to ensure that they can own their own home or rent in a stable and comfortable place, then these are the policies that the government is putting together. Rather than go on with all the fake news and the fake facts and the denial of facts that the opposition always seems to think that we are gullible enough to listen to, I am just going to talk a bit about what it is that this motion is all about and what levers and plans and strategies we have in Victoria to ensure that we open up the housing market.

This motion encapsulates a strategy that the Allan Labor government is implementing to ensure that first home buyers and coming generations can have good-quality, secure and stable housing. We are doing this in both the rental market and in home ownership. We continue to undertake rental reform designed to protect renters against unfair evictions and substandard facilities, because you do have a right to have a working stove and proper water pressure and timely repairs and a dog or a cat if you want to. We have already introduced limits on rent increases to once a year and banned rental bidding. To make housing more affordable and give more choices about where to live, we are undertaking housing and planning reform to make it quicker to build a home with more streamlined planning processes and less red tape, while also providing that bit of extra support for first home buyers. In fact, as another indication of the policies in Victoria compared to New South Wales and I think Queensland, we have also provided many more first home buyer grants than any of those other states that also provide such programs, thus ensuring that first home buyers are doing better here than in those other states.

Residents of the Thomastown electorate talk to me about rising rents and poor-quality rentals in the area. They are often young people who sadly have resigned themselves to thinking that they will never be able to buy their own home. They believe it is a pipedream that they will never achieve. Older residents are also concerned for their children and grandchildren and worry that home ownership is out of reach because it just costs too much. This motion supports the many levers and plans we are implementing to support cheaper, good-quality housing and more housing choices: choices such as to buy a house or rent with certainty and comfort; where to live in or out of Melbourne, in the regions or rural; and choices about the type of housing and the trade-offs that need to be made – for example, an apartment or townhouse in the inner or middle-ring suburbs with established amenities and close to family and friends, or the choice to live in the outer suburbs where land values are lower so you can have a house with a bigger backyard. These are the choices our policies and work will provide young Victorians and coming generations – policies to increase housing supply but also to increase density where land values are now prohibitively expensive but where many Victorians want to live.

While looking to the future for the coming generations, we are also looking to support older Victorians and their choices, strengthening the rules and rights of residents in retirement and lifestyle villages. What could be worse than buying into a retirement community to find out that it is not what you thought and the provider had not fully disclosed your obligations or theirs. Right now the opposition and their council mates are doing all they can to block increasing housing supply in established areas with great amenity, opposing more rights for renters and retirees and instead choosing to protect selfish vested interests: the 'not in my backyard' movement, who refuse to share with anyone. This is not showing leadership or vision. It is just pandering to a privileged few and really shattering the great Australian dream of owning your own home.

What is the Liberal Party's answer to the plummeting rates of home ownership in this country? And just remember, it is a national problem, not just in the state of Victoria, and it is also probably a global problem. They are proposing more of the same, which will shut Victorians out of home ownership further on. They even go one step further: not only do they propose to lock up the lovely suburbs of Kew and Malvern and Balwyn and Hawthorn, which all have really great schools and transport and parks and kindergartens, they propose only to open more land for more new suburbs, without the infrastructure that those communities need.

The previous opposition speaker was talking about how we need more infrastructure when we build new suburbs. That is exactly what the Allan Labor government is talking about: making sure that we have a plan, which is the greenfield plan, in order to open new greenfield sites in the new suburbs at the same time that that infrastructure can be laid. This plan is going to be implemented up until 2034, and it ensures that homes and jobs are built alongside the infrastructure that is needed to support them. Yet when we look at the opposition plan, that is a plan to open up more land on the suburban fringe, with no consultation with councils, with no proposal to put in the infrastructure that is needed and just lump people into these outer suburbs without any services or any plan for any services. Particularly when they are talking about huge cuts in budget, they will not have the money to provide that infrastructure.

I believe that residents of Thomastown electorate living in Wollert and Epping will be very happy with our plan, which is to ensure that further growth is accommodated with infrastructure as it is built. But of course they will not be happy with the opposition's proposal of just opening up more land without any thought about the roads and the schools and the parks that everyone needs in any place that they are going to live. It is also a great area, Wollert and Epping, for local people in Thomastown, because not only can they live out in those outer suburbs that have some of the schools they really like and lots of friends and family; they also can work from home in many instances, thanks to the proposals from, again, the Allan Labor government to ensure and enshrine that right so that families can live in the outer suburbs without having to travel into the city, cutting off lots of hours of their family time in a car rather than at home with their families.

So this motion goes through – and I think previous speakers have spoken about – the many, many levers that we are talking about using, whether it is changes to planning laws or whether it is encouraging social housing, providing funds and providing all the incentives as well as supporting renters and young people into their own homes. These are all things that the Allan Labor government is doing right now to fix the problem of the housing shortage, to ensure that our young people into the future are able to buy a home in a place where they want to buy and are not locked out of the inner and middle suburbs. I know that, for example, a lot of young families are moving into even the Thomastown suburb, which is still probably called the outer ring, and they are really enjoying the amenity they have there with the schools and roads. But of course, this is not what Liberal governments want to do.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (18:59): I am delighted to be, I believe, the final speaker on this side of the house on this very important motion on housing for this evening, and I am very proud to be rising as a member of the Victorian Labor government, which is absolutely committed to doing everything it can to deliver more housing for first home buyers, for workers, for renters, for families, for downsizers and for those that need a helping hand as well. We are doing that through very clear policies and very clear strategies, in very stark contrast to those opposite and the Greens as well. We have got the *Plan for Victoria* and the activity centres plan, including for Central Coburg –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt the member. He can continue when the matter comes back to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Somali Community Inc

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (19:00): (1589) My adjournment tonight is to the Premier, and the action that I seek is for the Premier to immediately meet with Somali Community Inc in Flemington to provide urgent accommodation for the great work that this community organisation does, particularly for migrants, young people and elderly residents that live in the commission flats. What we have seen is the government are looking at bulldozing 40-plus housing estates, of which Flemington is one. The Somali community, and particularly Farah Warsame from Somali Community Inc, has been operating for 35 years. They do not have a home. I was alarmed to read in the *Age* only a few days ago that they are desperately searching for a home and that they have been ignored and are potentially about to be evicted from their home.

The Somali community reached out on 28 July, writing to the Premier seeking support. They were advised that their longstanding office would be demolished under the housing redevelopment. On 23 September the Department of Premier and Cabinet acknowledged the seriousness and referred it to the Minister for Housing and Building and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. In October that year Homes Victoria met with the organisation and indicated they would consult and provide an outcome. In November they were advised the matter was still in progress. In December and January further meetings were held. In February 2026 final advice from Homes Victoria was that no alternative space would be provided, the youth office must be vacated by 6 March, with the main office to close shortly after.

This is such an important organisation. It does great work. We see the Somali community really do wonderful things. I went to the Australia Day celebration with the Somali community, who are so proud to be Australians, so proud to contribute to our community, many of whom live in these housing commission flats in North Melbourne and Flemington. This community is about to be booted out because this government does not care. It is incumbent on the Premier to meet with Farah Warsame to provide urgent accommodation so they have a home, they have a place to run their organisation, so they can provide much-needed support to the vulnerable communities that desperately need the support that we all talk about every day. It is not good enough for us to stand up in this Parliament and talk about how we reach out for migrant communities, how great multiculturalism is and how we support them if we do not do the actual work. This is a real chance for the government and the Premier to put her money where her mouth is and ensure that the Somali community have a home and that Farah Warsame is able to continue to do the great work that he does and has been doing for the last 35 years.

Education system

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (19:03): (1590) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the ongoing investments and measures the Victorian Labor government continues to make to support our hardworking teachers, educators and learning support staff. I am very proud to acknowledge and speak in support of our incredibly hardworking teachers and learning staff right across Victoria but also my suburbs of Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West. Like so many across my community, I am also the proud product of the local public education system and local public teachers. I attended Coburg West Primary from 1990 to 1996 and Northcote High School from 1997 to 2002, and over these formative years I was so fortunate to have been taught by so many dedicated and diligent public school teachers who did not just teach from a curriculum but also shaped lives, built confidence and opened minds to the fact that anything is possible, who always believed and saw potential in all their students, even on days when students might not have seen it in themselves. I would not be standing here today if it were not for the

help, support and inspiration of all of my teachers over the years, several of whom I did invite to my inaugural speech to commend and acknowledge and thank them back in 2023.

Teachers are not only at the heart of our education and school system, they are at the heart of our community. They educate and nurture the next generation. They help young people to develop academically, socially and emotionally. They are mentors, role models and often a steady, trusted presence in the lives of our children and their families. If we provide the environment for our teachers to thrive, so too will our children and young people, and ultimately the city, state and the country will thrive too. Notwithstanding all of the investments we have continued to make in building new schools and learning infrastructure, the fact is it is our teachers who bring our classrooms and our curriculum to life. I truly acknowledge the role that all of our teachers and staff play across all of the local public schools in my community: Coburg High, Strathmore Secondary, Pascoe Vale Girls College, Glenroy College, John Fawkner College, Brunswick Secondary, Pascoe Vale Primary, Pascoe Vale North Primary, Pascoe Vale South Primary, Westbreen Primary, Coburg Primary, Coburg West Primary, Coburg North Primary, Newlands Primary, Merri-bek Primary, Brunswick North West Primary and Coburg Special Development School.

But we all know the job of teaching has become more complex in recent years. Expectations have grown, classrooms have changed and the demands on teachers' time and wellbeing have increased. That is why it is so important that we continue to support our teachers not just with words but with real action. That includes ensuring teachers are properly recognised and fairly paid for the critical and essential work they do. In this respect I wholeheartedly acknowledge all the teachers and staff who have been in contact with me over recent months in relation to the AEU campaign, including Jennifer Trevan from Coburg Special Developmental School; Shay Preston from Coburg West; Krystyna Edwards from the union, whom I met with at Parliament; Daryl Croke from Glenroy College, with the member for Broadmeadows – we hosted a number of local teachers to meet with the Minister for Education; and all the other teachers I have spoken with and been in contact with. We welcome and acknowledge the Victorian government's recent pay offer to teachers, a strong offer to the AEU and other unions that delivers nationally competitive wages and conditions which acknowledge the incredible work that staff do. This is all about valuing our teaching workforce, strengthening our schools and ultimately delivering the best outcomes for students and families across the state. I look forward to continuing to support our teachers and our school staff and highlighting, championing and advocating on their behalf for a positive outcome for them and our students.

Fuel supply and prices

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (19:06): (1591) My adjournment matter is to the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to urgently work with the federal government to release fuel held under the minimum stockholding obligation into the spot market, with a priority on supporting independent distributors in regional Victoria. This afternoon most of my National Party colleagues have been receiving a stream of text messages from distressed farmers and from people who live in regional communities that the community had run out of fuel. In Maryborough, Barham, Kerang and Maffra we are hearing of deliveries of fuel not occurring to farmers. Well, it is putting enormous pressure on our rural communities, who do not have a choice of whether they catch a train to work or to school or how they get around in the community. And particularly this is putting pressure on our agricultural communities.

Farmers are doing it hard at the moment. They are facing incredible cost-of-business pressures. Of course we are looking at farmers who are facing a seeding and spraying time in their cycle over the year. We have got farmers who are managing stock, who use diesel and rely on fuels to be able to mix their feed. There are so many things on-farm that rely on fuel. The fact of the matter is that without fuel there is no food. We have heard a lot from the government today around price capping. It does not matter what the cost is on fuel if it is capped or if you cannot fill up at the bowser – if there is no fuel it does not matter what price it is. We are grinding regional Victoria to a halt without the continuity of supply. There is a pathway forward. We know that there is the minimum stockholding obligation

available. That could be prioritised to support our independent distributors in regional Victoria to make sure that everybody can get their fair share of fuel; to make sure that we are supporting agriculture, that we are supporting the industry that relies on diesel and other fuels; and to make sure that we are supporting our freight sector. This should be the number one priority for the government at this point in time. I urge the Premier to take this action, to work with the federal government and to let us get the fuel that is held for exactly this reason to the people in regional Victoria who need it right now.

Fuel supply and prices

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:08): (1592) My adjournment is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action I seek is that the minister update me on how our government's fair fuel plan is saving commuters money at the bowser during these tough weeks. We all know that when it comes to filling up on petrol we have all had a bit of a shock lately. The recent conflict that is unfolding in the Middle East with Iran has had major ramifications for the supply of fuel across the world, and folks are rightly worried about what this means for the price of petrol, including my mum, who talks to me about it on a daily basis. In many parts of my electorate prices have surged up to $2.40 a litre – I do not think you can find anywhere below $2 a litre at the moment – and in some parts of my community the popular petrol stations that normally provide cheaper petrol have on some days run out. Incidents like these are showing us exactly why our fair fuel plan to tackle price gouging in the fuel market is just so important – because it forces petrol retailers to publish the day before what their prices will be, and they will not be able to increase that price for 24 hours, starting from 6 am. Of course this will not stop retailers from lowering their prices if they want to be competitive or they want to give motorists a better deal – please give our motorists a better deal.

But only Labor has new solutions to make life easier and more affordable. Servo Saver is doing that by giving folks the opportunity to shop around and get the best deal they can, and Victorians can do so right now through the Servo Saver page on the Service Victoria app. If you have not downloaded the Service Victoria app, please do so. The Servo Saver page will save you some money. It is estimated that checking out the Servo Saver page can also save people up to $333 a year. I know that many are doing it really tough at the moment. The cost of living is a consistent struggle and this recent fuel shortage is not making things easier, which is why every support matters, and something like the Servo Saver, a small but nifty little tool, can make such a big difference when it comes to filling up your car and saving a bit of money, because every dollar counts. That is why I know my community would greatly welcome an update from the minister on how our fair fuel plan is saving them money in these trying circumstances.

Frankston and Mornington Peninsula funding

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (19:11): (1593) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Regional Development. The action I seek is for the minister to meet with the Committee for Frankston and Mornington Peninsula, Frankston City Council, Mornington Peninsula shire and me to discuss the recent benchmarking report released by the Committee for Frankston and Mornington Peninsula. In short, this report released by them shows that Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula are not getting a fair go. We are not getting our fair share. It compares the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula region with Greater Geelong and Queenscliff. It shows that we pay more in taxes overall – more in property taxes and more in payroll taxes. We pay $290 million versus $65 million in Geelong, despite the fact the two regions have similar populations, similar numbers of businesses and similar economic output and are similar distances from the city. We are taxed more, but in the past three Victorian state budgets Greater Geelong received much more than the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula region. In fact they received $14,400 per resident in Greater Geelong, compared with just $5600 for us per resident. A lot of this is linked to the classification of the Mornington Peninsula as metropolitan as opposed to regional like Geelong. I am not begrudging Geelong one dollar of investment, but I am asking why Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula are treated as metropolitan when the state wants to tax us yet we are overlooked when it comes to the kinds of development, infrastructure and services investment

and support that help grow communities, strengthen infrastructure, build economic resilience and grow local jobs.

The report makes it clear: across major state taxes and levies – payroll tax, land tax, stamp duty and the short-stay levy – Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula contribute substantially more while missing out on the breadth of funding support elsewhere. This has real consequences. The report found that nearly one in two residents commute out of the region for work. We have 82 per cent of the Mornington Peninsula with no public transport. Young people aged 18 to 35 are more likely to leave due to housing unaffordability, fewer educational opportunities and poor public transport. We now have the highest rate of rough sleeping in the state. Despite the fact that Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula record around 7.9 million visitors on average – around 2 million more visitors than Greater Geelong – our region has had an absence of tourism investment funding. Our region contributes enormously to this state. It deserves a fairer return. It deserves a fair share. We pay more taxes but get less investment from the state government. This state government needs to take the Mornington Peninsula and Frankston City area seriously and give us our fair share of investment.

Bellarine electorate sports clubs

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (19:14): (1594) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Community Sport, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on how this government is continuing to support our local Bellarine sporting clubs. Sporting clubs across the Bellarine are vital in our communities and are run by dedicated and committed volunteers. They bring people together, promote active and healthy lifestyles and provide that important social connection for all ages. In a growing community such as mine across the Bellarine, their support is more important than ever.

It was exciting to recently see some recipients of the latest sporting club grant program, with 14 clubs across the Bellarine receiving that support. These grants are really meaningful, and they really do some great work on the ground to benefit the clubs. From new equipment to uniforms and junior participation, these investments do help the clubs – even investments such as having a mental health awareness round at Barwon Heads bowls club, and Drysdale football club are delivering an inclusive Indigenous and Pride round, and they have got jumpers coming for that.

But the Bellarine sporting clubs are growing. All of them are delivering more junior teams and are growing, and these investments are really crucial. The grant schemes and other grants that we have for our sporting clubs are really important. I look forward to hearing an update from the minister on how this government will continue to support sporting clubs across the Bellarine.

Women's health

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (19:15): (1595) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. The action I seek is for the minister to meet with the health sector leaders who attended my recent women's health dialogue to hear where the system is failing women and to commit to delivering a coordinated, integrated model of care that addresses the current fragmentation across services. In the lead-up to International Women's Day I, together with my colleagues Georgie Crozier and Cindy McLeish, hosted the Hawthorn women's health dialogue. I wish to thank all the very distinguished participants who attended: Michelle Marven from the Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes Victoria; Dr Adele Murdolo from the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health; Kate Phillips from Women's Health East; Dr Shami Kathurusinghe from Clynden Ave specialist clinic; Professor Jo Williams, Associate Professor Paige van der Pligt, Dr Mercy Thomas, Dr Kathleen De Boer, Dr Ilona McNeill, Dr Inge Gnatt, Dr Jessica Sharp, Associate Professor Junhua Xiao and Dr Margaret Murray from the school of health sciences at Swinburne University of Technology; Professor Kathryn von Treuer from the Cairnmillar Institute; Sally Hasler and Jo Richardson from Women's Health Victoria; Carolyn Walker from Days for Girls; Sandra Fiona Netto from Chemist Warehouse; and Debbie Wilkinson from Access Health – all very accomplished leaders. Their

generous contributions, insights and expertise informed our discussion on improving women's health outcomes.

This initiative provided a structured opportunity to examine the most pressing challenges in women's health across Victoria today. Several clear takeaways emerged from the day. Firstly, women often delay or forgo their own health and wellbeing, prioritising the care of others. This pattern is shaped by both cultural expectations and systemic barriers. This must change. Secondly, there is an urgent need for greater investment in research, prevention and early intervention to reduce long-term costs and improve outcomes. Thirdly, our health system is too fragmented. Access, care and service integration need drastic improvements so women can navigate the system more easily and receive coordinated and timely care. Across our state these challenges are particularly acute in regional areas and in culturally diverse and socio-economically vulnerable cohorts. Victorian women deserve a health system that works for them, not against them. The need for action is clear, and I urge the minister to engage directly with these distinguished health sector leaders and act.

Community safety

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (19:18): (1596) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate of Wendouree to show support to the Ballarat Muslim community, which has been impacted by Islamophobia. Recently families gathered at a community centre in Alfredton for an iftar dinner, and a terrifying Islamophobic incident took place. It has shaken not only the people in attendance but people across Ballarat. A man entered the venue and aggressively threatened attendees with racially offensive and anti-Muslim abuse. Men, women and children were frightened, and I know that following that dreadful incident at the community centre in Alfredton, many people have been deeply affected.

The Muslim families who were targeted at the event are a part of the fabric of my community. They are our neighbours, our friends and our workmates. They are our doctors, our pharmacists, our nurses. They teach our children, they work at local businesses and they serve our community. They make Ballarat a better place to live by the contribution they make every single day. They are a part of Ballarat. They deserve to feel safe here and they deserve to feel respected. Anti-Muslim hate has no place in Ballarat. No-one in our community should ever feel unsafe because of who they are or how they pray.

Hate like this does not just appear out of nowhere. It grows when people are singled out, when whole communities are blamed, when fear replaces understanding. Today and every day I stand with the Ballarat Muslim community, united against hate and united for each other. But let me be very clear: this kind of hate does not come out of nowhere. It grows when people are blamed. That is exactly what Pauline Hanson and One Nation do by spreading fear and division, and the Liberal Party stands right beside them. In the South Australian election this weekend the Liberal Party will preference One Nation in all seats over Labor. And when you stand with Pauline Hanson, you give life to the same politics of fear and division.

To my Muslim community, I want to let you know this: we stand with you today and every day, and we will not let the Liberal Party and Pauline Hanson divide our community by using hate and fear to win votes. When the Liberals and One Nation make multicultural communities feel less safe, Labor will always back our multicultural communities. To my Muslim community and especially the children who were frightened that night: you are respected and valued, and most importantly, you belong in Ballarat. We will continue working together to make sure everyone in our community feels safe and is welcomed and supported, because kindness and inclusion are stronger than hate and fear, and respect is stronger than division.

Bank Street–Princes Highway, Traralgon

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (19:21): (1597) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to urgently visit Traralgon before her disastrous plan to build a footpath along the Princes Highway to the Bank Street intersection commences. Recently the minister reneged on the promise to improve pedestrian safety by building a pedestrian underpass beneath the Gippsland rail line, linking Bank Street and Kosciuszko Street. Instead the minister is now forging ahead with a new plan, a plan that has been rushed and a plan that is frankly dangerous. I have seen preliminary designs for the plan that involve constructing a pedestrian footpath that needs to cross no less than five high-traffic driveways and a new bridge over a waterway before crossing a four-lane major highway and finally the Gippsland rail line. The diversion will add approximately 1 kilometre to a pedestrian's trip.

You may ask: what could possibly go wrong? Well, I can tell you what could go wrong. The entire purpose of the proposed underpass was to stop people, mostly school students, from having to walk up a rock face and cross train lines just to head up Kosciuszko Street. Students will not walk further up to use a pedestrian crossing that forces them to walk across train tracks and then cross four lanes of a highway and walk along a new footpath beside a highway just to get to school. There is already a pedestrian refuge on the Bank Street side that effectively encourages people to climb over the rocks that they face to get up over the train line. Students and the general public will take a direct line of sight from the highway to Bank Street, so they will rarely use the alternative route. It is not a stretch of the imagination to see the disaster that would occur if someone tripped on a rock and ended up on the train tracks. It is also no stretch to imagine the disaster that would occur if a student was hit by a car as they crossed the high-use driveways, but it is a reality the minister must consider, because this plan is irresponsible and reckless.

What makes it worse is the footpath and crossing to the train tracks is scheduled to be finished before Labor has even installed the long-awaited traffic lights at the Bank Street intersection. If the minister's new solution becomes reality, we are facing children crossing train tracks and then making a life-or-death decision to run across a four-lane highway without traffic lights operating. Minister, I implore you to visit Traralgon and watch what unfolds at the intersection during peak time so that you can understand firsthand the dangers of the plan you are forging ahead with.

Ison Road, Werribee

John LISTER (Werribee) (19:24): (1598) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and Minister for Public and Active Transport. The action I seek is a briefing on how quickly we can open the new Ison Road for public use. The Allan Labor government's Ison Road project will connect residents of Manor Lakes and Wyndham Vale directly to the Princes Freeway. This will not only mean easier access for locals, it will mean less congestion in the centre of Wyndham Vale and Werribee along Ballan Road, as people will not need to travel through Werribee to get to the freeway. We have also recently commenced the service of new bus route 194, months ahead of schedule, and I know residents in the Harpley estate and surrounding areas are keen to see this bus take root on the new Ison Road overpass and down the new stretch of the road. When council needed help to finish this road, as part of the partnership this government stepped in to help deliver the extension through our major roads authority.

As the local member, I have had the opportunity to visit the site many times and speak to the workers and everyone involved in the engineering and building of the bridge. I thank them for all their work, particularly in what is quite difficult terrain when it comes to flooding and flood mitigation. I have many people who contact me on Facebook who want to see this project done as quickly as possible. I understand that this stretch of Ison Road is set to open in late 2026, but on behalf of my community I would appreciate an update or briefing from the minister about the possibility of bringing this date forward.

Responses

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (19:25): I thank the member for Laverton for raising that request during the adjournment debate tonight. It is fair to say that Victorians are currently watching every dollar. The conflict in the Middle East has pushed the global oil price up, and that has meant that we are seeing higher fuel prices here. That is just stating the obvious, but when you couple that with the decision of the RBA yesterday to raise interest rates, I know that people are feeling the pinch, including in the member for Laverton's electorate.

What is the government doing about fuel prices? The Allan Labor government is leading the nation when it comes to our fair fuel plan. It was introduced in two phases. The first phase was the launch of the Servo Saver feature on the Service Victoria app. Servo Saver is the only fuel finder feature where every single service station is required to report their fuel price in real time. I am pleased to advise the member for Laverton that we currently have 1680 service stations in Victoria registered on Servo Saver. On 10 March the Premier and I launched phase 2 of the fair fuel plan. Phase 2 requires every service station to notify the government of the next day's maximum fuel price. By 2 pm each day service stations in Victoria have to notify the government of their next day's maximum fuel price. That will be public on the Service Victoria app at 4 pm, and it will kick in at 6 am for a 24-hour period. For that 24-hour period from 6 am service stations will not be able to increase fuel prices above that maximum price, but they will be able to decrease them at any time throughout the day. It is giving Victorians certainty about fuel prices. It is also giving Victorians the most up-to-date information so that they can make an informed decision about where they go to fill up at the bowser. If you look at data from the ACCC in 2023, it demonstrated that had Victorians that year filled up at the bowser at the lowest price point throughout the year, they would have saved over $300. I know Victorians are looking at every dollar, and it is about giving Victorians the most up-to-date information.

I would also say on the supply issue that our colleague the Minister for Energy and Resources, Lily D'Ambrosio, has requested a meeting of energy ministers with Chris Bowen. I understand that that meeting is taking place on Friday. Yesterday the security and emergency management committee of cabinet, of which I am a member, met. While there is not a supply issue at the moment, we need to be ready for continuity to ensure that our essential services continue, because the reality is we do not know how long this conflict in the Middle East will last. I do thank the member for Laverton for raising this adjournment matter. It is important that we do what we can, notwithstanding the fact that a lot of these inflationary pressures are not of our making, to make sure that we help Victorians save money and we help Victorians ease cost-of-living pressures.

A number of other members raised matters for various other ministers, and they will be referred.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:30 pm.