Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 2 June 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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Tuesday 2 June 2026

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:03 pm, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Members

Member for Nepean

Swearing in

The SPEAKER (12:04): I advise the house that I have received the return to the writ issued on 13 March 2026, which states that Anthony Marsh has been elected for the electoral district of Nepean.

Anthony Marsh introduced and affirmed.

Business of the house

Standing and sessional orders

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (12:07): I move, by leave:

> That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to immediately allow:
>
> (1) the Premier to move a motion regarding the contribution and legacy of Neale Daniher AO;
>
> (2) the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Nationals, the Leader of the Greens, and the member for Pakenham to speak on the motion for a maximum of 5 minutes each;
>
> (3) at the conclusion of the contributions in (2), debate on the motion to be adjourned until tomorrow, in the name of Anthony Carbines.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Neale Daniher AO

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:08): I move:

> That this house expresses its deep sorrow at the passing of Neale Daniher AO – footballer, coach, Victorian of the Year, Australian of the Year and co-founder of FightMND – who faced motor neurone disease with extraordinary courage and grace, transforming personal hardship into hope for millions, and whose legacy will endure in Victoria and across the nation.

Barracking for Essendon in the 1980s was not like it is today. It is hard to believe, but at the time there was success on the field, there were finals to go out and celebrate and, more than that, there were the Daniher brothers, four of them, donned in the red and black. That is how Victorians like me first came to know Neale – as a footballer from country New South Wales who made his mark in the VFL and the AFL and then later as a coach for Melbourne for 223 games, including that grand final against his old club Essendon in 2000. Those of us who were there remember that as the Baby Bombers final.

As a coach, Neale was known as the Reverend – a deep thinker, a fierce competitor, a man who understood football but also who understood people. Earlier this year Neale kindly sent me a copy of his book *The Power of Choice*. That title says a lot about Neale, because Neale, more than most, understood that in life we do not get to choose everything that happens to us. We do not get to choose every hardship, every loss, every cruel turn, but we do get to choose how we meet it, how we carry it and what we do with the time we have. After he was diagnosed with motor neurone disease in 2013, Victorians came to know Neale in that way too – not just as a footballer or a coach, but as a man who made a choice to turn his own suffering into something that could help others, and through that choice his influence reached far beyond the football field.

In November 2024 I had the immense honour of presenting Neale with his Victorian Australian of the Year Award. By then MND had taken so much from him – his voice, his movement, things that most of us never have to think about – but it had not taken his spirit. When Neale came up onto the stage to accept that award, he rose from his wheelchair and stood proudly with that famous grin on his face, Jan by his side, and the whole room rose with him. It was a deeply powerful moment because everyone in the room that night knew what it had taken for Neale to stand strong and proud. There he was, standing, smiling, determined.

That is what came to define Neale in the eyes of so many across our state: an unwavering sense of optimism and hope, even in the face of the worst anyone could be asked to endure. He gave strength to other people, even when he had every reason to keep that strength for himself. He did not pretend it was easy. He did not hide the cruelty of it. No-one would ever have blamed Neale if he had stepped away. No-one would have blamed him if he had said, 'That's it. It's too much', because it was too much. It was cruel, unfair and relentless. But as we know, Neale made a very different choice. He chose to let people see what MND does, because he knew that if people understood it, they might help fight it.

For a long time a diagnosis of MND carried a terrible darkness: too few answers, too little awareness, too little research, too little that families could hold on to. Neale changed that. He made people look at it. He made people learn its name. Because of him there is now a stream of light where there was once very little. There is more research, more support, more awareness, more hope. Neale did that. As a result, thousands joined the annual Daniher's Drive, tens of thousands bought the blue beanie and countless more donated to FightMND. This is the army that Neale built to fight this cruel disease, and it will keep going to honour the man, to pay tribute to his legacy and to keep raising research funds to help beat MND.

No-one carries that fight alone, and no-one should think that Neale carried this alone, because you cannot talk about Neale's fight or the hope he gave to so many people without talking about Jan Daniher. To Jan, who fought beside him, who carried so much and who helped make so many of Neale's achievements possible, we thank you. To Neale's children and grandchildren, you loved him and were loved by him. He was a man that this state deeply admired, not just because of his football, not even because of his fight against MND. It is because of how he lived – with courage, with humour, with love and with the determination that made all of us better. Victoria thanks him. Victoria thanks you, Neale. In your honour, Neale, Victoria will keep fighting. Vale, Neale Daniher.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (12:14): I rise today to add my condolences and pay tribute to a truly remarkable Victorian, a man whose quiet courage and strength of character inspired millions, Neale Daniher. For many of us our legacies will be measured by trophies won or offices held. Neale Daniher's legacy is measured in something more intangible but also something far more profound. It is measured in hope – hope for those facing unimaginable adversity, hope for people confronting a devastating illness, hope for the families grappling with the unimaginable toll on their loved ones and hope that one determined individual can drive a national conversation to change how we tackle motor neurone disease.

Many Victorians first came to know Neale through his remarkable contributions to the great game of AFL. First, he was a talented player for the Bombers. He was one of four Daniher brothers to play for Essendon, starting out in 1979 and playing 82 matches in all. He won the Bombers best and fairest in 1981 and was named captain for the 1982 season at the very young age of 20, a testament to his skill, potential and ability to lead others. That courage and resilience in the face of adversity that he demonstrated later in life was evident during his playing career, too, as he confronted multiple injuries that limited his time on the field. Undeterred, Neale's love of the game continued as he stepped into coaching roles at Essendon, then Fremantle and then eventually at the Melbourne Demons. It was at the Dees that he picked up the name the Reverend, earned for his fiery and motivating speeches to his players. He coached 223 matches in all at Melbourne before serving as general manager of football at West Coast. Inducted into the halls of fame at Windy Hill and Melbourne, he is truly one of the greats

of our great game. Perhaps it was the length and depth of his career devoted to footy that made him such an effective advocate for the fight against the disease he would later confront.

Neale was diagnosed with motor neurone disease in 2013. We would all be forgiven in these circumstances for choosing to retreat from public life, but Neale chose differently. He chose to step forward, to step up. With extraordinary courage he transformed his personal battle into a national cause. Together with his family, friends, supporters and the wider footy community, he established FightMND and began one of the most successful fundraising and awareness campaigns Australia has ever seen. Through the Big Freeze at the MCG, countless community events, tireless advocacy and public engagement, Neale captured the attention and the generosity of Australians.

Neale started with an idea: to raise awareness about MND and to raise funds to help fight it, to cure it. What began as an idea became a movement through Neale's tenacity: a movement that has raised hundreds of millions of dollars for research, care and support; a movement that has accelerated the search for treatments and ultimately, we hope, a cure; and a movement that has given a voice to those living with MND and those who love and care for them. Many of us in this place have been dunked. We have had ice buckets thrown on us as part of Big Freeze events. Suffice to say, it takes someone pretty extraordinary to get people from all walks of life, from politicians to athletes to actors to pop stars, to be dunked into the ice.

It might be tempting to assume that what Neale built was easy, but it takes persistence, determination and years of hard work to establish a movement that captures the attention of a nation. It is easy to assume that everyone would have just gone out and bought a blue beanie for fun, that celebrities would have slid into ice baths of their own volition. But the truth of it is, the success of FightMND is a testament to Neale's relentless pursuit to push the cause forward at a time in his life when most people would step back. He raised $140 million to fight the beast, as he called it, of MND. But he did more than just that: he raised awareness among the Australian public, destigmatising a disease that affects thousands of Australians and their families. He gave a name to a disease that for too long people have suffered with largely unseen and in silence. Neale gave them a voice.

That is only part of Neale's story. Neale's greatest contribution to our state and to our country has been his personification of resilience, of grace and of dignity. In the face of adversity he demonstrated resilience. In the face of suffering he showed grace. In the face of a disease determined to diminish him, he displayed a dignity that inspired an entire nation. He showed us what courage is in the 21st century. He showed us that courage is the determination to keep moving forward, despite fear, despite pain, despite the unknown. Every day, Neale chose to show up. He chose to persist, to move forward, to further the cause he fought so hard for.

Neale penned three books, the third of which, *The Power of Choice*, was written after MND had taken his ability to speak. In it he writes:

> Life is part chance, part circumstance, part choice. You don't get to choose everything that happens to you, but you always get to choose who you become in response.

These words are as good to live by as any I have ever heard. Neale was truly among the best of us. He was a husband, father, brother, friend and role model – someone who faced one of life's cruellest challenges with a level of courage, grace and good humour that few of us could ever hope to match.

I want to take a few moments to acknowledge Neale and his wife Jan as members of the community in my electorate of Kew. Just two nights ago I was with the Kew Rovers, one of our fantastic local footy clubs, where Neale himself coached over the years. They were doing their Big Freeze fundraiser this weekend, as so many local footy clubs do across this country. The sadness at the ground on Sunday was palpable. We did not just lose a hero, we lost one of our own – a local, a friend, a neighbour, a family member. I have had the privilege to meet and get to know Jan Daniher through her involvement in the Kew Rovers. I want to pay tribute to Jan, who has shown an immense and quiet strength through her husband's illness. She is a person who has been by Neale's side, supporting him not just through

the challenges of MND but in his untiring efforts to drive change. She is herself an incredible example of resilience, strength and courage. She has worked just as hard to champion this cause, and I know she will continue to do so. I am certain that her strength will steer her and her family now, as they navigate their grief and confront a life without their beloved Neale.

Shortly we will hear from the member for Pakenham, and I want to pay tribute to her strength and incredible courage as she too confronts the beast. Emma is someone who commands the respect of everyone in this place for her persistence and incredible grace. Emma, on behalf of all of us, we know today is a hard day, but we stand with you every day.

Finally, I want to extend our deepest gratitude to Jan and to their children Bec, Ben, Lauren and Luke for sharing Neale with us and supporting him in his work. On behalf of the Liberal and Nationals coalition, I offer you our sincerest heartfelt condolences as you mourn his passing. And I say this to you: Neale's legacy will endure. It will live on in the researchers pursuing breakthroughs to treat MND, in the families whose diagnosis is yet to come and who will receive greater support because of Neale's work and in every future victory against the beast that his efforts have helped make possible. May we remember Neale Daniher not for the disease he fought but for the hope that he created. His legacy is one of hope, of resilience and of courage in the face of adversity. I quote again from his book *The Power of Choice*:

> The past is over. The future isn't promised. But what you do next is your choice for the taking. It's where the change happens. Choose wisely.

Vale, Neale Daniher. May he rest in peace.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:23): Today we pay tribute to Neale Daniher – not just a football great but a great Australian, admired across the country and deeply, deeply respected. His passing is a loss felt by all of us. Born on 15 February 1961 in West Wyalong and raised in Ungarie in the Riverina, he grew up as one of 11 children, the second of four sons in a proud farming family of wheat and sheep farmers. He began his schooling at St Joseph's catholic school in Ungarie before continuing at St Patrick's College in Goulburn and later Assumption College in Kilmore, that well-known football nursery. In his early years he played local football for Ungarie in the Northern Riverina league before progressing through Assumption and eventually making his VFL debut for Essendon in 1979 at just 18 years of age. He was forged on country footy fields and became one of regional Australia's great sporting stories – four Daniher brothers, who all went on to play VFL/AFL. Who could forget the four of them lining up in State of Origin together for New South Wales in 1990?

Neale never forgot where he came from, and he never lost those country values. He was shaped by regional Australia and spent his life reflecting the very best of it. At Essendon and later at Melbourne he made his mark not just as a player and coach but as someone who brought people together and earned respect through action rather than words. He was known as a leader who valued character as much as talent and who always put the team first. At the Dees he was known as Coach or the Reverend. Diagnosed with motor neurone disease – or the beast, as he called it – in 2013 and given just a few years to live, he faced that battle with courage, determination and dignity. In true country fashion, when adversity came he did not step back, he stepped up, co-founding FightMND and helping raise more than $140 million for research. He turned a deeply personal fight into a national cause, bringing Australians together in a way that very few people can. His message was simple but powerful: play on and fight on – words that captured exactly who Neale was. From the paddocks of Ungarie to the hearts of a nation, his legacy is one of courage, humility and service.

Neale Daniher will be remembered for his fight for MND sufferers and their families. Through FightMND he helped drive unprecedented national awareness, turning MND into a cause recognised right across Australia. At this point I also pay tribute to the member for Pakenham for her work in here and out of this place as well. Neale was clear the goal was never sympathy; it was action, research and ultimately a cure that would benefit future generations. Neale's leadership helped transform fundraising into a national movement, particularly through the Big Freeze at the MCG, which united

Australians in support of sufferers. He showed that even in the face of an incurable disease, you can create meaning, purpose and change for others. His enduring message was the importance of hope and action in the face of adversity. Neale once said:

> Life just gives you an opportunity and a handful of cards and it's up to you how you play them. And if you get a bad hand, you still have to look for the opportunity.

I note the comments from the family at the time of Neale's passing. They said:

> His wish was simple but powerful – to help create a world where no one has to face this disease. But beyond that he wanted to leave a legacy that says this "No matter the odds, no matter the diagnosis, we all have the power to fight, to smile, and to do.
>
> Because the mark of a person isn't what they say, "it's what they do".

To Jan and all the family and all those who loved or were inspired by Neale, the best way we can honour Neale Daniher is simple: play on and fight on.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (12:27): I rise on behalf of the Victorian Greens to speak on this condolence motion recognising the incredible life of Neale Daniher – footballer, coach, MND fighter, Australian of the Year. I only got to meet Neale once in this place. I think it was shortly before or after I was dunked in a freezing cold container of water. I have to say it is only someone like Neale – or perhaps you, Emma, the member for Pakenham – who could get me to do that. I hate the cold, but he was that kind of person that inspired people to follow him.

Although I only got to meet him once, the life of Neale Daniher actually loomed quite large in the Sandell family household when I was a kid. My dad was an absolutely mad Demons supporter and would sing – the kids, all of us – the 'grand old flag' before we went to bed at night. I knew those words; they are burnt into my memory. I knew them before I knew the words to my own team song, before I knew the words of 'Tigerland', and I think that I will die having those words burnt into my memory. We always knew the incredible kind of man that Neale Daniher was through Dad's stories.

Professional footballers often occupy some kind of godlike position in Melbourne society – deserved or otherwise – for being elite footballers. Talent and courage on the football field is of course a rare commodity, but rarer still is the ability to display that greater talent, courage and achievement outside a football career when the adoration may have faded. The Reverend was a nickname given to Neale on the football field but perhaps was more applicable to the role he ended up playing after his football career was over. Not only to be able to look the adversity of MND in the face but then to show such courage and optimism, and to bring hundreds of thousands of people into the fight alongside him, is something that very few people achieve. In particular, the personal support that he gave and the personal hope that he gave to people with MND and their families – that level of humanity and compassion towards others was a really wonderful thing.

My electorate has a lot of the big medical research institutes in it, and one of the great pleasures of my job is to be able to go and meet researchers all of the time and incredible scientists who are often working behind the scenes. I know that a lot of them say that they may not be able to do the work that they do if it was not for people like Neale going out there and rallying that support for work that happens in a lab or behind the scenes.

I know Neale's family carried so much of that work behind the scenes, as so many families do when a family member faces a serious disease or when a family member is simply in the public eye trying to do something big. I want to also express thanks and acknowledge the work that Neale's family did and the work I am sure all of the people around him will continue to do to fight MND. Should auld acquaintance be forgot? Vale, Neale Daniher.

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (12:30): Last week was a very difficult week for many Australians. We lost a true hero in Neale Daniher. I think all of us knew that it would come eventually, but that did

not make the news any less shocking or heartbreaking. Like so many people across the country, it hit me hard. To be honest, I do not know a lot about football, but I heard he was pretty good at it.

Today I am going to speak about the difference he made for people like me who are living with motor neurone disease. Back in 2014, when Neale publicly announced his diagnosis, many Australians had never heard of MND, let alone understood the devastating impact it has on individuals and their families. Together with his family, co-founders, friends and the incredible team behind FightMND, he changed that forever. Over the past 12 years Neale helped raise not only extraordinary funds for research, treatments and care but also something equally important – awareness. He helped Australians understand the reality of this disease while also giving hope to those living with it.

When I was first diagnosed Neale reached out to me personally. He did not have to, because he did not know me from a bar of soap, but he invited my partner Matt and me into his home. We sat with Neale and his beautiful wife Jan and had an honest conversation about what was ahead. He did not sugar-coat things. He told me what I needed to know about maintaining independence, about equipment I would need, planning ahead and the realities of this disease. But he also gave me and my family something incredibly important: he gave his kindness, generosity and hope. Since then I have heard the same story from countless others living with MND: Neale reached out, he made time and he took people under his wing.

To Jan, Bec, Ben, Lauren, Luke and the extended Daniher family, his carers and everyone at FightMND and beyond, our hearts are with you. Today is a day of sadness, but it is also a celebration of an extraordinary life. Neale Daniher may be gone, but his legacy, his courage, compassion and determination will live on for generations. Vale.

Debate adjourned until tomorrow in accordance with resolution of house today.

Condolences

Hon Robert Ian Knowles AO

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:33): I move:

> That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death of the Honourable Robert Ian Knowles AO and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as member of the Legislative Council for the province of Ballarat from 1976 to 1999, Minister for Aged Care from 1992 to 1999, Minister for Health from 1996 to 1999 and Minister for Housing from 1992 to 1996.

I never had the chance to serve with Robert in this place, but he being from Ballarat and I from Bendigo, in regional Victoria you often know who is who. You know what people stand for, you know what people care about and you know who does the work for their community and who holds the respect of others. Robert Knowles was one of those people. I knew his reputation as a thoroughly good, kind and decent man, someone who cared about his community, someone who cared about regional Victoria and someone who believed public service was about doing the work.

Robert began his working life as a farmer. He later worked with the Rural Finance and Settlement Commission, helping country communities farm, build homes and build their businesses and futures. When he first entered this Parliament he spoke with so much pride about Ballarat, its history, its industries, its culture and the strength of its people. He spoke about a perspective and a state that could not be understood from just sitting in Melbourne. That was something he carried with him – a belief that regional communities deserve to be seen, listened to and served properly. That belief shaped his contribution to public life. For 23 years Robert represented Ballarat Province in the Legislative Council. He served on committees in opposition and in government, and across housing, aged care and health he worked in areas of government that touched people in important moments and in vulnerable moments in their lives. A home, care for an older parent, a hospital when someone is sick and support when life becomes hard – Robert understood those responsibilities. As health minister he

helped drive changes in hospital care and home-based recovery. As aged care minister he worked in a portfolio that demanded patience, respect and dignity.

After leaving Parliament Robert continued serving and continued that determination to provide service to the public. His work continued in boardrooms, hospitals, schools, mental health organisations and community institutions. He served as chair of Mental Health Australia and the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia. He served with Beyond Blue, the Royal Children's Hospital campus council and Ballarat Grammar. Those contributions and the wideranging organisations he was involved in say something about the kind of contribution Robert wanted to continue to make to the Victorian community: steady, practical and useful, the sort of work that helps systems improve and helps people get better care and support. Our government too recognised that dedication with his appointment as chair of Grampians Health, and that role brought together his experience in health, his love for regional Victoria and the Grampians region and his belief that good services matter no matter where you live. When I spoke to Robert's son Bob after his father's passing, he told me that his dad was continuing to chair a board meeting from his hospital bed in the final weeks of his life, and that shows the kind of commitment he had to his community, his position and, again, that service to the public.

Robert Knowles will be remembered by many as a man who gave a great deal to his state. On behalf of the government and the Victorian community I extend our deepest condolences to Robert's wife Carmel and his children, grandchildren and extended family, who mourn his loss, and to his friends and his former colleagues and those in the Ballarat region and across Victoria who knew and respected him. Vale, Robert Knowles.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (12:38): It is with a heavy heart that I join in supporting this condolence motion for the late Rob Knowles, who passed away on Wednesday 29 April 2026. Rob was well known to many on our side of politics. Most who knew him well will tell you that he was truly one of the finest men to devote their life to our cause and to the people of Victoria. He had a kind heart, an impressive intellect and a formidable work ethic. A genuinely funny man, he was both delightful company and a genuine reformer in his work as a minister.

Robert Ian Knowles was born in 1947, the son of Robert Joseph Knowles and Dulcie. He was born in Ballarat and attended Ballarat technical school. On leaving school he worked on the family property and then joined the Rural Finance and Settlement Commission from 1972 to 1976 as a loans officer.

From an early age he joined and became an active member of the Liberal Party. He served as chairman of the Ballarat federal electorate council from 1972 to 1976, on the state executive with the Victorian Young Liberals and as a member of the party's state executive from 1973 to 1976. In 1976, at age 29, Rob was elected to the Legislative Council as a member for Ballarat Province. I note he was unusually young to be elected at that time, and clearly his impressive intellect and energy were already evident to those all around him. He served on various committees until his elevation to the front bench as shadow minister for the aged and for housing in 1991.

When the coalition won office in 1992 he became Minister for Housing and Minister for Aged Care. After the 1996 election he became Minister for Health and Minister for Aged Care and remained so until 1999. Rob was an exemplary minister in all three portfolios. He was highly respected around the cabinet table and a close confidant of the Premier of the day. He had the respect too of his opposition, especially those who sat with him in the Legislative Council, and he had the respect of many, if not most, of the key stakeholder and advocacy groups in his portfolios. At a national level he was the leading minister in the debates around the COAG ministerial tables. He was widely respected by all other ministers: federal and state, Labor and coalition. As health minister he shared many of the goals of his New South Wales Labor counterpart Craig Knowles. The descriptions of the two were simple: 'blue Knowles' and 'red Knowles'. During this time the then federal minister for health Michael Wooldridge displayed the greatest respect for Rob, even through some tough Medicare agreement negotiations where state and territory ministers banded together to pick on the feds. Rob fought for a better deal for Victorians and worked across party lines to do so.

Rob was a reforming minister in all portfolios. I asked some of the senior public servants who worked for Rob to give me their thoughts about Rob as their minister. Rosemary Calder, a former senior state and federal public servant, said of Rob that he must be:

> … acknowledged as a pre-eminent Health and Aged Care Minister who led changes and investments in Victorian services that established world-leading palliative care, rehabilitation and sub-acute health services as well as reforming and modernising public sector residential aged care and the retention and rebuilding rural health and aged care services. Those substantial changes are still providing Victorians with an un-paralleled range of health care services for older people and those with chronic health conditions.

Tony Cahir, a former director of housing policy in Victoria and later director of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, said:

> Rob Knowles brought to the housing portfolio some very straightforward but important philosophical starting points that were to shape his success as Minister for Housing. Firstly, he fully believed that secure housing was the very basis of economic opportunity, social cohesion and successful family life. Secondly, within the housing systems that operate in Australia, there is a group of people whose only real chance at such access rests in an effective, efficient and responsive government public housing system.

Outside his ministerial roles and post Parliament, Rob chose to continue his support and advocacy for better policy outcomes, particularly in the areas of aged care and health. Soon after leaving Parliament, he was appointed by the Howard government as the aged care complaints commissioner. This was the first of many appointments by governments of both persuasions at the federal and state level. He also took on a number of directorships in the charity and not-for-profit sectors. I feel it is important to put on the record Rob's diligent service beyond his time as a minister and a member of Parliament. In no particular order – and the list is not exhaustive – Rob served as commissioner of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission, appointed by Prime Minister Rudd; director and deputy chair of Beyond Blue; an inaugural national mental health commissioner; chair of the Royal Children's Hospital; chair of the Victorian Health Reform and Innovation Council; chair of Ballarat Grammar; director of DrinkWise; director of the Penington Institute; director at St John of God Health Care; director at Great Ocean Road Health; director at Silverchain health and aged care services; chair of Mental Health Australia; director at the Brotherhood of St Laurence; and most recently, chair of Grampians Health. This list will give members an appreciation of the breadth and depth of Rob's contribution to public life.

It is an extraordinary reflection upon a man who never gave up a life of service, particularly for those who needed extra support and care. Many of these organisations have paid special tribute to Rob since his passing, but I want to mark the words of the chair of Beyond Blue and former Governor, the Honourable Linda Dessau, who said Rob was:

> … a passionate champion of mental health reform, and a man who led with integrity and humanity.
>
> …
>
> He met every moment with wisdom and expertise built over decades in political and public life, but also the quiet steadiness of his other life as a farmer, father and grandfather – patient, grounded, and unflappable.

In 2007 Rob was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service of a high degree.

Over and above his contribution to public life, which I have just detailed, Rob was first and foremost a family man. Rob married his beautiful wife Carmel O'Rorke, and they were at all stages inseparable. Their children Edwina, Bob and George were truly central to Rob and Carmel, who worked hard to establish a loving and supportive family home. Members will appreciate how proud Rob was of his eight wonderful grandchildren. Despite his very busy life both in Parliament and post politics, Rob's main focus was Carmel, the children and, more recently, his grandchildren. As a family they will take a great deal of time to recover from this loss, and I extend my love to them all.

Personally, I often think of Rob's example when I reflect on the challenges of balancing the demands of a career in public life with the priorities of my own family. Rob's family grounded him and were a

guiding light and a moral compass throughout his career. It is a framework that served him well and one that I aim to emulate for as long as I serve in a public place. I also want to share with the house that I have a very personal connection to Rob. For seven years my father Ron Wilson was Rob's chief of staff, first in the housing portfolio and then in health. Dad always describes those years as the best of his career and counted Rob amongst his closest friends. They went through so much together: the Longford gas disaster in 1998 and the impact that had on the energy supply for hospitals and other health services, the salmonella outbreak of 1997, the establishment of the metropolitan hospital networks and the implementation of new funding formulas. Particularly significant was the work Rob did to bring mental health into the mainstream of the health portfolio.

Dad's view of Rob would be shared by so many. He was a man of great integrity. He was totally committed to making life better for every person, especially the vulnerable and the least advantaged. He was extraordinarily honest and transparent. Even those who did not support his side of politics had the greatest of respect for his abilities, his intelligence and his integrity. He was totally engaged in his portfolios and was determined to lead policy reform from the top down. He believed the role of the public service was to implement government policy, not to produce it. He would regularly return ministerial briefings from the department with a two-word annotation: 'Try again.'

On a much lighter note, Rob had a great sense of humour. I can advise the house that on many Sundays when Dad went into the ministerial office to prepare with Rob for the week ahead, I would accompany him. I have a very vivid memory of playing one of my favourite games at the time with Rob. It was Blue Heelers, inspired by the TV show of that name, and probably the beginning of my deep respect for Victoria Police. I remember sitting in Rob's ministerial office conducting a very serious interview with him, declaring him guilty and then duly arresting him at the end. Rob found the whole charade hilarious, and I can still remember the laugh lines on his face.

Vale, Rob Knowles, gentleman; devoted husband, father and grandfather; reformer; perennial advocate for those less fortunate; champion for Ballarat; Geelong Football Club tragic; and friend to so many. I am certain that great memories of this great man will endure here in Victoria.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (12:48): I rise to join the condolence motion for the Honourable Robert Ian Knowles AO. In conversation with past colleagues of Rob's, the recurring descriptions were 'nice guy', 'decent' and 'honest'. A Ballarat local who retained lifelong friendships, his post-politics appointments were as a long-serving chair of the Royal Children's Hospital between 2012 and 2022 and at Grampians Health as chair since 2024. There was recognition across different governments that he was a huge contributor who could be counted on to always put the health and wellbeing of patients, their families and staff first, come what may. Be under no illusions: to lead a place with the complexity and the need for deft handling of the RCH, loved by all Victorians, while managing myriad interests, aspirations, demands and expectations was something that Rob did with great respect, and his achievements there are very well recognised. His earlier work in the Rudd federal government's health and hospitals commission in 2008 also speaks to his national influence on health, aged care and mental health policy.

Friends I spoke to also recalled his love for the family farm at Clarendon, where he continued his lifelong involvement. It is also a place that some said to me perhaps interrupted some of his aspirations as a younger person in his schooling and the like, but returning to the farm in Ballarat to work was fortunate for Victorians because it brought him to this place with the opportunity to be elected to Parliament, where he served for some 23½ years, from 1976 to 1999, and also as a minister across the health, housing and aged care portfolios from 1992 to 1999.

Personally, as Parliamentary Secretary for Health after the 2018 election, and during his time as the RCH chair, it was always good to come across Rob. He was generous with his time and his advice. There are some past members of this place that you are happy not to bump into, apparently, but Rob was never one of those people. Whether it was about health policy and the like or happenings at the

Cattery, he was always happy to talk about them. Over the years he was someone you would always bump into at Kardinia Park, and he was always up for a conversation on September possibilities.

It has been remarked upon that there were – I think it is reasonable to touch on it – aspirations perhaps, but certainly plans in different ways, for Rob to join this place around 1999. I think it is still fair to say that there was significant regard from the leader of his party and others in his party for him, that there were perhaps considerations and musings on that. I know that the former Premier touched on that in some of his public commentary on the passing of Rob. But perhaps Parliament's loss at that time was the broader community's gain, given the significant contributions that he was able to make for so many decades – an acknowledgement of and testament to those achievements being his Order of Australia. He was a nice guy: decent, honest, and if I could add, selfless, jovial and good natured, and certainly generous with his time and his contributions to Victorians. My condolences to his family. Vale, Rob Knowles.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:52): I rise on behalf of the Nationals to also pay tribute and extend our condolences on the passing of Robert Ian Knowles AO, a man who dedicated his life to public service in this state. In an article in the *Herald Sun* in 1999 Rob Knowles was asked to describe himself in a few words, and he chose 'ordinary, committed and honest'. I think that speaks volumes in itself. On his passing, his Ballarat contemporary – part of the Ballarat mafia perhaps – Steve Bracks actually acknowledged Mr Knowles as 'one of the good guys'. Indeed he said:

> He was a great contributor to many governments over a long period of time and he'll be sorely missed.

That says a lot about how Rob Knowles was seen across the parliamentary chamber.

Born on 4 July 1947, Rob Knowles leaves behind a legacy defined by service, leadership and an enduring commitment to both his local community and the people of Victoria, and as the Leader of the Opposition said, the underprivileged and vulnerable. He began his working life as a farmer at Clarendon in 1964 and also worked as a loans officer with the Rural Finance and Settlement Commission before entering public life in the Legislative Council as the member for Ballarat in 1976. Like the Premier, who did not serve with Rob, and I certainly did not either, I remember as a young WIN TV reporter in Ballarat in the 1990s coming across Rob. It does make us all feel a little bit older when we are acknowledging the passing of someone who we were working with in those days.

Throughout his time in Parliament Rob served in a range of senior roles, including as Minister for Housing, Minister for Health and Minister for Aged Care, portfolios that placed him at the centre of some of the most important social policy reforms and challenges of the time. As Minister for Health and Minister for Aged Care he was responsible for major reforms and decisions affecting hospitals, aged care services and broader health systems across Victoria, a role that he continued well after he finished in politics. To that extent, I was interested to note in the Ballarat *Courier's* reporting of Mr Knowles's death that former Premier Jeff Kennett said the following:

> It is true to say that he probably had more influence on me, or I respected his advice more than any … of my very talented colleagues in government … and that was because he was firstly a listener, he was not excitable, and as a result of that, he was able to give very frank and thoughtful comment, suggestions, and, when necessary, criticism …

I think anyone who could give criticism, who could ensure that his view was listened to by Jeff Kennett, must have been a very special person indeed. As the Leader of the House indicated, and as Mr Kennett also acknowledged in the same article, Mr Knowles was his preferred successor and was set to join this place. We all know what happened, though, in 1999.

After leaving politics Mr Knowles continued his public life, as I said, and had a number of positions, including appointments by Labor governments. Most recently he had been chair of Grampians Health since 2024, but previous positions included commissioner of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission and the National Mental Health Commission and chair of the Victorian Health Innovation and Reform Council and the Royal Children's Hospital board. He also served as a director

on and chair of Ballarat Grammar school board and was made a life governor of the school in 2019 as acknowledgement of his contribution.

Across all of the roles that Rob Knowles worked in, he was recognised for his integrity, his calm judgement and his willingness to work constructively across sectors, across perspectives and across the aisles of politics. He understood that strong communities rely on strong institutions, and he dedicated his post-parliamentary life to strengthening those institutions. Those who worked with him described him as a man of decency, intellect and quiet determination – someone who led with principle rather than ego. His contribution to Victoria was not limited to one sector or one period of time but spanned all of those areas I mentioned: health, education, mental health, aged care and community services. On behalf of the Nationals, I extend my condolences to Carmel and his family – his children Edwina, Bob and George and eight grandchildren. Vale, Rob Knowles.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:57): I rise to pay my condolences to the Honourable Robert Ian Knowles AO. A lot can be said about somebody who dedicates their whole life to service, to community, and we know as members of Parliament it is what we strive to do every day, albeit in public office. We all get to attend a number of different funerals, and certainly attending Rob's funeral and seeing how packed out it was, I saw people from all walks of life – former members of Parliament, former members of the various organisations that Rob worked with and certainly locals from Ballarat and throughout the region – all paying huge respect to a man that was really larger than life.

But I think for me, leaving aside all of the accolades and the work that Rob did both in this place and beyond this place, the thing that really sticks with me is his family because of the way that his family revered him and spoke of him. With all the life that he endured and the dedication he had to his political life, he always had time for his family, and he made that the centre in everything in his life. He married Carmel in 1982, almost in – well, it was in – the middle of an election period. He got married, and a lot of people said, 'Well, what about the honeymoon?' And Rob said, 'No, look, I'm dedicated to this campaign,' and he went off campaigning and said, 'We'll have our honeymoon at the end of the election period,' which I am sure they did. The children – Edwina, Rob and George – just spoke so wonderfully about Rob; the grandchildren just sat there so attentively looking at those that spoke about their grandfather in their dedication to him.

The fact that Rob served in the portfolios of aged care, health and housing I think was absolutely true of him. If you are going to put somebody in certain portfolios that reflect you, I think they were absolutely perfect for Rob in that he was the person that had the biggest heart and had the biggest care in the world for others. Those portfolios suited him absolutely, and you can totally understand why at the end of Rob's political life he decided to continue his work in those areas. Premier Jeff Kennett at the time said, and repeated in the service, that people contribute so much. And as much as Rob did for him – as the Leader of the Nationals said, as one of the most trusted individuals and most hardworking members of Parliament and as such a huge, huge achiever and contributor – it was said that his work after Parliament and the contributions he made were sometimes even more than those he made in the Parliament itself. I think that is something for us all to reflect on in terms of what we do in how we leave this place.

There were talks that 23 years is a long time as a member of Parliament. Both Jeff Kennett and Rob started at the Parliament and finished at the Parliament at the same time, but Rob was not intending to finish at that particular time.

Jacinta Allan interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Let us stick with Rob, shall we, Premier? There were always bigger plans, because of the great capacity that Rob had and the great leadership qualities that Rob had, for him to take over afterwards. There was the idea of Rob to move from the upper house to the lower house, and unfortunately he did not retain his seat. As Jeff Kennett said at the funeral, he was not necessarily revered shortly after for the fact that he had encouraged him to move down to the lower house and he

did not continue his life in Parliament, but reflecting on what Jeff did for Rob, it was probably the best present he could have given him, because he got to continue on his life and contribute and change so many other people's lives, particularly in health – what he did with the Royal Children's Hospital, what he did with men's health, what he did with Beyond Blue and in so many different areas, including working on reform in aged care. He was a Ballarat Grammar boy that left school at 15 to help work on the family farm but still went on in a leadership role serving at Ballarat Grammar.

Rob, there is no doubt, left this place in a much better place than he found it. His legacy will go on for generations and generations. We all thank Rob for his contribution. Vale, Rob Knowles.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (13:02): I thank the house for its indulgence to say a few words on Rob Knowles. As a young 20-something Liberal Party member, I was lucky enough to work in the office of the Premier at the latter period of the first term of the Kennett government right until the end of the second term at the 1999 election, with a brief interlude to the federal scene. In that time I came to know many of the ministers in the government and of course get to know some better than others. Rob Knowles was a gentleman. He was self-effacing, he was kind and he was thoughtful. The character of someone is not defined by how they act when they win, it is defined by how they act when they do not. He was a gentleman the first time I met him, he was a gentleman as a minister to his staff and to those around him and he was a gentleman when he was unexpectedly defeated in 1999.

Since Rob's passing I have spoken to a few people from that period of Liberal politics, and it is fair to say the consensus is that in the chaos of what was a reformist government, Rob was the voice of wisdom and restraint. I understand even Jeffrey admitted this in his eulogy. Premier Kennett never argued with Rob, as he would say, but Rob would make his feelings known directly and respectfully. When he spoke sternly it was like a principal or a parent giving you advice you knew had to be taken. For Jeffrey to know this vocal tone of Rob's was not to be ignored said something. When Rob spoke it was with purpose and intent, and it was more often than not wise and considered.

He took on the health portfolio at a difficult time and settled it down. He was innovative. The first policy for carers in Australia was launched and enacted under his direction and watch as health minister. Telehealth came about in Victoria first and under Rob Knowles as its minister. At the time our opponents said it would ruin the fabric of the health system. Now it is considered fundamental to it, but Rob saw that about telehealth and knew it. He pressed on and introduced it, to latter national adoption from all sides.

The Kennett government is often referred to and judged as uber conservative in every way, and that is just not true. It was on social policy certainly not – in fact far from it. Rob Knowles was a key part of that direction and in fact had Premier Kennett in lockstep with him on almost all of these reforms. It is why when he was out of politics he became the chair of the Brotherhood of St Laurence – not the likely step for a former Liberal minister. He was active with Beyond Blue and the Penington Institute, amongst others. He was committed to helping disadvantaged Victorians, whether in or out of politics, and was a fierce advocate for them. No wonder he was held in such high esteem in the community sector.

Premiers and their private officers can sometimes have wild ideas that the rest of the ministry holds their breath on when they find out about them. In the Kennett era those sent in to convey reality to us were usually Mark Birrell, Petro Georgiou or Rob Knowles. It is fair to say we never argued or debated any of them, particularly Petro Georgiou, when the reality checks came. But Rob, as opposed to Petro, had a calming and reassuring way of making the enthusiasm in level 1, 1 Treasury Place, see reason.

As I said earlier, Rob was a gentleman. His staff loved him, those around him respected him and the Liberal Party admired him. He was happy as the government's deputy leader in the Legislative Council but was convinced to stand for the lower house at the 1999 election, a plan that did not pay off. Victoria then lost someone that would have been a magnificent premier, and had those circumstances gone differently, he would have been one. However, as I said, while he was defeated, so many other

organisations then benefited from his wise counsel, his advice and his humble intelligence. Vale, Rob Knowles.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (13:06): I rise to pay tribute to the Honourable Robert Ian Knowles AO, universally known as Rob. Rob Knowles's background was not necessarily that of a typical Liberal, but in many ways he exemplified the very best of what the Liberal Party stands for. Rob's dad Robert died while Rob was young, so he stepped up and helped to run the family farm. He attended Ballarat North Tech. He left school at year 10 but went on to complete matriculation himself.

Nothing was handed to Rob Knowles. He worked, and he worked to create opportunity. He farmed in Clarendon, south-east of Ballarat. It was, as one of his former colleagues described it, the less fashionable end of the Western District. Rob Knowles was certainly no landed grazier. He was a hard worker who threw himself into making the farming business a success. He had an appetite for learning and for discussing farming and the issues of the day, so he became very involved with the young farmers organisation and also the Young Liberals. He became known as a very strong debater and a strong advocate for agriculture. This brought him to the attention of some of the movers and shakers in the Wannon and Corangamite Liberals, and Rob went on to become chair of the Ballarat federal electorate council and was marked as a rising star. In his late 20s he was preselected and then elected to the Legislative Council to represent Ballarat Province. There was another bright young MP who came into the Parliament at that election, a fellow by the name of Jeffrey Gibb Kennett. The two were to become very good friends and colleagues over their 23 years serving in this place together, and Jeff would play an important role in Rob's ministerial career.

Rob was a great debater and a clear thinker. His Liberal colleague Haddon Storey always said that Rob would have made a very fine lawyer; I think it was meant as a compliment. While it took some 15 years for Rob to be elevated to the front bench, he was widely liked by colleagues across the Parliament. He took on the role of whip in the Council, where he was respected and praised for his organisational skills but also for the personal connection that he built with members across the chamber. In fact, being a country Liberal, Rob Knowles arguably did more than anyone to see the creation of the coalition between the Liberal Party and the Nationals. He was described by colleagues at the time as being the glue that kept the coalition together, because he was so well regarded by Nationals MPs. I think this was reflected by the number of Nationals who attended Rob's state funeral. Rob was also highly respected by Labor MPs, as exemplified by Caroline Hogg's attendance at Rob's service.

Rob served as deputy leader in the other place and was shadow minister for the aged and housing in the lead-up to the 1992 election. After the election Rob was sworn in as Minister for Housing and Minister for Aged Care in his good friend Jeff Kennett's government. After the 1996 election Rob relinquished the housing ministry for the health portfolio. Rob was an activist minister, a reforming minister, not just a manager. He stepped up because he cared deeply about the impact that better health and aged care policy would deliver for millions of Victorians. Strengthening palliative care, helping Victorians at their most vulnerable, was a landmark of Rob's tenure in the health ministry, and everything he did was underlined by his decency and humanity. Former Treasurer Alan Stockdale regarded Rob as being one of the strength points of the whole coalition government over its seven-year term.

Just as Jeff Kennett entered Parliament with Rob, he may have had a hand in his departure from it. Jeff was very keen for Rob to move to the Legislative Assembly at the 1999 election and to run for the seat of Gisborne. But as history shows, that move was not a success, and so Rob Knowles's parliamentary career came to an end after 23 years.

For many MPs that would have been a full stop on a significant career of service, but for Rob Knowles it was just the beginning. Rob took his experience and his passion for health and mental health to a large number of post-parliamentary roles, including, as we have heard, chairing the Royal Children's Hospital board for a decade, serving as a board member and then deputy chair of Beyond Blue and

serving in a myriad of other roles. For this lifetime of service Rob was awarded the Officer of the Order of Australia in 2007.

My leader obviously has a keen eye for very good quotes, because she stole my thunder, but it does bear repeating. The current chair of Beyond Blue, the former Governor the Honourable Linda Dessau AC, said that Rob:

> … met every moment with wisdom and expertise built over decades in political and public life, but also the quiet steadiness of his other life as a farmer, father and grandfather – patient, grounded, and unflappable.

The CEO of Beyond Blue Georgie Harman added:

> Rob was a gentleman, in every sense of the word. How lucky we are to have known him.

From every personal dealing I have been fortunate enough to have had with Rob, I can only agree – what a life, what a legacy, what a good and decent man. To Rob's wife Carmel and to his children, grandchildren and many, many friends, we offer our heartfelt condolences. Vale, Rob Knowles.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (13:11): I rise today to acknowledge the passing of the Honourable Rob Knowles AO and to recognise the lasting contribution he made to regional Victoria and communities through education and health, most recently with organisations in my own electorate such as Great Ocean Road Health and the nearby Grampians Health.

Rob represented a large part of Polwarth when first elected in 1976 up until boundary changes in 1984. In his maiden speech he spoke of one of the biggest local issues at the time in Polwarth, which was the need for a sustainable timber industry in the Otways region. I first came to know Rob Knowles as an aspiring political apparatchik, when I met with him before he appointed me to the then Colac District Hospital board in 1999. It was a wonderful opportunity for a 26-year-old, but it also reflected Rob's reputation for supporting new ideas and thinking in an area entrenched by old ideas and practices. I lowered the average age by about 50, I think, at the time.

Rob was someone who understood country communities not just in theory but through lived experience. He knew that in places like Apollo Bay, Lorne, Colac and across the south-west, access to health care was not just about policy but about people, distance and trust in the local services. After his time in Parliament Rob did not step away from the commitment; instead he leaned into it through his work on regional health boards, including Great Ocean Road Health. He played a practical and hands-on role, ensuring that small coastal communities could continue to access high-quality local care.

It was interesting for me as the local state MP to watch him lead an amalgamation of two competing health services in Lorne and Apollo Bay, where he helped work a magic that few thought was possible, with the bringing together of Lorne Community Hospital and Otway Health. This amalgamation highlighted the respect on all sides of the debate that was held for Rob. Rob recognised that long-term sustainability required more than goodwill – it required strong governance, integration and planning. His contribution to the bringing together of services along the coast helped secure a future where health care could be delivered more effectively without losing the identity and connection that was so important to the local communities.

Those who worked with Rob often speak not just of his experience but of his approach. He listened, he mentored, he respected local knowledge and he made people feel that their voice mattered. Rob's legacy is not just in reforms or structures but in the confidence that he helped build in the idea that people living outside metropolitan areas deserve the same quality of care and that it can be delivered in ways that reflect the character of those communities. On behalf of my Polwarth community I offer sincere condolences to Rob's family. His contributions will not be forgotten. Vale, Rob Knowles.

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

Hon Norman Henry Lacy

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (13:15): I move:

> That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death of the Honourable Norman Henry Lacy and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as member of the Legislative Assembly for the districts of Ringwood from 1973 to 1976 and Warrandyte from 1976 to 1982, and as Minister for the Arts from 1979 to 1982 and Minister of Educational Services from 1981 to 1982.

Norman Lacy lived a life defined by service and belief. Before he entered this Parliament he served as an Anglican minister. He served at St Mary's Caulfield, St Stephen's Richmond and St John's Healesville. That was a different kind of public life, not one lived here in this chamber but one lived with people, with families and communities, in moments of joy and also in moments of hardship. It is not too hard to see how that experience would shape a person who continued to serve the community here in this place.

In 1973 Norman was elected as the member for Ringwood. Three years later he became the member for Warrandyte. He would go on to serve in the Hamer and Thompson governments, holding responsibilities in the portfolios of education and the arts. Those portfolios say something about the work of government at its best. Education is about giving people opportunity, the arts are about giving people expression, and both speak to the kind of state we are today, a place where children are supported to learn, a place where creativity is valued, a place where public institutions are built not just for one generation but for the next.

As Minister for the Arts Norman served during an important period in Victoria's cultural life. From the Victorian Arts Centre to Film Victoria, the Victorian College of the Arts, the Australian Children's Television Foundation and the Heide Museum of Modern Art, he played a big role in many of the institutions that still form part of Victoria's story today. It is a reminder that the decisions made in government can last well beyond a single term or a single Parliament.

In education Norman was involved in reforms to the administration of the education department. He was also connected with the special assistance program and compulsory physical education in government schools. That work was practical. It was about classrooms and students, teachers and families; the systems behind our modern education system; the extra support that a child might need; and the health and wellbeing of young people in this state. After leaving Parliament Norman continued a long and varied career. Public life was just one chapter in his story; his contribution continued well beyond this place.

On behalf of the Victorian government and the people of Victoria, I extend our deepest condolences to Norman's wife Gayle, to his children, grandchildren and broader extended family and to his friends, former colleagues and all those who knew and loved him. Vale, Norman Lacy.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (13:19): I rise in support of this condolence motion for the late Norman Lacy, who passed away in May. Norman made a significant contribution to this state as a minister in the Hamer government, overseeing some remarkable achievements in the arts and the education portfolios.

Born in 1941 just down the road from this place, in Richmond, Norman lived a full life of diverse service to the people of Victoria. Norman lived at Ridley College at the University of Melbourne while he achieved his leaving certificate before studying theology. He was then ordained a deacon in the Anglican Church, serving parishes in Caulfield, Richmond and Healesville. It was during his tenure as vicar at St John's Healesville that he joined the Liberal Party and secured preselection for the seat of Ringwood.

He served in this place as the member for Ringwood and later for Warrandyte between 1973 and 1982. During his parliamentary career he served as Minister for the Arts, Assistant Minister of Education and Minister of Educational Services. As Minister for the Arts Norman left an enduring mark on

Victoria's cultural landscape. He oversaw the final phase of construction of the Victorian Arts Centre, the process of which was started under Rupert Hamer himself when the former Premier served in the arts portfolio. Norman was responsible for installing the lightning conductor rod at the pinnacle of the now famous arts centre spire on 20 October 1981. The spire is now of course a key Melbourne landmark and the arts centre the beating heart of Melbourne's thriving arts and culture scene. In his capacity as arts minister Norman also played a key role in the establishment of the Heide Museum of Modern Art. These institutions have become an integral part of Victoria's cultural identity, fostering creativity, learning and artistic excellence for generations of Victorians.

Norm's legacy in the education portfolio is also significant. At a time when our education system was often dominated by centralised decision-making, Norm championed a model that empowered local school communities. He was a strong advocate for school councils and greater parental involvement in education, recognising that schools are strongest when families, teachers and communities work together in partnership. His ideas helped shape approaches to school governance and administration that remain influential in schools today. He was also a strong advocate for physical education in schools, helping to establish PE as an integral part of the curriculum in all Victorian schools, and so generations of Victorian kids have Norman to thank for being able to look forward to a run outside during PE at least once a week.

But perhaps one of Norman's most significant achievements in the education portfolio was his establishment of the special assistance program across primary schools in Victoria. The program introduced the concept of special assistance resource teachers. These special assistance resource teachers worked in schools to identify students who needed additional support. They assisted in the diagnosis of learning difficulties and then worked to develop and implement appropriate support programs to support those students who needed extra help. These roles also worked alongside teachers and parents to support student learning. This type of thinking was ahead of its time and reveals a man who thought long and hard about how we support all children to succeed in education and in life, regardless of their disability or disadvantage. These are still issues we confront as a society today. How do we best support all of our kids to achieve their best in our schools? How do we identify and offer extra help and support for kids who need it? How do we support our teachers by giving them the tools they need so they can best do their jobs and thrive at work? How do we make sure schools are integrated into their local communities? How do we make sure parents are involved in their children's education? Norman was contemplating these questions some 50 years ago, and his ideas show a man who was compassionate, who was persistent and who cared deeply for the future of our children and our state.

Norman had this to say in his first speech of the role he sought to play as a parliamentarian:

> We are seeking first and foremost to build a liberal society in which each individual has the opportunity of achieving fulfilment. This will be possible only when every man, woman and child, irrespective of his social and economic background … has maximum freedom of choice in his own life.

Norman was clearly a man who approached public life with seriousness and with purpose. He sought at every opportunity to serve others, particularly those who faced additional challenges and disadvantage. Many of the institutions he established continue to endure today, a testament to his commitment to serve the people of Victoria.

On behalf of the Liberals, I extend my sincere condolences to Norm's family, his friends, his former colleagues and all who knew him. May they take comfort in knowing that his life was a life of meaningful service and lasting impact. Norm Lacy leaves behind a legacy that can be seen by anyone who happens to walk down St Kilda Road today. Victoria is better for his service, and his many contributions to our state will not be forgotten. May he rest in peace.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (13:24): I too rise to speak, on behalf of the Nationals, in acknowledging the contribution of Norman Lacy. Norman Lacy was the member for Ringwood from 1973 to 1976 and the member for Warrandyte from 1976 to 1982. He served as the Minister of

Educational Services, Minister for the Arts and Assistant Minister of Education in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the governments of Hamer and Thompson.

Norman Lacy was an Anglican minister, as the Leader of the Opposition said, serving at St Mary's Caulfield, St Stephen's Richmond and St John's Healesville, which of course earned him the pithy headline, when he became a minister, that said, 'Ministry to Ministry'. He was clearly a man of God and a man who was committed to the underprivileged, the poor and the disadvantaged throughout our community. He undertook theological studies at Ridley College from 1962 to 1964 and was ordained as a deacon in 1964 and as a pastor in 1964 at St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne.

He went on to have a long and varied career in Victoria in public service spanning Parliament, education, the arts and industry. His career was notably diverse, including work as an apprentice plumber, an Anglican priest, as I said, a Liberal parliamentarian, a management educator and an information technology industry executive. His time in Parliament continued his service to those particularly underprivileged, and some of his comments in his inaugural speech in 1973 reflect things that I think we all should be reminded of. There had been a federal election not too long earlier, and he referred to the election as being 'a divisive instrument' and said that he now would be working in this house on behalf of the people who had elected him:

> … as a community of people, many of whom are living in desperate need … These people are looking to us now, in hope and anticipation, to act on their behalf. It is, therefore, the responsibility of both Governments –

that is, the federal and state governments –

> to accept what is good in each other's programme and cooperate unreservedly to ensure that good is brought to its appropriate culmination.

Which I think is something, particularly in these febrile days between federal and state and across the political aisle, that we should all remember. Norman went on to say in his contribution about the intentions of the then government:

> We are seeking first and foremost to build a liberal society in which each individual has the opportunity of achieving fulfilment. This will be possible only when every man, woman and child, irrespective of his social and economic background or intellectual and physical handicaps, has maximum freedom of choice in …

their own lives. Again I think they are important issues that we should all remember. In closing, I quote from the obituary in the *Age* for Norman Henry Lacy. His family stated:

> Norman lived life to the full, with several interesting careers, a long list of wonderful overseas trips, and a delight in the achievements and exploits of his beloved children and grandchildren.

Oh, that we all share such a life. Our condolences to his wife Gayle, daughters Fiona, Sharon and Kirsten and son Henry. Vale, Norman Lacy.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (13:28): Today I rise to honour the life of the Honourable Norman Henry Lacy, and I do so with a particular sense of connection. Norm was the very first member for Warrandyte elected in 1976 when the seat was new, and I of course have the privilege of being its current member. Although I never had the chance to personally meet Norm, given there have been four members for Warrandyte since Norm, I have been generously assisted in preparing these remarks by Peter Falconer, the former federal member for Casey, who worked alongside Norm at the electorate level for many years. I thank Peter for his assistance.

Norm leaves behind a remarkable family, and on behalf of this house I extend our deepest condolences to all of them – to his wife Gayle; to Norman's three daughters with Ruth, Fiona, Sharon and Kirsten; and to Norman and Gayle's son Henry; to his six grandchildren, Hamish, Sasha, Mairead, Finn, Eljay and Archer; and to his sister Janette. Norm's love for his family was, in the words of one of his daughters, limitless, and we honour that love today.

Norman Henry Lacy was born in Richmond in October 1941, the son of a self-employed plumber. Tragedy came early in his life when Norm lost his mother to cancer when he was just 14. In his

family's words, he bore that loss with the stoicism of a working-class lad of the 1950s, throwing himself into sport and going on to later captain the Victorian under-16 basketball team. Four years later, after years of his father's ill health, Norm lost him too, and was orphaned at 18. As he himself reflected, he knew then that he was alone in the world. From that beginning, Norm built a life of extraordinary breadth. He was, in turn, a plumber's apprentice, an Anglican priest, a parliamentarian, a cabinet minister, a management educator, a director of an Australian government training centre in Beijing and a senior executive in the information technology industry. Few public lives encompass so many worlds.

In May of 1973, at the age of 31, Norm was elected as the member for Ringwood, as the youngest member of the new Parliament. It was in 1976 that he became the inaugural member for Warrandyte, where he held the seat for three terms. A fortnight ago I had the honour of attending Norm's funeral, where his daughter Sharon Lacy shared a beautiful summation of Norm's work, saying that:

> Norm came to parliamentary life with what he himself described as classical liberal and conservative philosophies, built on freedom, free enterprise, and the traditional family unit. He was the product of the postwar era. His own life had shown him that upward mobility was possible through hard work and seizing opportunity.

It was after the 1979 election when, at the age of 38, Norm became the youngest member of the Hamer ministry. He held the portfolios of Minister for the Arts, Assistant Minister of Education and later the Minister of Educational Services. As the Minister for the Arts, Norm was responsible, as has been said, for the construction of the Victorian Arts Centre. He also notably established the Victorian Arts Centre Trust, created Film Victoria, oversaw the establishment of the Heide Museum of Modern Art and helped bring the Australian Children's Television Foundation into being. Norm also reconstituted the Victorian College of the Arts to better provide for the preparation of young people to enter upon ideas as professional artists. In fact it was the school where his daughter Kirsten ended up studying ceramics and where his grandchild Eljay now studies sculpture.

But Norm reflected for himself that for all of the major projects, the towers and the trusts, what gave him the deepest satisfaction were the policies that touch people at the street level, playground level and classroom level. There are a few examples which I will share today, the first being the school crossing supervisor program, the so-called lollipop ladies, introduced by the Hamer government in 1975. As a local member, Norm threw himself into the rollout with local councils and schools across Warrandyte. He issued an enthusiastic press statement listing the equipment that supervisors had been issued with: safety vest, all-weather jacket and stop–go baton. This legacy would follow him for years. He would arrive at an electorate function and someone would always call out, 'Didn't hear you coming, Norm. Should've blown a whistle.' He took it all in good humour, and as was often reported back to branch meetings, you did not read about bad accidents at school crossings anymore. The program worked.

The second was the introduction of compulsory physical education in Victorian government schools. At least 20 minutes of supervised exercise for early years of primary school was built on what many schools were already doing voluntarily. That made it consistent across the state. It earned him more friendly ribbing. He would often be asked, 'Done your 20 minutes, Norman? How many push-ups did you manage this morning, Norm?' And it is said that Norm was once seen launching a speech with a few stretches and toe touches, just to prove he was keeping up with the kids. For this work he was later recognised with a fellowship by the Australian Council for Health Physical Education and Recreation.

The third achievement – and the one Norm considered himself as the most important – was the establishment of the special assistance program in Victorian primary schools. Norm said of these ground-level initiatives that they gave him the chance to talk with teachers and parents about practical things without political risk and without ideological baggage. People responded to them. He used to say that he received more spontaneous comments at the school gate about the lollipop ladies and the PE program than he ever did about the arts centre. Together, these reforms – street, playground and

classrooms – speak to the kind of member he was: not chasing headlines but quietly improving the everyday life of the community he served.

Beyond Parliament, Norm was a father and a grandfather. His daughter Sharon, who spoke so beautifully at the funeral, wryly recalled the tall tales politicians used to get away with in the era before social media and 24-hour news cycles. His daughters found one clipping from a newspaper in 1973 featuring a photo of the new member with his young family and their Shetland pony. However, as Sharon noted, none of his daughters can remember ever actually owning a Shetland pony. His family remembers Norm as fabulously fun and shared that, like most politicians, Norm was big on inducements. If the children behaved themselves in church on a Sunday, they got a Violet Crumble on the way home. If they helped out in handing out how-to-vote cards at an election, they got a Big M as well. In Parliament he let his children do cartwheels in Queens Hall when the guards were not watching. He likened the politics of the cabinet room to the story tales of the Brothers Grimm. He was a man that was mischievous and irreverent. He was a man with an open mind and a passion for new information.

In closing, his family told us he was still learning new things on YouTube right up until his death. By example, he showed his children resilience and tenaciousness. He showed them that it was okay to be sad, that sometimes you lose and that graciousness is the better measure of success. He made sure that they knew he was proud of them. He taught them to be brave and to see the world. He had created his own opportunities, and he urged them to do the same. He made them believe they could do anything. Two wives, four children, six grandchildren – as was said, his love was limitless. In him we have lost a man larger than life. Vale, Norman Henry Lacy.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (13:36): I rise to speak on the condolence motion for the Honourable Norman Henry Lacy, a former member for Ringwood, member for Warrandyte and Minister for the Arts and Minister of Educational Services. I have quickly edited this speech to remove those matters that have already been covered by my colleagues. As the current member for Ringwood, it is a particular privilege to acknowledge one of my predecessors, even though he became the member for Ringwood before my parents had even met. I extend sincere condolences to his wife Gayle; children Fiona, Sharon, Kirsten and Henry; and his grandchildren, extended family and many friends. It was lovely to meet many of them at his recent memorial service.

Norman lived a life that was defined by service but also by reinvention. Few people, I think, can claim to have been a plumber, a priest and a parliamentarian. Most people spend a lifetime building one career; Norman seemed to have built several. Each chapter of his life was different, but all reflected a desire to contribute and leave institutions stronger than he found them. He was elected as the member for Ringwood in 1973, at a time when the area was growing rapidly and finding its identity as Melbourne expanded eastward. Indeed when he was elected Ringwood was a very different place. Eastland was still relatively new, and Melbourne's eastern suburbs were continuing to grow. Communities like mine were simply establishing their identities. More than 50 years later much has changed, but the responsibility of course remains the same: to leave the community better than we find it. One of the most remarkable aspects of his story, I think, was the adversity he faced early in life, which others have alluded to. Rather than becoming bitter, he channelled those hardships into faith, into learning, into public service and into community involvement. He often credited sport with helping him through those years. He represented Victoria in basketball and developed the discipline of teamwork and resilience that would remain with him throughout his life.

He was a parliamentarian of principle. He belonged to a generation of parliamentarians who saw ideas and reform as central to public life. He was known as thoughtful, intellectually curious and willing to take a position based on principle. In fact he was not somebody who discovered these principles after entering Parliament. As a young Anglican priest he joined those protesting the execution of Ronald Ryan, Australia's last judicial hanging. He was there on the day that Ryan was hanged. Years later, as a member of Parliament, he became a strong advocate for the abolition of capital punishment. There are not many people who can say they fought the same cause from both sides of the gates. Whether

people agreed with him or not, it demonstrated a characteristic that remained with him throughout his life. He was prepared to take a position, defend it and accept the consequences. Indeed, looking back over his career, it is clear that Norman Lacy seemed remarkably comfortable being unpopular. Whether it was capital punishment, education reform or social policy, he was prepared to advance ideas that attracted criticism if he believed they were right. He understood that leadership and popularity are not always the same thing, and he earned respect from colleagues across the political divide through the seriousness with which he approached public policy. He understood that politics was not simply about winning the argument, it was about improving people's lives.

His lasting contributions were significant, with a mark particularly on Victoria's cultural landscape. He had a major role, as others have said, in the development of the Victorian Arts Centre, including the iconic photograph of him installing the lightning rod at the top of the Victorian Arts Centre spire, but also in supporting the establishment of Film Victoria and helping establish the Australian Children's Television Foundation, as well as in the creation of what became the Heide Museum of Modern Art. Many Victorians enjoy these institutions today. They will not necessarily connect them with him, but that is a remarkable legacy. His legacy, too, is in education as a champion of literacy and numeracy intervention. He established the special assistance program and the deployment of specialist teachers into Victorian primary schools, a remarkable legacy, and long before intervention became a widely used phrase he understood that helping children early could change the trajectory of a life.

There are not many cabinet ministers whose life story includes plumbing pipes, preaching sermons, protesting outside Pentridge and helping build the arts centre, but Norm Lacy was one of them. He leaves behind a substantial legacy in Victorian public life, and more importantly, he leaves behind a family who loved him and many people whose lives were enriched by knowing him. On behalf of the people of Ringwood, I extend my condolences to his family. Vale, Norman Lacy.

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

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (13:41): I move:

> That, as a further mark of respect to the memory of the late Honourable Robert Ian Knowles AO and the late Honourable Norman Henry Lacy, the house now adjourns until 2:45 pm today.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 1:42 pm.

The SPEAKER took the chair at 2:47 pm.

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the gallery the former member for Lara and former minister John Eren.

Members

Minister for First Peoples

Absence

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:47): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today I will answer questions for the portfolio of First Peoples, the Minister for Transport Infrastructure will answer questions for the portfolio of roads and road safety and the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs will answer questions for the portfolio of community sport.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:48): My question is to the Premier – sorry, I should say the honourable Premier.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a good start to question time. Leader of the Opposition, I ask you to direct your question through the Chair.

Jess WILSON: Why should Victorians believe the Premier is serious about giving IBAC follow-the-money powers when she voted against them less than three months ago?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:49): Yesterday the government announced the most far-reaching reforms to IBAC since it was established in 2012, and central to those reforms was recommendation 1, which was expanding the definition of 'criminal conduct'. The reason why this definition is important is because the expanded powers for IBAC hang from that recommendation. I note that this is a recommendation that is not supported by the Leader of the Liberal Party, who refused to support this when questioned today on radio.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: As part of the work that we are doing in implementing the recommendations of the committee – and I thank the members of the house who were part of that committee's work – the committee itself actually went to this question of timing, and it is why yesterday, alongside announcing the most far-reaching reforms of IBAC, we have immediately established an expert reference group. The committee went to this exact point: we need to ensure that we get these changes right, because they are far reaching and because they go to serious matters that demand serious, thoughtful attention, which is why, in supporting the recommendations as we have done, we are supporting expanding the definition of 'criminal conduct' – a recommendation I note the Leader of the Liberal Party does not support. We have supported the recommendations around giving IBAC expanded follow-the-money powers, and I announced yesterday that those powers will be retrospective.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, we are 2 minutes into a 3-minute response, and the Premier has yet to explain why she voted against these powers three months ago. Why?

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Then finally we are taking the appropriate approach to dealing with these matters in a serious and considered way. This is something the report goes to, and it is something that the integrity agencies as well go to: you have to see Victoria's integrity system as a system. That is why we did not support the bill that was put to the Parliament previously by those opposite, who were all about the political moment. They were not about the seriousness of these matters.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:52): Isn't it the case that the Premier voted against immediately giving IBAC follow-the-money powers in March because she knew it would reveal the true extent of corruption under her watch before an election?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:52): The answer is no, and I go to this point: you cannot see the follow-the-money powers recommendation that we are accepting and making retrospective in isolation from the recommendation to expand the definition of 'criminal conduct' – a recommendation the Leader of the Liberal Party opposes and did not support, would not support, when questioned on this matter this morning. In order for IBAC to have the reforms that we are implementing, that we have accepted – the most wideranging reforms since IBAC has been created – you have to look at expanding the definition of 'criminal conduct' in order for those follow-the-money powers to be implemented effectively, something the Leader of the Liberal Party does not support.

Ministers statements: vehicle registration rebate

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:53): When families are under pressure they deserve a government that is on their side, a government that understands that cost-of-living relief just cannot wait –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bulleen, this is your last warning.

Jacinta ALLAN: a government that looks for ways, practical ways, to make life cheaper and easier for families, and that is exactly what our Labor government is doing, delivering 20 per cent off car rego for eligible Victorians. Whether you are dropping the kids to school, heading off to TAFE, going to work or visiting family, we know that the cost of keeping a car on the road matters. Right now, when fuel prices continue to be high and household budgets are tight, families are looking for relief and every dollar counts.

I want to provide the house today with an update on the first 24 hours since car rego was available. We have seen that 677,907 applications have been submitted – over 22,000 an hour. What that means is there are hundreds of thousands of Victorians who have looked for and have needed this support, and it is being delivered to them. These are funds that are being put straight into their bank account, and we know this will be money that will go to household bills, to groceries, to the cost of rent, to the cost of a mortgage.

There are those that called this a hoax, those who have opposed this, those who think that 677,000 Victorians should not have received this support – and that number, we know, will only grow – those who think that the way to support families is all about a 10-year cuts plan. We are all about providing real and meaningful relief. It is not a hoax to help families with real cost-of-living relief right now, and that is exactly what our government is delivering.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:55): My question is to the honourable Premier. Why is the Premier gaslighting Victorians by pretending she is acting on corruption when her announcement yesterday delays IBAC follow-the-money powers for a further 18 months, until after the election?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:56): This question substantially mirrors the question from the Leader of the Opposition. Therefore my answer will be consistent with that that I gave earlier to the house. We are delivering the most wideranging changes to IBAC since it was established in 2012.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, if it assists, this question asked why the Premier was delaying taking any action for 18 months. The previous question was why three months ago the Premier did not vote for the IBAC laws. They are two very different questions.

The SPEAKER: The question was about gaslighting. It was not the question that you just put on the point of order.

Anthony Carbines: Speaker, in relation to the point of order, it is quite clear that on the word salad from the member for Caulfield the Premier was being absolutely relevant.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: I draw the member's attention to the information I provided in my answer earlier. We are delivering these wideranging reforms. We are immediately establishing a reference group. That work will be undertaken carefully and with deep consideration. It will involve advice from experts and stakeholders in this field, because these are serious matters. In supporting the recommendations that have been put by the committee, those recommendations include follow-the-money powers. I remind the member for Caulfield that we have recommended to the expert reference

group that that should be retrospective, but I also draw the member for Caulfield's attention to the point that these powers also intersect with recommendation 1, which is expanding the definition of 'corrupt conduct', something the Liberal Party do not support.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:58): Isn't it the case that the Premier has kicked the IBAC follow-the-money powers into the long grass because it would expose Labor's corruption before an election?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:58): No.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for South-West Coast, this is your last warning.

Ministers statements: regional development

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka – Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture) (14:58): I rise to update the house on the record investment of the Allan Labor government in regional Victoria. This government has invested more than $50 billion in regional Victoria, and in this budget alone there is $2.7 billion invested. In this budget over 30 per cent of Labor's investment in upgrading and modernising schools goes to regional and rural communities. Of the record $1 billion investment to repair and resurface roads, 70 per cent will go to country roads. More than 50 per cent of the local sports infrastructure projects in 2025–26 were in regional Victorian communities.

We do not just talk about percentages, we deliver. These are not just slogans in an election year, these are schools built, hospitals upgraded, TAFEs expanded and communities seeing real investment where they live. In towns right across regional Victoria, people can point to projects that are already making a difference because this government backed them with funding and got on with the job. Last week a member for Eastern Victoria in the other place and I visited the towns of Loch and Nyora to unveil project numbers 99 and 100 of completed Tiny Towns projects. While those opposite are talking about percentage guarantees, we are delivering on outcomes. By contrast, the member for Gippsland South is in the country talking about percentage guarantees and the member for Kew is talking about $40 billion cuts in the city.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are not an opportunity for ministers to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: The minister will come back to her ministers statement.

Michaela SETTLE: Regional Victorians have been down this road before. The member for Kew's cuts will mean cuts to regional hospitals, schools, TAFEs and vital services. A friendly reminder to the member for Gippsland South: 25 per cent of nothing is nothing.

Construction industry

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:01): My question is to the honourable Premier. One of the Premier's own members of Parliament has confirmed to the media:

> Jacinta, Daniel … and Tim Pallas handed over a monopoly to thugs disguised as unionism, who then used that monopoly cartel power at the expense of taxpayers.

Why does the Premier deny that this has happened under her watch, when it has been called out by her own Labor members of Parliament?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (15:02): I reject the statement that has just been read out by the member for Brighton. The member for Brighton might want to trade in anonymous gossip. We trade in getting on with serious business and implementing the most wideranging reforms to IBAC since it was established in 2012. And again, for the completeness of the house, I draw the attention of the house to the fact that this is something that is not supported by the Liberal Party.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:02): The Labor member of Parliament also said:

> This is a deflection of historic proportions … Anything short of a royal commission is not good enough.

Given that the Premier's own members of Parliament are calling for a royal commission into corruption, why is the Premier refusing to establish one?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (15:03): This question tells Victorians everything they need to know about this Liberal outfit, which is not serious about dealing –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is an important matter, not time for a tricky response. This is about a serious matter, on relevance.

The SPEAKER: The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: This shows that the Liberal Party are not serious. To be framing questions around anonymous gossip tells Victorians everything they need to know. Questions like this are simply a cover-up for the fact that the Liberal Party do not support expanding the definition of 'corrupt conduct' as recommended by the committee.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, you have drawn the Premier back to the question once, and now she is defying your ruling.

The SPEAKER: The Premier responded to the question. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: community safety

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Local Government, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Corrections) (15:04): Every Victorian deserves to be safe at home, safe at work and safe in the community, and that is why this year's budget is investing $1.7 billion to keep Victorians safe – new funding for our hardworking Victoria Police, new funding for our emergency services and new funding for our criminal justice system. This is the next step in the Allan Labor government's community safety plan, which is delivering serious consequences for violent offending. In my portfolios that means investing in the capacity we need in our corrections and youth justice systems to make sure that serious offenders face serious consequences, like the Western Plains Correctional Centre and the Cherry Creek youth justice facility, both designed, built and now operating by this Labor government. That is more than 1200 new, modern beds added to our corrections and youth justice systems.

If we compare and contrast to when those opposite last sat on the government benches, our prisons were underfunded and overcrowded. A leopard does not change its spots, and that is exactly what those opposite are offering again, with their plans for $40 billion in cuts.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I know the minister is new, and I feel terrible doing this, but a ministers statement is not an opportunity to attack the opposition.

Anthony Carbines: On the point of order, Speaker, I draw your attention to *Rulings from the Chair*, 'A minister may refer to a range of policy positions' – Speaker Brooks, 21 February 2018 and August 2019.

The SPEAKER: The minister did say he was comparing and contrasting.

Paul HAMER: This November Victorians will have a choice between a Labor government that is focused on cost of living –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I fail to see how direct electioneering in an attack on the opposition could possibly not be an attack on the opposition – clearly.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Paul HAMER: This is a choice between a Labor government that is focused on cost of living, with 20 per cent off rego, half-price public transport and investment in the schools, hospitals and prisons that we need and a Liberal outfit that will cut $40 billion out of vital services.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I renew my twice already raised concerns about the misuse of the ministers statement.

The SPEAKER: The minister will come back to his ministers statement without attacking the opposition.

Paul HAMER: We are funding the services that Victorians rely on for community safety, to get treatment when they are sick or to provide the best start in life for our children. We know what the Liberal cuts mean for crime and community safety, because we have seen it before.

The SPEAKER: I remind ministers that there is a fine line between comparing and contrasting previous governments and attacking the opposition.

Family violence

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (15:08): My question is to the honourable Premier. The Minister for Youth has provided six references to individuals of poor character, including at least one sexual offender and a man convicted of domestic violence. Does the Premier have confidence in a minister who believes sex and domestic violence offenders are of good character?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (15:09): I refer the member for Warrandyte to the minister's statement that she released yesterday on this matter, where she has already acknowledged that she should not have provided those references, has apologised for that and did so because she was not aware of their backgrounds. In answer to the second part of the member's question, I have confidence in all of my ministers.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (15:09): Given the government continues to allow a labour hire firm run by a domestic violence abuser to run rampant on Big Build sites, aren't Victorians entitled to conclude that this Premier and her government are totally disinterested in protecting victims of domestic violence?

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, I do not see the relevance or the connection to the substantive question.

The SPEAKER: It is a very tenuous link, member for Warrandyte, between the main question and your supplementary question. I will allow it.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (15:10): In rejecting the member for Warrandyte's question, I draw the house's attention to our very proud record as a government of doing more than any other jurisdiction in this nation, from holding the Royal Commission into Family Violence to investing billions of dollars to reform and change the system, to giving police more powers, to protecting victims, to strengthening information sharing and also to introducing important preventative measures like the Respectful Relationships program in our schools – which so many of those opposite continue to deride and belittle – making a fundamental difference.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is again being tricky and debating the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier is being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Again I am reminded by my colleagues that those royal commission recommendations on family violence were not all supported by the Liberal Party. It has taken our Labor government to fundamentally reform the system. There is more work to do, and only a Labor government will do it.

Ministers statements: electricity prices

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (15:11): I am pleased to inform the house that in just three weeks time on 1 July this year over half a million Victorians will see a drop in their electricity prices. The Victorian default offer will fall by an average of $84 per year for households and $241 per year for small businesses. At a time that Victorians are under real cost-of-living pressures, this will help them. The final VDO is $444 lower for households and $1299 lower for small businesses than the equivalent offer in other states. Victoria consistently has the lowest energy prices in the nation, and that will continue after 1 July.

The reasons for this are very clear. We are building the renewable electricity and the big batteries that give us cheaper electricity and help Victorians with the cost of living every day when it comes to their energy bills. And we are making it even easier for Victorians to take advantage of cheap renewable energy through the midday power saver. From 1 October Victorians can access 3 hours of free power every day, even if they do not have solar. It could save Victorians between $149 and $1102 per year on their bills, depending how much of their electricity usage they can shift to the midday period. And the Victorian offer will be much cheaper outside the free hours than in other states, with rates ranging from 12 per cent to 90 per cent cheaper on average than the equivalent in other states.

Those are quiet on the other side; I wonder why. Some people choose to describe renewables as renewables rubbish and are intent on stopping renewables and keeping coal power going longer, which will cost Victorians more on their electricity bills every day. We are on the side of Victorians and giving them real cost-of-living relief.

Fire services

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (15:13): My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Tarneit fire station is either the busiest or second-busiest fire station in Melbourne, responding to more calls for emergency medical response than any other fire station. Despite this fact, Tarneit firefighters continue to operate with one truck. When will Tarneit fire station receive another truck?

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (15:14): I thank the member for his question and for the opportunity I think for all of us to share our immense distress and the breaking of our hearts over the terrible incident that we saw in Werribee two nights ago – an incredibly distressing story that is extraordinary for the family and the community around them but also for those first responders who were there fighting as hard as they could to get this fire under control. The member asks about resources for FRV, and I am sure the member is aware –

Members interjecting.

Vicki WARD: The FRV station in Tarneit.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Can the minister have the floor without interjections?

Vicki WARD: Speaker, it would be great to be in this place and to be able to actually give an answer without constant interjections, where it is very clear that those opposite are not interested in actual answers. What we have seen is the $40 million that we invested in the last budget for a rolling replacement fleet program for FRV for new appliances.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, we would actually like to get an answer. On the question of relevance, it was specifically about when Tarneit will get an extra truck, not what the FRV is getting overall but specifically about Tarneit.

Anthony Carbines: On the point of order, Speaker, the minister is being relevant to the question. She is going to the matter of not only the suburbs but also the organisation, the authority that is responsible for these matters.

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

Vicki WARD: As I was saying, there was $40 million in last year's budget, there was $15 million in the budget before and there is another $10 million in this budget to continue the rollout of new appliances for FRV. New appliances going to stations is an operational decision made by FRV, and we are supporting those decisions through the increased investment that we have in new appliances for FRV, notwithstanding of course the work that we are doing with their mechanics as well, including the new mechanics workshop that we have got. We also know that that area –

Danny O'Brien: Speaker, I renew my point of order and ask the minister to come back to answering about Tarneit.

The SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant.

Vicki WARD: Recognising the constant interruptions, the member does not actually give anybody the opportunity to give a fulsome and wholesome answer to their question. When we talk about investment we have not only got the investment we are putting into FRV appliances; there is of course also the new fire station we built in Tarneit in 2019. We also saw a new CFA station for Truganina in 2023, a new CFA station for Wyndham Vale in 2026, a heavy tanker was delivered to Werribee CFA –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is clearly now debating the question. I ask you to bring her back to answering it.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order.

Vicki WARD: A heavy tanker for Werribee CFA in 2024, a heavy tanker to Point Cook CFA brigade in 2022 and a pumper tanker delivered to Hoppers Crossing in 2021. Our agencies work together. They know how to work –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I seek your guidance in relation to debating the question. This was actually a very simple and specific question about a particular site, and the minister is doing everything she can to not talk about that question. That goes to the heart, I would put to you, of debating the question.

The SPEAKER: I believe the minister has already answered the question.

Vicki WARD: I have given a fulsome and wholesome answer to the question, and I would also remind the member that it is this government that is investing over $2.4 billion in emergency services and forest fire management this year. We are not ripping $1.6 billion out of the budget like they will.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (15:19): Minister, the firefighters rostered at Tarneit yesterday were not serving at that station because they had been moved to Lara because Lara's fire truck had broken down. The firefighters at Tarneit yesterday came from Newport. With 65 per cent of the entire Fire Rescue Victoria fleet past its service date, when will the minister publicly release the outcomes of the KPMG audit into the condition of FRV's fleet?

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (15:20): The member, despite the fact he has been shadow minister for some time, clearly does not understand how our emergency services work and how they make operational decisions. FRV and CFA work closely together to deliver coordinated emergency responses across Victoria, and decisions about which service attends a complex incident are made by agencies based on safety, capability and response times. And of course FRV will release the report when they are ready to do so.

Ministers statements: schools funding

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (15:20): Labor is and always has been the party that looks out for regional communities. We do not just talk about regional communities; we invest in them – regional hospitals, regional schools and regional police stations. That is why I was so shocked to hear the big announcement from those opposite made at their state conference in Caulfield on the weekend that they are going to guarantee 25 per cent of school infrastructure to the regions. Hang on a minute, there is one big problem. They have not done their homework; we know that. Their 25 per cent commitment to regional schools is a cut to what Labor and Jacinta Allan do for regional schools. Under Labor it is over 30 per cent; under the cutters over there it is 25 per cent. Do not take my word for it. They put 25 per cent in writing – their 'fair share' guarantee, except when it comes to education. Our last budget funded nine regional schools, so which ones are they going to cut? Is it Ararat Primary School in Ripon, or is it Bacchus Marsh College in Eureka? We know no-one trusts those opposite when it comes to investing in regional Victoria.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question that the minister must be factual, perhaps he could explain why work on Yinnar Primary School that they announced in 2022 still has not started, or Leongatha or any others.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Ben CARROLL: Regional communities know better than to trust any promise from those opposite. They all remember the 350 schools that Jeff Kennett closed, and we know who has come back to finish the job. $40 billion will mean deeper, stricter and harsher cuts than ever before.

Annabelle Cleeland: On a point of order, Speaker, we have regional students here today, one of whom is from a school operating with a generator. You are misleading the house. We have had 12 per cent of infrastructure –

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Ben CARROLL: On the point of order, Speaker, I am happy to table the press release from Danny O'Brien and Jess Wilson, which is their 25 per cent cut.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Premier will refer to members by their correct titles.

Ben CARROLL: The member for Kew and the member for Gippsland South.

Constituency questions

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (15:24): (1648) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, when will my angry and long-suffering Rowville electorate constituents finally be fairly treated, not ignored, by your government, with state budget funding provided for vitally needed local infrastructure projects? Specifically, funding is desperately needed for Rowville's Napoleon Road duplication, Lysterfield's Wellington Road duplication, facilities upgrades to Rowville secondary colleges and a new fire station for the dedicated volunteers at the Scoresby CFA. The 2026–27 state budget completely short-changed and abandoned the people of the Rowville electorate. My constituents just want a fair go, but instead they are being treated like second-class citizens by the arrogantly out-of-touch Allan Labor government, forced to pay the price for Labor's relentless corruption, waste and staggeringly high $200 billion net state debt.

Bass electorate

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (15:26): (1649) My question is to the Minister for Government Services in the other place. How many residents in my electorate of Bass are expected to benefit from the 20 per cent rego rebate for cars, utes and motorbikes? This is immediate relief, and many people

have already visited my office, with my fantastic team helping them to apply in person. It is open until 31 July for two vehicles per person, returning up to $186 each. We are also delivering transport relief through free public transport for under-18s; free weekend travel for seniors, carers and disability support workers; half-price fares for everyone else until December; free rego for eligible apprentice tradies; and free Ls and Ps for young people. There is also the Servo Saver to help find the cheapest fuel locally. Visit the savings finder on the Service Victoria website and complete the 1-minute survey for tailored rebates, discounts and other savings across transport, education, health, energy and more. As a Labor government, we remain committed to practical cost-of-living relief.

Lowan electorate

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (15:27): (1650) My question is to the Minister for Education. Seven-year-old Jack Mattschoss lives in Kaniva. Jack has a disability, is non-verbal and started prep this year at Horsham Special School. Jack is a great kid and is fortunate to be supported by a kind, loving and caring family. Currently there is no direct school transport available from Kaniva to Horsham for special school students. That means Jack's day starts by leaving for school at 7 am, with his parents driving to Goroke to meet a taxi to join other students going to Horsham Special School. It is a 2-hour journey, which he repeats at the end of the day. 7 am to 5 pm for a prep student is a lot. The impact has been significant. Jack is now displaying school refusal behaviours and has attended school only once in recent weeks. Jack is not alone. Two other students currently travel from Kaniva to Horsham Special School, with another expected to commence next year. When will special school students in Kaniva be able to access a direct school bus service to Horsham?

Greenvale electorate

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (15:28): (1651) My question is to the Minister for Environment Mr Erdogan in the other place. Residents across Melbourne's growth areas, including Greenvale, are increasingly frustrated and angered by the persistent problem of illegal dumping along arterial roads like Somerton Road, especially around Greenvale Reservoir Park and near Woodlands Historic Park. A small number of offenders continue to use our shared spaces as dumping grounds, causing environmental harm and significantly impacting community amenity. Given the Victorian government's substantial additional investment in the Environment Protection Authority Victoria to strengthen its ability to deter, detect and prosecute illegal dumping offences, what actions are being taken by the EPA to combat illegal dumping in Melbourne's growth corridors and to hold offenders accountable?

Brighton electorate

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:28): (1652) My question is to the Premier. Why did the state Labor government break their written promise committing to resurface unsafe Hampton Street in Hampton? Bayside knows that Labor neglects our community. As Anthony said:

> The road has deteriorated to the point where it is genuinely unsafe. The number and size of the potholes are forcing drivers to swerve into oncoming traffic to avoid damage, creating a serious risk of an accident.

In December then Minister for Roads and Road Safety Ms Horne gave a written commitment that:

> … Hampton Street from South Road to Beach Road is planned for … resurfacing by April 2026.

But as we know, the Labor government's written commitment is worth nothing. When the government trucks turned up, they only resurfaced a fraction of the road between Beach Road and Ludstone Street. The entire stretch between Ludstone Street and South Road was ignored. The truth is that the completed stretch is in the neighbouring electorate and the ignored part is in the Brighton electorate. What a shameless political attack on my community.

Ripon electorate

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (15:29): (1653) My question is to the Minister for Carers and Volunteers. Minister, what support is our government providing to neighbourhood houses so they can

keep delivering vital food relief to locals in need? Demand has exploded across my electorate, from Linton to Dunolly, Clunes to Creswick, Ararat to Wedderburn and everywhere in between. Our neighbourhood houses and food pantries are stepping up in extraordinary ways to help people who never imagined that they would need this support. I want to acknowledge the incredible work of Chrissy Austin, Lana De Kort, Rick Bushell, Warren Bowen, Tash Trewin, Teli Kaur, Malcolm Sanders, Kath Ryan, Jeannie Clark, Heather Stevenson, Andrew George, Russell Steel and Louise Cook, to name a few. I am determined to back these community champions and ensure their food relief efforts remain strong into the future. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with them.

Narracan electorate

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (15:30): (1654) My constituency question is to the Minister for Regional Development. My community wants to know why funding has not been yet provided for the Weebar Road roundabout in Drouin. This roundabout is a critical piece of infrastructure in Drouin that needs to be funded and completed as soon as possible. Drouin is one of the fastest growing areas in Victoria, along with Warragul, and this community is suffering under the burden of growth and congestion in the area. For as little as 2 hours a day of interest payments in this state this roundabout could be funded by this government. I met with the minister on a previous occasion, and I thank her for the meeting. I am under the impression there is a grant application in at the moment, and I would urge the minister to provide a grant to this community to build this roundabout so the people of Drouin can have a better life.

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (15:31): (1655) My question is for the Minister for Planning, and my question is: if a development plan for Preston Market were submitted for approval, at what point would that development plan be made public? As you may recall, it was our government that put a heritage overlay in place over Preston Market back in 2023. But at the same time we did that we also put in place what is called a development plan overlay. That overlay means that you cannot just go and get a planning permit to put a new building on that site as you normally would. Instead you first have to put together what is effectively a sitewide blueprint for how the market's operations will be protected, how parking will be provided, how pedestrian access will be provided and so forth. Those blueprints are not strictly binding on the planning permits that follow, but they are strongly suggestive. I think there would be a great deal of community interest in such a development plan if one were submitted. Any information that the minister could provide to us about how that process would work would be greatly appreciated by the Preston community.

Eildon electorate

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (15:32): (1656) I have a question for the Minister for Planning. Communities in the Murrindindi shire are still grappling with the devastation of the Longwood fires. In that shire over 200 homes were lost, and hundreds and hundreds of sheds and equipment were also lost. Constituents are dealing with the clean up and the rebuild. The government has announced that standard planning permits can be bypassed or streamlined. However, residents have contacted me disappointed that they have been hit with a $1500 fee for the rebuild of a house, and others have had $600 fees for sheds. Will the minister waive these fees for these families who are undertaking significant works and are under very significant stress and pressure?

Bayswater electorate

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (15:33): (1657) Construction is very much well and truly underway at Boronia station. It is the biggest investment by any level of government in a generation into what is a growing, beautiful, modern suburb filled with lovely local folk. I am very proud that this Allan Labor government is getting on and delivering a new and better Boronia station precinct for people not just across Knox but right across Melbourne to enjoy for generations to come. My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure: when can we expect to see people getting back onto

trains at Boronia station? Works are absolutely powering ahead, and it is fantastic to see locals adjusting to the changes, to some of the disruptions. I want to thank locals again for all of their patience during the major works in Boronia. These are the biggest works we have seen. They have encouraged a lot of different private investment in the CBD, which is increasing the amount of jobs locally. I tell you what, we are onto a winner here. It is from where Boronia used to be to the extravagance we are going to see at the end. It is going to be delivered; I cannot wait.

Bridget Vallence: Deputy Speaker, I have a point of order on a number of questions that are unanswered and have been unanswered for a very long time, dating back to May 2025. I have raised points of order on these many, many times, and still the ministers and the Treasurer fail to respond. I have a number of questions overdue from the Treasurer. These are questions on notice 2421, 3237, 3238, 3239, 3240, 3241, 3242 and 3256. Most of these relate to the COVID debt levy, which the government wants to keep until 2035. Questions that are overdue from the Minister for Finance are questions on notice 3243 and 3245. A question on notice to the Minister for Education is also overdue, question 3210. I can make this list available to the clerks.

Tim Read: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I have got about nine overdue questions on notice. Are you happy for me to email those to the Clerk?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Brunswick. They will be passed on.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I too have a number of questions that are outstanding. A number of them are actually time sensitive and others relate to the needs of bushfire-impacted families, so it is very disappointing. Constituency question 1520 is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport; 3162 is a question on notice to the Minister for Education; 3163 is to the Minister for Environment; 3218 and 3219 are to the Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, and they are particularly urgent, relating to bushfire victims; and 3257 is to the Minister for Housing and Building.

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I have some unanswered questions. These have all been previously followed up on, but we will have another go: 3128, 3129, 3130, 3131, 3132, 3135 3153, 3154, 3172, 3214 and 3254.

Bills

Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (15:37): I move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Racing Act 1958 and the Domestic Animals Act 1994, to amend the Australian Grands Prix Act 1994 in relation to approved motor sport events under that act and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (15:37): You could have waited one more week, Minister, but I do ask for a brief explanation of the bill.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (15:38): As I said, we prefer to work people all the way to the finish line. This is a bill to establish a single integrity oversight body for the Victorian racing industry and to modernise the governance arrangements for Harness Racing Victoria and Greyhound Racing Victoria.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Health Legislation Amendment (Regulatory Reform) Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (15:38): I move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008 to require registered ART providers to comply with an approved accreditation scheme and to make amendments to provisions relating to the registration of registered ART providers and the inspection powers of the secretary, the Non-Emergency Patient Transport and First Aid Services Act 2003 to expand the scope of the regulation-making power in relation to the incorporation of documents, the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 to amend provisions in relation to the registration of cooling tower systems and the Radiation Act 2005 in relation to the disposal of radiation sources and to create a regulatory scheme for the provision of financial assurances and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:39): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (15:39): It is a bill to deliver reforms in four health-related acts to improve the health and safety of Victorians.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (15:40): I move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to further amend the Electoral Act 2002 in relation to political donations, state funding and reporting requirements, to make consequential amendments to the Electoral Amendment Act 2026 and the Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Act 2026 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:40): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (15:40): The bill will replace the invalid regime in part 12 of the act to increase transparency in the Victorian electoral system.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:41): General business, notices of motion 35 and 36, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

Petitions

Period products

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) presented a petition bearing 38 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that the Victorian Government is looking to remove free access to pads and tampons in public school bathrooms due to cost related issues. This decision will greatly impact students experiencing periods. Period products are a right, not a privilege.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly ensures the continued funding of period products in all public school bathrooms across the state.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Assistance animals

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) presented a petition bearing 2122 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the urgent need for stronger legal protections for Seeing Eye Dogs, Guide Dogs, and Assistance Dogs, which are essential mobility and disability aids rather than ordinary animals. An attack on an assistance dog is treated the same as an attack on any animal. There is no specific offence in the Domestic Animals Act 1994 that deals with attacks on assistance dogs. Instead, attacks on assistance dogs are treated the same as attacks on any animal, despite the significant consequences such attacks have for handlers, including loss of independence, trauma, and the high cost of replacing and training a working dog. Section 29 of the Domestic Animals Act 1994 only creates general "dog attack" offences and does not recognise the special status of assistance dogs as mobility and disability aids.

Action:

The petitioners request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Government to amend the Domestic Animals Act 1994 to create a specific offence and higher penalties for a person in charge of a dog that attacks, rushes at, or interferes with an assistance dog, regardless of whether the handler or the assistance dog is physically injured.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 7

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:42): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 7 of 2026, on the following acts and bills, together with appendices and an extract from the proceedings:

Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Act 2026

Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026

Energy and Other Legislation Amendment (Resilience Reforms and Other Matters) Act 2026

Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026.

Ordered to be published.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Sustainability Reporting by Water Corporations – released on 20 May 2026

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 22 *(Gazette G19, 7 May 2026)*

Parliamentary Committees Act 2003:

Government response to the Electoral Matters Committee's report on the Inquiry into the 2025 Prahran and Werribee by-elections

Government response to the Integrity and Oversight Committee's report on the Inquiry into the Adequacy of the Legislative Framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

Government response to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's report on the Inquiry into fraud and corruption control in local Government: a follow up of two Auditor-General reports

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Bass Coast – GC148

Buloke – C44

Cardinia – GC148

Casey – GC148

Glen Eira – C282

Greater Bendigo – C270

Horsham – C88

Melbourne – C488, C489

Moorabool – C103

Mornington Peninsula – C318

Southern Grampians – C63

Whittlesea – C287

Yarra – C338

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Building Act 1993 – SR 42

County Court Act 1958 – SR 56

Crimes (Assumed Identities) Act 2004 – SR 41

Criminal Organisations Control Act 2012 – SR 44

Electoral Act 2002 – SR 45

Magistrates' Court Act 1989 – SR 47

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 – SR 46

Plant Biosecurity Act 2010 – SR 43

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56

Documents under s 16B in relation to the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005*:

2026 Ministerial Order under section 16BA

2026 Ministerial Order under section 22A

Wildlife Act 1975 – Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) (Wetlands Closure) Notice No 2 *(Gazette S235, 5 May 2026)*.

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER STANDING ORDERS – The Clerk tabled:

Government response to the Environment and Planning Standing Committee's report on the Inquiry into the supply of homes in regional Victoria

Proclamations fixing operative dates:

Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Act 2026 – Whole Act – 12 May 2026 *(Gazette S232, 5 May 2026)*

Electoral Amendment Act 2026 – Parts 1 and 2, other than s 73 – 25 May 2026 *(Gazette S251, 19 May 2026)*.

Bills

Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026

Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026

Royal assent

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:44): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026 and the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026.

Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026

Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026

Appropriation

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:44): The Speaker has received messages from the Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026 and the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026.

Committees

Electoral Matters Committee

Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:44): The Speaker has received the resignation of Dylan Wight from the Electoral Matters Committee effective from today.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (15:44): I move, by leave:

That Mathew Hilakari be a member of the Electoral Matters Committee.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Program

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (15:45): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 4 June 2026:

Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026

Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026

Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026

Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026.

In speaking to those matters, if I may, this is a very significant business program that the government is bringing forward to the house. It is putting more police back on the streets to keep our community safe, further expanding important tax exemptions for home owners and emergency services volunteers and promoting participation and improved access to public lands so more Victorians can take part in our great outdoors.

Particularly around police reservists, this is a very significant driver of reform which will give the Chief Commissioner of Police the power to appoint police reservists and provide a legislative framework that is required for a modern and fit-for-purpose reservist scheme. The budget this year includes some $62 million for up to 200 police reservists to be appointed. That is for full-time appointments, but many of these police, as we would expect, could be part-timers and the like, which will expand the pool of those who provide a great service to our state as former police officers come back and serve as police reservists. We need that mechanism to be fit for purpose and appropriate, hence the fact that we are making changes, bringing into debate those matters around the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill. This is about a safer, new-look Victoria Police. On this side of the house we support Victoria Police and the chief commissioner at all times.

I can also say, from discussions with the chief commissioner, that there has already been an overwhelming response from former serving members who have taken part in expressions of interest. I am talking about hundreds of expressions of interest that have been lodged already, with the funds available in the budget from 1 July. Our goal in introducing and being able to debate the bill this week and conclude our discussions at the end of the week is to provide an opportunity, with the good graces of members in both chambers, for the legislation to get royal assent and for the funds to flow not only to work through the EOIs that have come through already but to have those police reservists available for appointment from 1 July. So it is a critical piece of work that the house will need to do in the Parliament, already enlivened through funding that is in place from 1 July and an EOI process that has seen hundreds of former police members already putting their hands up to serve in these roles and in stations across the state and also providing investigative support for detectives and officers and frontline support in terms of front counter support for police members.

Further, we will be debating the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill, which includes a range of amendments to various taxation acts to provide tax relief to community housing organisations, expand the eligibility of our nation-leading emergency services volunteers rebate scheme and make it easier to get a land tax exemption for homes under construction or renovation. We know that the work we are doing with the Albanese federal government is making those big investments of building a house and buying a home easier, unlike others who perhaps are not so focused on making sure we give every person the opportunity to buy and own their own home.

Further, we will be debating the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill. That brings together the Victorian fisheries and game management authorities into a single new authority, Outdoor Recreation Victoria. It is a new body that will have an important role in promoting participation in supporting access, working with land managers, communities and traditional owners and those stakeholders to identify practical opportunities. It is about giving more Victorians the opportunity to enjoy our great outdoors. The recasting in recent years by our government of the portfolio around outdoor recreation goes to the heart of making sure that at the centre, having a voice, are those people who love the great outdoors but in particular advocates who make sure, whether it is our state parks or our national parks, it is not just about locking everything up. We want to make sure there are opportunities for Victorians to experience the great wonders of our outdoors, because then more Victorians can be the advocates for supporting, maintaining and protecting these great natural resources in our community.

Further, can I say, as I did touch on earlier, the Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026 – a particularly significant piece of work, given some determinations that have been made by the judiciary in recent times – is an important piece of legislation that we need to debate this week and that we need to provide an opportunity for the house to consider so that we can enliven, action and replace the invalid regime. Part 1 of the bill says, 'Increase the transparency and integrity of the Victorian electoral system'. We

know at the moment there are opportunities for those who wish to do harm – for bad actors out there – to be able to make contributions and use dark money in electoral campaigning, and we need to address that as soon as possible, in light of and giving respect to decisions that have been made by the judiciary. We can do that this week. The Parliament has the opportunity, through legislation the Parliament is bringing, to bring back and ensure that we have robust integrity and transparency regimes in the electoral funding system. I commend the business program.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:51): I will start where the Leader of the House ended when he spoke about a robust and transparent donation system in Victoria and the proposed amendments reflected in the government business program. 'Robust' and 'transparent' – well, this government business program deals with a bill that has not yet been tabled. We on this side of the chamber, the non-government members, have before us a proposed government business program with electoral reform that has not yet been released to the Victorian community or to the Parliament, so when it comes to a transparent and robust donation system, how can this government possibly claim to use terms of that nature? We have a government business program that will force a guillotine on that bill on Thursday afternoon. One can only presume, as the government advised that the bill would be debated in the house today with a guillotine today and moved into the other place today, that the government have not been able to do their numbers and get a deal on their bill. So widely did they talk about the deal that they had supposedly done, they committed to dealing with that bill within one afternoon through both chambers. I say to the crossbench and the other minor parties that they did the right thing by not rolling over on an important bill.

As the Leader of the House said, this bill – whatever the government is proposing – does deal with an important reform following the High Court's knocking out of an important part of our donation and electoral system, and it is important that this week the house be afforded the time to consider that. We need to ensure that we have laws in place that deal with the matters that were knocked out by the High Court. But while doing so, we need to think through what we are proposing to replace them with, because if the High Court has intervened once to say this government got it wrong, I think that we should be starting from a place of wanting to make sure that does not happen twice. Even the government, I am sure, does not want to be a two-time loser when it comes to these electoral laws. Sadly, from what I have seen and from what others have expressed publicly over the last number of days, there is a very, very strong concern that what the government is proposing will see the government a two-time loser when it comes to these reforms, and so we have said what this government needs to do is consult on a bill and consider a bill that is constitutional. You would think that that is a first-past-the-post requirement for bills they bring into this chamber. As it was knocked out once, there is serious concern about the same thing happening again. I am very concerned and the coalition is concerned that what we are seeing and hearing is not constitutional.

We have said work with us as an opposition, and instead what has the government done? We see a government business program that lists a bill for guillotine on Thursday that has not even been tabled. The bill is not there. The bill has not been released. The only reason you could hide the release of the bill is if you did not have confidence in it and you did not want people looking at it closely. Well, people will be looking at it closely, and I suspect in a couple of months the High Court will be looking at it closely, because I suspect the bill will be knocked out again. We say to the government: while you continue to play these games, we cannot support it, just like we will not support this government business program that tries to ram those laws through. We will not be supporting the government business program.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (15:56): I have to say, I am not surprised that the opposition are not supporting it, because last week was one of those anomalous weeks where they did support the government business program.

James Newbury interjected.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Two weeks? Oh, I have been corrected. That is exciting. I think we are not even at 10 yet in the 60th Parliament, because I have been keeping track. There are several important bills before the house this week. I was listening to the Leader of the House, who is also the Minister for Police, talk about the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. I am looking forward to contributing on this bill because I think it is incredibly important. I actually think it is such a great place for former police officers to come back and contribute their knowledge, their skills and their expertise in a way that benefits everyone, without them having to be active, running down streets and pursuing people, but being able to contribute really good skills. It is a great step forward for policing in our state, and I think it is going to have a really significant and positive effect overall. It is really good that this bill, which will provide a modern and fit-for-purpose reservist scheme within Victoria Police, is being debated this week. I look forward to my contribution, and I look forward more to listening to the contributions of everyone else. I do enjoy listening in. Sometimes if I am not in the chamber I sit glued to the television in my office, because it is always interesting to see the perspectives that we all bring into this place – our representation of our communities, but also our own stories and our own experiences, which inform our contributions here. I am looking forward to that.

I am also looking forward to the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026, which will establish Outdoor Recreation Victoria and the Land Access Panel. We have some beautiful parts of my electorate that are enjoyed by many across a whole different range of experiences. It can be bushwalking, and there are other tracks out in the Bunyip State Forest, which has a boundary with the member for Narracan's. We share that beautiful part of the world. I know it is important that people can enjoy the great outdoors in different ways. It is finding that sensitive balance where we are protecting our environment but also allowing people to enjoy recreation in a really great way, because we need to get outdoors more. At no other time in human history have we been more tied to screens – fixed to them, children and young people in particular. Any encouragement to get people outside in fresh air is a great thing indeed. I am really, really glad to see that a new agency is being established here.

Then we have the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026. This bill is actually doing quite a bit of work this week. It is a bit of a workhorse. It is going to enable modernisation and reflect current industry practice in the building industry. It is going to, really importantly, improve protections for consumers in Victoria's housing and building system by introducing a voluntary decennial – I do not think I have ever used that word in my life before, so that is a moment; it means 10-year – insurance scheme for new apartment buildings. It is going to expand powers to address land-related safety risks, and in my part of the world that is incredibly important because we are well known for erosion. It is going to improve identification and designation of land in flood-prone areas – not so much an issue across the Dandenong Ranges, but definitely a big issue for many people across our state. I just want to make a point about the Manager of Opposition Business's comments about the bill that he is concerned about, the Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026.

You cannot win, because if this bill was not coming on this week, the cries from those opposite would be that we are taking too long and we are dragging our feet. Then when we do do it, we are going too fast. Well, I think it should be stated that the opposition and all crossbenchers have actually been furnished with a copy of this bill, and that is important to note for the purposes of *Hansard*. They have been provided opportunities to engage, and there has been a lot of dialogue with key admin wings of the parties and crossbenchers. This is what I have been told. Time is of the essence on this, and we will continue to negotiate –

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is perhaps inadvertently misleading the house. She must be relying on faulty advice. There has been no bill circulated to the crossbench; we simply have not seen it. I think she ought to correct the record.

Anthony Carbines: Further to the point of order, Acting Speaker, there is no point of order. There are drafts and ongoing consultation and discussion with leaders.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): It is not a point of order.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (16:01): Unfortunately the member for Monbulk has run out of time, but as it stands, the very reason we are opposing the government business program this week is because of the tight timeline. There is no care for scrutiny in this place. There is no care for the rules or convention. The crossbenchers, as stated in the member for Ringwood's point of order, have not even sighted a draft of the donations bill, which has been first read today, to be second read tomorrow and to be guillotined by week's end. How on earth could we be expected to support a government business program that the Leader of the House claims to be robust and transparent when presenting this legislation? Come on. If it is robust and transparent, surely it would stand up to scrutiny. But given the disregard for convention, clearly it will not stand up to scrutiny and clearly a deal has not been struck as yet. But we will wait and see how that pans out over the course of the week and in fact if the crossbenchers do get a chance to sight it before debate begins – presumably tomorrow, one would think.

One of the other bills on the program this week is the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026, which is to be debated later on this afternoon, which is the bringing together of the Game Management Authority and fisheries. Obviously the fisheries industry and the Victorian Fisheries Authority have had it tough with cuts to staffing levels. This is part of the Silver review, which has recommended that these two bodies be amalgamated. It is an interesting bill, but it gives us a chance, particularly my colleagues in the Nationals, to talk about one of our great loves, and that is – I think that goes for all of us, despite how surprising that might be for a couple –

Peter Walsh interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Well, no, not the Geelong Football Club – the outdoors. The outdoors, member for Murray Plains, is one of the Nationals' great loves. The Geelong Football Club certainly does not rate a mention, I would not think, for most of us, but it does give us a chance to talk about and it will give me a chance to talk about Wyperfeld National Park in particular, when we talk about game hunting and things like that, and the vast area of national parks and state forests in my electorate.

Of course, there is the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. Allegedly there is a police reservist scheme still in the system, so that will be an interesting debate. While we are speaking of Victoria Police, I do want to acknowledge the fact that the Chief Commissioner of Police was in Mildura over the course of the break discussing the first of the regional academies, to be rolled out in Mildura, which is something that we are all looking forward to, and it is all very exciting. And while I am talking about our Victoria Police members, Mallee Annie is back on the job, which is fantastic, after 17 months of leave. It is fantastic to have her back at the single-member station in Culgoa. But Culgoa is not the only station she covers. She covers the entire Mallee region, and there are only five police members in fact that cover that entire Mallee region south of Mildura really, down through to Donald. It is a very big area with very few, so police reservists may be very useful there. But as the leader of opposition business has said, we cannot support a business program that is not robust. It is not transparent.

I actually forgot about the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026. Whenever anything comes into this place with regard to building, my go-to counsel is the member for Narracan, and because I spend so much time in the car, getting a briefing, which can go for an extended period of time, is always quite useful. I look forward to his debate, because I do know, after yesterday's briefing on my drive down to Melbourne from Mildura, that he has some very strong opinions on this bill.

A member interjected.

Jade BENHAM: It will be good. It will be highly entertaining, I should say. But as it stands, obviously, we cannot support the government business program.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (16:06): It gives me great pleasure this afternoon, indeed later than normal, to stand up and make a contribution in favour of this amazing, robust and transparent government business program. I note that the opposition, as per usual, have found some ridiculous reason to oppose the government business program, and shame on them for doing so when it has such important content – the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026 and the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. It is incredibly important getting some of those police reservists into the system to make sure that our Victoria Police members can be out on the beat doing the most important work that they can possibly do keeping our community safe.

There is the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026, a bill quite close to my heart as somebody who loves getting into the outdoors. I do not go as far north as Mildura, because I have some of the most fantastic national and state parks just on the doorstep of my electorate. Indeed if I go further west to Connewarre to the game reserve down there to shoot ducks, there are some of the most amazing state and national parks and of course game reserves right on the doorstep of my electorate. Of course, there is the Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026 as well.

On the point of being robust and transparent, too, member for Mildura, I assume that you know this and that I do not know something that you do not. I was going to come here and just give a really nice, calm contribution about how fantastic this government business program is until I had to listen to the dross coming out of the mouth of the member for Brighton – utter dross, speaking out of both sides of his mouth, to come in here and say that the government is just ramming this bill through without consultation, with a quick guillotine to get it into the upper house. I will give you a hint – I am sure you know this, member for Brighton: there are no donation laws in Victoria right now, so it is kind of urgent to get something done. I know full well that extensive consultation has been happening with the crossbench and indeed the opposition to try and land this legislation, to get an agreed pathway through the Parliament. In fact the information that I have, member for Brighton, is that you were quite difficult in that process. I think the wording that I heard was that your head office and your leader's office 'could not control' you. That is the information that I have, member for Brighton. The information that I also have, member for Brighton, is that you may stand here and say, 'We couldn't possibly support it, because it's rushed,' but the reason you will not support it is because you do not support the retrospective nature of it. You do not support donations that have been received being transparent, and I wonder why that is. What happened in the last few weeks in this place? Was there perhaps a by-election that the Liberal Party contested?

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a procedural motion. This is not an opportunity for him to vomit in this chamber. I would ask you to bring him back to it.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): I ask the member for Tarneit to come back.

Dylan WIGHT: Truth hurts, old glass jaw, doesn't it? Anyway, this is an incredibly important, robust and transparent government business program here today. Take the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026, a piece of legislation that is in line with the government's housing statement that was made almost three years ago now, I believe, in 2023. It is a housing statement that makes sure that people are going to have access to affordable homes near where they want to live, near where they grew up – much to the disgust of the member for Brighton and the member for Hawthorn – near where their parents live and near existing infrastructure, and to make sure that the outer suburbs like Wyndham Vale, Manor Lakes, Tarneit, Hoppers Crossing and Mount Cottrell do not have to continue to shoulder the load as they have for so long. We know that that is what the Liberal Party want to go back to, because that is what their housing announcement was: let us build more houses in the outer burbs. This is a brilliant government business program, and I commend it to the house.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (16:11): To the member for Tarneit, just because you spew more spin and you spin and you spin and you spin, it does not make it true. This is an absolutely chaotic

government business program that we will be opposing. We have just heard the Leader of the House introduce an Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026 and some changes to that bill. But have we seen it? No, we have not. They have not extended the courtesy to the Victorian public to inform them about what they want to do with these electoral reforms, with these donation law reforms, and they have not extended that courtesy to other parliamentarians – non-government members – because that just demonstrates the absolute and utter arrogance of this government. Their laws have been unconstitutional before, so there is absolutely nothing to guarantee that this new proposed legislation that we have not seen, that they want to bring on for debate urgently, swiftly, and guillotine off without delay, will not be unconstitutional again. What is to say that these rushed laws will not be unconstitutional again? They have not tabled them. They have not shared them with non-government members. They are absolutely failing on sensibility and transparency, and clearly they have no deal.

As of this morning we understood that the government wanted to rush it in – first read, second read, debate and guillotine off within a matter of hours. The pure fact that that is happening now over at least another day is purely because they know they do not have the numbers to get it through this place, to get it through the upper house. Quite frankly, there will be serious questions to be raised about whether they will be unconstitutional. This tired and arrogant Allan Labor government has form when it comes to laws that are unconstitutional. They have form when it comes to laws that are poorly drafted such that they have to do new revisions and new amendments to legislation time and time and time again. The electoral laws that they introduced previously were struck out, found to be unconstitutional, and with something so serious as the laws that guide the donations and the Electoral Act 2002 going to be rushed through, we would have to ask whether they will be constitutional again. We need something that works – absolutely. I think all parliamentarians and all Victorians want certainty, want something that works. That is why the government should not be pulling the wool over the eyes of their own backbenchers. They should be transparent and they should work together with all parliamentarians to make sure we get something that is constitutional and something that is the best option for Victoria.

In terms of the other bills that are on the government business program, the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026 is up this week. Whilst it might be common sense to address some of the workforce issues in terms of Victoria Police, it clearly indicates the absolute mess under the Allan Labor government when it comes to policing. Labor cut $50 million from the Victoria Police budget. They have a shortage of around 1500 police officers, and they have closed or reduced the hours of more than 40 police stations, including Mooroolbark and Croydon police stations in my electorate, which are shut four days a week. That is not what we need for our police, and this bill is an indication that they have workforce challenges. The Wilson Liberals and Nationals coalition's solution is to recruit 3000 more police. That will enable more police to be on the beat and reopen those stations that are closed.

In terms of the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026 that is up, this will give the minister more powers to designate flood zones. I will be eagerly watching this, because in my community Lilydale and Coldstream suffer flooding incidents quite regularly, and this will mean that these will become flood zones. That is going to go nowhere with the consultation of the community and will challenge this government even further to meet its 80,000 homes per year. It could bring some relief to those members in the Lilydale community. However, I think there should be greater expectations and greater emphasis on Yarra Ranges council and local municipalities for the drainage infrastructure that is so desperately needed, which is exacerbating the flooding in my community across Lilydale and Coldstream.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (49): Jacinta Allan, 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, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie

Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, 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, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (28): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Anthony Marsh, 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, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

James Hewat

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (16:22): Today I rise to pay tribute to James Hewat, who passed away on 13 May. Uncle Jim had four loves in life: the labour and union movement, the Essendon Football Club – I am wearing the right colours for him today – his deep faith and his beautiful family. It was so moving to hear his grandchildren speak so fondly of him at the funeral and of his absolute commitment to being a good father and grandfather and husband to the lovely Aileen, as well as later her dedicated carer through her battle with Alzheimer's. We enjoyed many a great get-together at the Hewats' in Valley Crescent, along with so many neighbours and friends. He always made a huge effort to bring people together and to be there when people needed him. Jim spent many years volunteering for St Vincent de Paul, helping others and giving dignity to those most in need, with both food relief and furniture. A loyal unionist, Jim knew the power of collective action to change lives, and he worked for the SDA national office for over a decade. He was an absolute stalwart of the Labor Party, helping out at every election I can remember, always at the Glenroy West Primary booth. He was also the best letterboxer the Labor Party has ever known and would always take the hardest bundles on the steepest hills and come back for more. I thank Jim for all that he gave to our community and our movement – a great bloke who lived a good life shaped by faith, loyalty, hard work and service to others. I pass on my sincerest condolences to Simon, Tim, Tiffany, Matt, Dot, Dolores, Jason, Chloe, Darcy, Abbey, Harrison, Patrick, Ella and Grace, and I thank Simon for his beautiful words at the funeral.

Kew electorate student leaders

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (16:23): Last week I hosted a primary school leaders forum here at Parliament House, bringing together students from across Kew to discuss the issues that matter to them. Students raised a broad range of topics, including community safety, homelessness, social media, sustainability, mental health, cost-of-living pressures, road safety and local infrastructure. Of particular interest was the issue of Victoria's debt, raised by Andy from Our Holy Redeemer Primary School. Drawing on his own experience running a lawn-mowing business, Andy spoke about the importance of staying within a budget, highlighting the need for governments to carefully manage public finances.

I was also pleased to host students from local secondary schools at the senior school leaders forum. Students raised a wide range of issues, including housing affordability, cost-of-living pressures and community safety, including in their own streets and their own homes. Mental health and wellbeing featured prominently, with students highlighting the importance of support services and wellbeing programs and speaking passionately about the fact that many of them are leading programs within their own schools. We also discussed the impact of AI on education and civic education for young voters and school funding. Other themes included crime and community safety and planning for future

population growth. I thank all the students who participated from the many schools across the Kew electorate. It was a genuine pleasure to welcome them to this place.

Bellarine electorate community safety

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (16:25): It was great to attend the Policing on the Bellarine forum at the SpringDale Neighbourhood Centre last week with many locals. The forum, organised by Neighbourhood Watch Bellarine and the Bellarine Community Support Register, provided an excellent opportunity for community members to learn more about local policing and community safety initiatives from the local police station members. One of the key messages from the event was the importance of reporting incidents and suspicious activity and the community playing a vital role in preventing crime and helping police respond effectively. I want to thank the dedicated volunteers and the police for organising such a successful event and all those present for their ongoing commitment to community safety. I look forward to also chairing the next bSafe meeting, which we do quarterly with local police and representatives from the Bellarine community. This is aimed at keeping communication open, improving community awareness and supporting our efforts to keep the Bellarine safe.

Bellarine Memorial Park

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (16:26): I was also honoured to attend the opening of the new Bellarine Memorial Park by the Geelong Cemeteries Trust and to join community members and project partners in marking a really important occasion. The Bellarine Memorial Park is more than a cemetery; it is a thoughtfully designed place of remembrance, reflection and connection that is going to serve our growing community for generations. It is set within the beautiful Bellarine landscape, and the park has been carefully planned to provide a peaceful and dignified resting place. I would like to acknowledge the Geelong Cemeteries Trust CEO, staff, board and chair for their commitment, care and foresight in creating such a wonderful place.

Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop awards

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (16:26): Today I had the absolute privilege of celebrating 13 extraordinary young people from right across my electorate of Euroa, each one a worthy recipient of a Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop Award. I want to give a huge congratulations to Aiden Aisbett-Wray, Aria Winkler, Ariana Berry, Charlotte Watson, Christian Lurati, Daniel Andrew, James Parker, Logan Schwarzkopff, Mitchell Sullivan, Murdoch Smith, Odern Rachelle, Oscar MacDonald and Rachel Richards. Ten of these incredible students, along with their families, are here at Parliament today for this special moment.

This award is named after a true local hero, Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop, a man whose name and legacy mean so much to our region. It is an award I am proud to support every year, because it recognises students who live by the same values Weary showed throughout his life, even in the darkest wartime circumstances: compassion, courage, humility, leadership, integrity, friendship and forgiveness. These young people have shown all of that and so much more. Whether it is by overcoming immense physical hurdles, medical events or personal tragedies with courage and positivity, through their diverse contributions from school leadership to creative talents and everyday kindness they perfectly embody the compassionate spirit of Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop. Some have faced challenges that would overwhelm most adults, yet they have met them with courage, resilience and grace. They may be young, but they are already proving our future is in very good hands. I want to thank the parents, guardians and teachers here today. You should be proud of the influence you have on these beautiful young people. I know I am.

Simon Vallone

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham) (16:28): I rise today to call out a disgraceful breach of trust. Simon Vallone, a former public servant in this state, lied about being Aboriginal. He used that fake, false claim to take up senior roles that were meant for First Nations people in this state. He took up

roles which required a lot of integrity and oversight. He assumed cultural authority. He benefited from systems built to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities after generations of exclusion and dispossession. This is not a mistake with paperwork, it is identity theft. This takes away opportunity and cultural authority. Every time someone falsely claims to be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, First Nations people are pushed aside and culture is disrespected. This case shows exactly why treaty matters. Treaty is not just symbolic; it is about truth, accountability and First Nations people having the authority to protect their own identity. Gellung Warl will have the powers under treaty to set clear standards, to verify claims and to stop opportunists from exploiting identity or asking for funding and status that they are not entitled to. This should never have happened. As allies and lawmakers, we need to stop it.

Member for Nepean

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (16:30): There is a new face in the house, and I would just like to say that the face is a friend of mine. We have been known to have a few beers together, and I am sure we will continue to have a few beers. I did say to my friend that he was on the wrong side, but I would love to take the opportunity to wish my friend the member for Nepean lots of luck in his new career.

Peninsula Aero Club

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (16:30): Something I talk about a lot is the Peninsula Aero Club, and I had the honour of going there a couple of weeks ago to hand out the proceeds of their air show, which was $45,000. They gave $18,000 to Kindred Clubhouse, $10,000 to Tyabb CFA, $10,000 to It's Okay Not to Be Okay, $6000 to Hastings SES and $1500 to the Tyabb Junior Football Netball Club. They are a magnificent group of volunteers – very passionate about community.

Willum Warrain

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (16:30): I often talk about community supporting community. When I went to Willum Warrain on the weekend for National Reconciliation Week we talked about 'all in'. Again, I think about community supporting community. If we want to make change, if we want to support each other, then we need to go hand in hand together, all in. It was fantastic to be at Willum Warrain and talk about reconciliation, which is so important.

Sikh Volunteers Australia

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (16:31): Lastly, Sikh Volunteers Australia are always down at Hastings foreshore on a Sunday, with free food from 12:30 pm to 1:30 pm.

North East Link

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (16:31): Residents in the area of Doncaster South have raised with me a lot of concern around planning scheme amendment GC271, which is going to see more land lost to the North East Link. This project has taken the initiative to go and take council's open space across a number of council areas – the cities of Yarra, Whitehorse, Boroondara and, predominantly, Manningham. As I said, this is affecting residents in the suburb of Doncaster South, where a lot of parkland is now going to be lost. This comes within, supposedly, two years of the completion of this project and completely out of nowhere. No-one from the North East Link Program or the Labor government had ever forecast that Tram Road Reserve and some of the parklands to the north side of the Eastern Freeway beyond the works area would be taken. But at the last minute, 2 minutes to midnight, the Labor government now come out and say, 'Oh well, actually, we're going to take not just that parkland, we're going to take a lot more.' Very little rationale has been given. I do not know what is going on in the minds of the Labor government. Why do they keep lying or misleading residents in Doncaster and the City of Manningham about open space that is being taken for the North East Link, not giving proper explanations and treating residents and council with contempt? There will be a reckoning for this, and it will come in November.

Country Fire Authority The Basin station

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (16:33): It was very exciting to see that after many years of patience The Basin CFA's new station is underway, with the site being announced on Basin-Olinda Road, just a couple of hundred metres away from their current station. The new station will be ready to go and operational for them in their 100th year. I want to thank all the members and the community for their patience. I want to thank the Minister for Emergency Services and the member for Monbulk as well for their advocacy in seeing this delivered.

Patrick Kelly

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (16:33): In the last minute of my members statement, I want to pay tribute and thank someone who has become a very close friend of mine, and that is Patrick Kelly. Today is his last day not working for me but working with me, because Pat truly worked with me. He is someone who has become a dear friend. I do absolutely love him. From a very selfish perspective, it is very sad to see him go. So many people in our community, so many school principals and so many people from across the political spectrum and right across the stakeholder group have written to Pat and thanked him for his time. Some of it is genuinely tear-jerking stuff. Pat has made an impact and has enabled me to do my job. The things that we have been able to do I think we have done okay, and we would not have been able to do them if it was not for people like Patrick Kelly. Patrick Kelly is someone who has worked in successive Labor governments. He is a great man, supported by his wonderful partner Steph Krueger. My son George thinks he lives at the office. Every time we drive past, George is like, 'Pat, Pat,' and I am like, 'No, mate,' so he is going to be devastated. I wish Pat the very best of luck in his future, and I am grateful for his loyalty.

Data centres

Tim READ (Brunswick) (16:34): Last week the *Age* revealed that the largest data centre ever proposed in Australia is being quietly mapped out in Plumpton, north-west of Melbourne. At 350 hectares, this facility would consume more power than the entire output of Victoria's largest coal-fired power station and would rely on fossil gas turbines to manage the swings in energy demand driven by AI training models. When the Premier appeared before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, my colleague Aiv Puglielli asked her how many data centres she hoped to attract to Victoria, and she said 'as many as we possibly can'. What does that say about where the Allan Labor government wants to take Victoria? The answer could be Ireland. A report released last week found that data centres there now consume 22 per cent of Ireland's electricity, more than every urban household combined. Irish households have already paid an estimated €715 million in additional electricity costs, and that is predicted to double over the next decade. Victoria is blundering down the same path to higher energy bills for Victorians and a delayed transition to renewables. The best time to regulate was before the data centre boom began, but the second-best time for a government to act is now. The Allan Labor government missed the moment, too busy wining and dining tech giants at the tennis, it seems.

Chemist Care Now

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (16:36): I was delighted to recently welcome the Minister for Health to my electorate for a visit to Amcal Chemist in Springvale. Together we saw firsthand the incredible impact of the Chemist Care Now program. Having worked in community health myself, I know how vital accessible, trusted local care is. Our local pharmacists do an exceptional job keeping our community healthy, and this program ensures that families in Springvale and across my electorate can access immediate world-class health care and treatments right when they need them most. Whether it be for UTIs, contraceptives or shingles or psoriasis treatment, this is important. I want to thank the wonderful team at Amcal Springvale for their dedication to our community's wellbeing and for the excitement in undertaking further studies so that they can continue to support my community as the Chemist Care Now program further expands.

Vietnamese community

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (16:37): Over the weekend I marked a profoundly significant occasion for our local Vietnamese community, the 2026 Vietnamese flag-raising ceremony in the City of Greater Dandenong hosted by the Vietnamese Community in Australia – Victoria Chapter. This annual ceremony is a moving reflection of resilience, freedom and identity for those with Vietnamese heritage. It was an honour to stand in solidarity with community leaders and families as the flag was raised.

Father Peter Slater

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (16:37): I rise today to acknowledge the life, faith and courage of Father Peter Slater and to recognise his ongoing battle with multiple system atrophy, or MSA. In June 2025 Father Peter and his family received the absolutely devastating diagnosis of this awful illness. He had previously been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, but after a fall caused by extremely low blood pressure further investigation confirmed that he had MSA, a rare, progressive neurological disorder affecting movement, blood pressure, speech, swallowing and, over time, a person's total independence. Father Peter's sister Julie McLean is a friend of mine and a constituent. Julie has spoken with deep love and admiration of her brother Peter. From the age of eight, after receiving his first Holy Communion, Peter knew he wanted to become a priest. He went on to devote his life to the priesthood, serving parish communities across the Sale diocese. In May 2025 he marked 50 years of ordination, receiving a special papal blessing from Pope Francis. Although his illness has changed his life profoundly, Father Peter still celebrates mass each day and continues to serve others at Shanagolden aged care. That is the kind of man he is.

Cranbourne electorate funding

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (16:39): If you live in Junction Village, I have some great news for you. Through the hard work and advocacy of our community members – and I am talking to you, Blessing – we have secured $50,000 to upgrade the Junction Village playground. This is an optimistic community. It is a young community. This community really deserves to have a topnotch playground, and this is what we are going to be able to deliver. The Allan Labor government cannot wait to see those little legs, that excitement from the little children around Junction Village. But wait, there is more. Junction Village and Botanic Ridge are going to get a new bus service. This is huge news.

Cranbourne electorate teachers

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (16:40): On another note, there are topnotch teachers in my community, and some of them have been serving Cranbourne for a long time. I would like to take the time to recognise George Massouris for his 40 years of service. Mr Massouris is the assistant principal of Cranbourne Secondary College, and I am always bumping into his past students. People talk about him in the fondest possible terms. Decades of service is no small thing. I would also like to take the opportunity to commend Andrew Bergmeier, our amazing principal from Cranbourne West Primary School, for his 55 years in education. These extraordinary educators are a credit to our community, and I am very grateful.

Vehicle registration rebate

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (16:40): We are here with yet another example of the Allan Labor government announcing a headline-grabbing cost-of-living measure without doing the basic homework necessary to deliver it. This government's vehicle registration rebate scheme descended into chaos on its very first day. Within seconds of applications opening, the website crashed under the weight of demand. Victorians promised relief were instead met with error messages, delays and frustration. Frankly, this should never have happened. Any competent government would have anticipated strong demand for a cost-of-living rebate and ensured the system was capable of handling it. Even more concerning is the decision to make applications online or on the app only. This

demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of the reality faced by many Victorians. Thousands of elderly residents with limited digital skills just cannot go online and do this. But the biggest question really is: why are Victorians being forced to apply at all? The government already had the information. It knows who pays vehicle registrations; it has the records in the database. The government could have simply credited the rebate to motorists' next registration renewal notices or automatically refunded eligible vehicle owners. Victorians deserve better than a rushed announcement, crashing websites and more bureaucracy. They deserve a government capable of delivering assistance efficiently, automatically and fairly.

Melton electorate teachers

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (16:42): I rise to recognise and thank the dedicated education staff from Melton who have been honoured through Victorian Recognition of Service awards. These awards celebrate extraordinary commitment to public education, recognising staff with 40 years or more service. In Melton we congratulate Neil Bradbury, Issam Kanaan and Francis Szydlowski from Kurunjang Secondary College and Karyn Woolley from Wedge Park Primary School, each, again, recognised for 40 years of service. And a special congratulations goes also to Jennifer Dockeary from Melton South Primary School, recognised for her outstanding 45 years of service. These teachers and education staff have shaped generations of young people through dedication, care and hard work, and I thank them for their remarkable contribution to our community and to public education in Victoria.

Bernie Goss

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (16:42): I now want to talk about another professional, an ambulance paramedic by the name of Bernie Goss. He started as a paramedic in 1980, 46 years ago. He has responded to thousands of patients and saved many lives. He worked in the Sale area for decades, and he has mentored many colleagues. He provided mental health support to those colleagues right through his career. Bernie retired in December last year, and I want to acknowledge and congratulate him on all of his efforts, in particular as a union delegate and state councillor fighting for better ambulance services and improved employment conditions for paramedics. Bernie has been the president of the Victorian Ambulance Union for the last seven years, and he is now retiring from that position. I extend my thanks to him for his service to Victorians and in particular to his colleagues in his support, resilience and leadership in making it a better, safer job. Finally, I want to thank his partner Miffy and his family. Thank you, Bernie, for all that you have done. Enjoy your retirement.

Randall Bourchier

David HODGETT (Croydon) (16:43): I rise today to speak on one of our community's local personalities, Mr Randall Bourchier. I have had the pleasure of knowing Randall for over 20 years, and in that time he has worn many hats, literally and figuratively. Not only is Randall a church pastor who gives endless pastoral support to so many in the community, he is a master of ceremonies, especially for the Celebrate Mooroolbark Festival held annually, and a regular contributor to *Living Today* magazine, which fosters growing community spirit in Mooroolbark and the Yarra Ranges. He is a mentor who offers pastoral support to the participants of the Hornbill Sports Club, a Chin volleyball and soccer club. Randall was also the president of the Mooroolbark Umbrella Group for 15 years and has only recently stood down from this distinguished position, after contributing from the establishment of the group through to helping build them to be an integral part of Mooroolbark organisations' successes. At one point in time Randall was also my piano teacher, lending his guidance and patience to me as I attempted to improve my musical ability, much to my wife's and family's deep concern. Randall has been a stalwart of our community, and I feel it is important to acknowledge and thank those who give so much and expect so little in return. I know Randall will continue to support the Mooroolbark community in many ways for a long time to come. In the meantime, I would like to say thank you, Randall, for all that you have done. It has not gone unnoticed.

Eid al-Adha

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (16:45): Last week I had the privilege of joining hundreds of families across Greenvale to celebrate Eid al-Adha. For Greenvale's Muslim community, Eid is a time of faith, generosity, family and unity. I thank the volunteers from the Adal Centre Australia and the Eritrean families in Hume who hosted such a special celebration in Craigieburn, and the wonderful Sahin family in Meadow Heights, who generously welcomed me into their home for a beautiful Turkish breakfast.

Kolbe Catholic College

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (16:45): Last week I joined the Deputy Premier and Minister Spence to open Kolbe Catholic College's St Catherine of Bologna campus. Supported by a $5 million Victorian government investment, this milestone strengthens faith-based education for our growing community. Thank you to principal Nick Scully, Max and principal Scully's team at Kolbe, who deliver outstanding Catholic secondary education to the Greenvale community.

Mar Polis III Nona

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (16:45): It was an honour to welcome His Beatitude Mar Paul III Nona to Victoria for his first visit as patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church. His election is a source of immense pride for Victoria's Chaldean community and recognises the strength, faith and contribution of our Chaldean diaspora. I thank the communities of Our Lady Guardian of Plants Catholic Parish and St George Chaldean Catholic Parish and Walid Bidaweed at Brookwood Receptions for hosting such meaningful celebrations.

Hume City Football Club

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (16:46): It has been a big couple of weeks at Hume City FC. I was delighted to secure $250,000 in last month's budget to upgrade the lighting at Nasiol stadium. It was also great to join international legend and World Cup winner Juan Mata to see a strong 3–nil win over Avondale FC and to have seen last weekend's big clash against traditional rivals South Melbourne. Thanks to SBS Sport for also being there ahead of the 14 June match between Australia and Türkiye at the FIFA World Cup.

Camberwell Primary School

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (16:46): I rise to recognise the outstanding achievements of the École primaire de Camberwell, or Camberwell Primary School. This phenomenal school has been delivering an innovative French–English immersion curriculum for more than 25 years. The program delivers exceptional educational outcomes and attracts families from across Melbourne seeking a world-class bilingual education for their children. But more can be done. I join Dr Bertha Bazalar, school council vice-president, and the entire Camberwell Primary community in calling on the government to support the establishment of a bilingual kindergarten onsite, creating a seamless language immersion pathway from early learning through to year 6 and helping more Victorian children access the benefits of bilingual education.

Justices of the peace

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (16:47): I recognise the important work of Victoria's justices of the peace, who quietly provide thousands of hours of voluntary service each year, helping Victorians access legal and administrative services close to home. Despite the value they deliver to our community, support for the recruitment and ongoing training of JPs from this government has not kept pace with the importance of their role. As the demand for their services grows, concerns remain about whether enough is being done to equip and sustain the next generation of volunteers. I particularly wish to recognise Lynette Giddings, a constituent of mine, for her strong advocacy to improve access to the services and support that hardworking JPs provide in our community.

Motor neurone disease

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (16:48): We have so much heart and the strongest community spirit in the hills, and just this weekend I joined the Hills MND Big Freeze Walk to Paradise, where I joined my beautiful friend the member for Pakenham. There was a river of blue beanies snaking its way along the path from Emerald to the Paradise Valley Hotel, and hundreds turned out to raise funds for this most worthy of causes. In its third year running, this event has quickly become a hills institution, organised by the family of local Matt Strickland, who was diagnosed with MND in 2015. The funds raised have exceeded all expectations. By midday on Sunday they had raised over $200,000 over the past three years alone. Brave locals lined up once again to feel the impact of icy cold water, and this year Matt's wife Sarah was amongst them. To the Stricklands, the Paradise Valley Hotel team, all who helped to organise and fundraise for this event and everyone who supported it, a huge thankyou to you all.

Shitbox Rally

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (16:49): In other worthy causes, I had the great pleasure of meeting Mark and Tony, two locals entering a 1976 Toyota Hilux with over 830,000 k's on the odometer and an AI assistant called KATT – the older brother of *Knight Riders*' KITT, of course – into the ahem-box rally, the largest community fundraiser for the Cancer Council in Australia, where teams drive cars worth no more than $1500 across harsh outback roads. It has raised over $65 million for cancer research so far. Best of luck to Mark and Tony.

Cardinia mental health and wellbeing local

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (16:49): In really important news, it was wonderful to be at the opening of the Cardinia mental health and wellbeing local in Pakenham with the member for Pakenham.

National Reconciliation Week

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (16:49): Since the commencement of reconciliation week last Thursday, I have had the pleasure of attending many events, including in my Geelong electorate. On Sunday the annual Rec in the Park celebrated First Peoples and their culture. It was an opportunity for people to learn about our shared history, to participate in a welcome ceremony and to ask questions. I want to thank Geelong One Fire Reconciliation Group, Kiri, Marsha, Kristi and the community dancers and Corrina Eccles, Wadawurrung woman, for another successful Rec in the Park.

Last week I also attended the showcase of the Gordon TAFE First Peoples culinary school. It is a first in this country. It is a great demonstration of what self-determination is all about. It was an exclusive culinary experience demonstrating the Wadawurrung people's cooking methods, ingredients using the seasonal calendar and appropriate cultural practices based on years of research. I want to acknowledge and thank Jas, Cam and Luke, who have spent many hours using Wadawurrung research to develop the First Peoples culinary certificate III in an authentic, respectful and culturally appropriate way. I also acknowledge the deep listening and respect by the Gordon TAFE CEO Joe Ormeno and his team. They have clearly understood reconciliation and self-determination and put it into practice. This course has been designed in collaboration with First Peoples to empower and inspire the next generation of First Peoples' culinary talent. It really does reflect a strong commitment to cultural knowledge, storytelling and excellence in hospitality.

Vesak

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (16:51): On 16 May I was honoured to join with Simon Kearney, the president of the Victorian United Nations Day of Vesak, to celebrate the 19th Victorian United Nations Day of Vesak in Melbourne. This gathering is not only a sacred Buddhist occasion but also a beautiful reflection of our multicultural spirit of Victoria, a state where people of all cultures, faiths and backgrounds come together in harmony and mutual respect. I would like to acknowledge the

continued support of the Victorian Labor government and Victorian Multicultural Commission for fostering inclusion, diversity and social cohesion across our community and the commitment to ensure that our cultural and spiritual celebrations like Vesak are recognised and celebrated by all Victorians. Today, as we commemorate of the birth, enlightenment and passing into nirvana of Buddha, we are reminded of the timeless values of compassion, loving kindness, meaningfulness and peace. In a world facing conflict, divisions and uncertainty, the teachings of Buddha remain deeply relevant and necessary. This year marks the Buddhist era year 2570, and it gives us an opportunity to reflect not only on our personal journey but also on how we can build a more peaceful and compassionate society together.

Bills

Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:52): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026 on behalf of my colleague Melina Bath in the other place as the shadow minister and to outline a few views on this important area of activity in our state and in the government. From the outset I make the point that what this legislation is doing is effectively merging two authorities, the Game Management Authority and the Victorian Fisheries Authority. The Game Management Authority was set up by my predecessor the member for Murray Plains when we were in government last as an important regulator and overseer of the hunting sector, and also one that supports and promotes the industry and ensures that the right things are happening in it. The Victorian Fisheries Authority as well is being merged together with this, so this is a fairly significant reform.

But I make the point that this reform is not occurring because the government thinks it is important to make these changes with respect to outdoor recreation, hunting, fishing and other activities. It is happening because of the Silver review, and the Silver review happened because this government cannot manage money, and it is Victorians who pay the price. Whether this particular legislation, this outcome, is about paying the price will be open to debate. We are not going to oppose this legislation, although we do have quite a number of amendments that we will be putting forward in the other place, and I will talk to those as I go through my contribution. But it is important to understand that this is not the government acting on some great reform drive to better promote outdoor recreation, fishing or hunting or any of those. It is because the government has run out of money and had to go to a review to understand how it could actually save some money, and the Silver review did make this recommendation.

I find it bemusing – 'galling' might be another way of putting it, too – that we have had ministers in question time today and over the last week or so issuing media statements making all sorts of allegations about what the very nasty opposition is apparently going to do when it comes to public service jobs. But it is actually this government that has been cutting public service jobs. I remind members, if they did not see it, of a great little video of the Premier being quizzed at a press conference and attacking the opposition for having the temerity to freeze public service numbers and being asked, 'Didn't you cut some public service numbers?' 'Yes,' said the Premier. 'How many was it? Was it hundreds?' The Premier replied, 'It was thousands.' That is the fact: it is thousands of jobs that the Premier and this government have been cutting, because they have lost control of the finances.

That is not just across the board in the public service. It has, of course, also occurred in the fisheries sector in particular. Last year we saw the government announce cuts of nearly 50 per cent of fishery officer positions statewide, reducing the overall numbers from about 69 to as few as 39. I do not think the government was quite prepared for the backlash that came from that. I think they probably thought, 'Oh, the fishos will be okay with it because it means less enforcement and everything.' But actually

Victorian fishermen and fisherwomen, recreational or commercial, are pretty keen to ensure that we do have a sustainable fishery in our state – in our rivers, our inland bays and inlets and our offshore zone as well – and those cuts were savage. It was a very big cut to fisheries officers. That generated a level of concern, I can say, and I am sure members opposite are still getting comments from people on Facebook about those cuts. I get them just about every post I put up. It does not matter what it is, someone will be raising it because it was simply another case of a government that cannot manage money and frontline services being impacted. As I said, literally about half of the fisheries officers were taken away. A number of fisheries stations were closed, and that has an impact on the fisheries themselves. That is what the genesis of this legislation is. It is not about a government that thinks it can do better on promoting hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation; it is about a government that is strapped for cash and desperately looking for ways to make the budget look better and, as a result, went to the Silver review. This is a result of that. This is one part of the legislation.

I say from the outset, as Leader of the Nationals, that the Nationals strongly support our outdoor recreation sector, whether that is hunting, fishing, four-wheel driving or prospectors and miners, who do such wonderful things around the state, or whether it is mountain biking, all of those things. They are good for people. They are good for health and fitness. They are good for people understanding our environment and being out and about and appreciating it.

From a hunting perspective, of course, it is critical – the number of pest animals that are taken out by hunters, whether that is foxes, deer, wild dogs, feral cats, all of those things. I know that not just in a recreational sense but in a formal sense there are recreational hunters who are engaged by the government in places like Wilsons Prom to go in and reduce deer numbers that are impacting on our local environments. So I strongly support the hunting sector. It is an activity that allows people to get out with their families. It allows them to get out with their friends and secure wild-grown food. It is a misnomer – so many of those opposite and particularly their so-called friends in the Greens up the back do not understand what hunting is about – and I hate it when duck hunting in particular is referred to as a 'sport'. Because if you talk to any of the duck hunters that go out, it is so much more than that. It is not a sport; it is about harvesting wild-caught food and doing it sustainably. All the evidence provided by the Game Management Authority over the years and by the other scientists will show that it is sustainable, and I strongly support it myself.

I am a member of Field & Game. I am not a hunter myself. I did have a shooters licence until recently when I unfortunately allowed it to lapse. I would now need to go back through the process to get it again. I do not have any firearms myself, so it is not an issue, but I strongly support those who do. When you get to mingle with those hunters, whether they are duck hunters or deer hunters or taking out feral animals, you see they are good people and they are law-abiding people in the main. There will be a bad egg in every bunch. I looked around the group that Melina Bath in the other place had down for a debate on a petition on firearms a few months ago – many of them from my own electorate, from the Sale branch of Field & Game – and they are really good humans. They are really good citizens. They do a lot of work in conservation, and they absolutely should be applauded for it, particularly Field & Game. As I said, I am a member of the Sale branch. I get all the emails and all the invitations. They do so much work on our local wetlands in particular, supporting not just ducks but all wildlife.

If anyone has the opportunity, they should visit the Heart Morass just out of Sale, which is a property that Field & Game and the Wetlands Environmental Taskforce purchased back in 2006, I think it was, at the height of a drought. It was a degraded grazing property, and Field & Game and the WET trust and others have done extraordinary work in renovating that property. When you see the photos of what it was when they purchased it, admittedly in the middle of a drought, you see it was a dust bowl and there was not a lot of vegetation there. It is now a very well functioning ecological site directly adjacent to the Latrobe River, not far from where it goes out into Lake Wellington. The habitat that they have built – the trees and shrubs they have planted and the work that they have done with nest boxes for ducks – is astounding. As a member I had the privilege a number of years ago of getting the keys one

day and taking my kids down to camp. We lucked out with some beautiful weather; I think it was on the grand final weekend. Getting out in the morning and seeing the birds that come in – there are birds that come literally from Japan to nest and breed there. We could hear the hog deer honking during the night and early in the morning. We went out in the night with a spotlight and saw possums and other wildlife in the trees. It is a beautiful location and a highlight of the sort of work that our hunters can do for our environment. They know, as every good hunter does, that if you protect the environment and you protect the habitat, then you will have sustainable hunting for the future.

As it happens, I was walking around Lake Guyatt in Sale on the weekend and saw a panel remembering Herb Guyatt, who it was named after. He was a member of Field & Game for many, many years in the Sale area and one of the people that set that up. I know Pud Howard, who is a driving force behind Field & Game and particularly the Heart property, said that Herb Guyatt said to him, 'You need to look after the habitat. If you look after the habitat, you'll hunt forever and a day.' That is something that our hunters do so well. Similarly, the Australian Deer Association and the sporting shooters association have the best interests of the environment at heart. Naturally they want to do their activity, but they can only do it if they look after the environment, so I strongly support them.

As I said, the Nationals and the Liberals are very strongly in favour of outdoor recreation pursuits. I think one of the things that we get concerned about is the way much of our public land gets locked up and is not available, whether it is for recreational pursuits or whether it is for commercial pursuits. That seems to be the approach of Labor governments over many years, driven particularly now by the Greens, and we saw it most recently with the central west national parks establishment. We have a very different perspective on the management of public land. You do not manage public land by putting a line around it and giving it a different name. Simply saying 'This is a national park, so it is now protected' does not actually protect it, particularly if you effectively lock it up and leave it. We see that time and time again. Governments think that because they have changed the name on a piece of paper here in this place and put a sign out the front that says it is now a national park, not a state forest or whatever it might be, somehow that is protecting it. You do not protect it. You need to manage the land.

That was why when I became leader of the party and appointed Melina Bath in the other place to a portfolio it was very deliberate that her portfolio is called 'public land management', because that is what we need to do. We need to protect the opportunities for outdoor recreation for hunters, for fishers, for four-wheel drivers, for mountain bikers, for motorbike riders, for horse riders, for prospectors and miners and for all of those activities but also for the environment itself. The land has been managed for 60,000 years by our Indigenous predecessors, and obviously it is done differently now and needs to be done differently, but that is an issue that I am very passionate about. We need to make that public land available to the public, and we need to make sure that we can continue to manage the land and ensure that it is well looked after in the future.

As I said, I do not think the approach of some Labor people is right. I think there are some on the other side that have actually got this and have been doing the right thing. I have been noticing in particular recently that Forest Fire Management Victoria are actively promoting more often their planned fuel reduction burns, which tells me that they are off the leash a bit and are trying to do the right thing. I know there are members of Parliament who are supportive of better management, but there are those still of the 'lock it up and leave it' approach.

The second part of the approach that is of concern is the neglect. Again, it comes back to finances or it comes back to a lack of care for anything outside the city. I will go to a couple of examples when it comes to our environment. The Sealers Cove boardwalk through a swampy area on Wilsons Prom in my electorate was damaged and destroyed effectively in 2021. It is only now being fixed in 2026, five years later. It is a project that would have been insured or at least self-insured by the government, and yet it has taken five years for the government to rebuild that track. All that time has robbed visitors and the people of South Gippsland of opportunities to head to Sealers Cove. It has particularly robbed our local businesses of more tourism, because it is a significant tourism attraction.

Likewise, the Thurra River bridge, which the member for Gippsland East and I have been talking about for six years now, burnt down in the Black Summer bushfires. It is a critical link to part of Croajingolong National Park, the Thurra River campground and the Point Hicks lighthouse, and it took five years for the government to rebuild it. I was there at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee asking questions about it repeatedly, and I repeatedly got answers saying, 'It's about to happen, Mr O'Brien. It's about to happen.' It did not happen for five years. It highlights the frustration. The Cape Conran cabins were similar. They were also burnt and damaged in the Black Summer fires. I think the member for Gippsland East is coming up shortly. He will be able to correct me if I am wrong, but I think they still have not been rebuilt or relocated back.

Likewise, we have seen what has happened in the west, in the member for Lowan's electorate, with Mount Arapiles and rock climbing, where rock climbers have been shut out. That is not an approach that has been based on good practical evidence or science. It is something that has caused a lot of concern in what is a world-class and global destination for rock climbing. It has an impact on the community of Natimuk, which also was impacted by fire this year. Then we had the debacle a few years ago, last term, with riverside Crown land access, which was mismanaged by the government, forcing farmers who had Crown land reserve frontage to permit access. That was certainly a concern that did not get the balance right. I mentioned duck hunting, and I am pleased that that is continuing. That is one area where the government made the right call, despite many on their side being very committed to shutting down duck hunting.

Likewise, while I am on a positive bent again, the decision last week of the government to not propose a cap on firearm numbers for law-abiding firearms owners is a critical one that I strongly support. We have been going around the state meeting with firearms owners and with hunting groups, and they were very concerned that we would follow the same path as New South Wales and WA and introduce caps. As I have said time and time again, capping the number of guns does not stop a terrorist incident. Indeed the law as it stands now in New South Wales, with caps of four guns per licensee, would not have stopped Bondi, because they had three guns. Leaving aside the guns, they also had improvised explosive devices. Those Islamic terrorists were committed to causing carnage and causing death and mayhem, and it was not the gun that was the issue that did it, it was the ideology. I give the government credit, though, for acknowledging that that was not going to actually make the community any safer and for not agreeing to the recommendation for the introduction of caps.

This legislation and part of the amendments that we will be proposing also go to the issues of commercial fishing. One of the concerns that we certainly have with this legislation and this decision to merge the VFA and the GMA is that commercial fishing will not be adequately considered and protected. That is something, again, pretty close to my heart. I have the only remaining bay and inlet fishery in Victoria, in Corner Inlet. It is a magnificent fishery. It is a great fishery for recreational fishermen as well, and yes, I get complaints occasionally that there are no fish because the netters have taken them all. But in general the recreational fishermen understand that we have had commercial netting in Corner Inlet for 150-odd years. We have gone from dozens and dozens of commercial fishermen down to I think it is 19 now, if I am not mistaken, who operate there. There have been some who have gone pretty hard in recent years, but generally speaking, the industry is very sustainable. We know the fishery is sustainable.

I had the pleasure of going out with Luke Anneda, a fisherman from Port Welshpool, last year. I happened to pick a day in January, I think it was, when the water was like glass. There was not a breath of air. It was a magnificent day. I am sure that Corner Inlet is not like that every day – in fact I have been out there on days when it is not – but this day in particular was magnificent, and Luke and his crew showed me how they fish. They literally put the net out, they bring it in and they, by hand, take the fish out of the net. They take the bycatch, and the bycatch goes straight back out. It is not even in the net generally; it is just caught in a pool, and as a result there is no unnecessary bycatch. They are only taking the fish species that they want. In particular Corner Inlet is famous for its King George whiting, for its flathead and for its calamari. But the King George whiting – if you have never had

fresh King George whiting, do yourself a favour. It is unbelievable, simply cooked with a bit of lemon, a bit of flour. It is just unbelievable. If you cannot get down to Corner Inlet – and it is actually hard to get access to it now – I think certainly one of the restaurants on Southbank, and the name has escaped me at the moment, literally used to have Bruce Collis's name on the menu as 'King George whiting supplied by Bruce Collis from Corner Inlet'. It was Rockpool. I am not sure if it is actually still there; no, it is gone. But that fish is coming into Melbourne and to some of our best restaurants because it is top quality. As I say, it is important that we actually look after commercial fishing as well, and that is perhaps a segue for me.

I should just mention too that with Melina Bath recently I was at San Remo co-op. Also last Sunday, with the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Kew, and the Liberal candidate for Bass Rochelle Halstead, I was at San Remo again. The member for Kew and Rochelle Halstead both had a go at the crays. The member for Kew did a great job holding a live cray. I do not think she was terribly comfortable about it. San Remo co-op is a great part of our state and is doing great things with fresh seafood.

To some of the concerns that we have and some of the amendments as a result, as I said, we are particularly concerned about respect for and consideration of the commercial fishing industry. Some of the amendments that we are looking to pursue include that we think the name Outdoor Recreation Victoria is somewhat limiting, so we are proposing to amend the legislation to create the name 'Victorian Fishing, Hunting and Outdoor Authority' to highlight the fishing aspect of it. That is important when it comes to the commercial fishing industry. We will move an amendment to ensure there is a provision in there clarifying that nothing in the bill affects the operation of the Fisheries Act 1995, which includes any lawful commercial fishing licences, quotas, entitlements or management arrangements.

We believe there is a need to clarify some of the definitions, so we will seek to insert a definition of 'seafood'; insert some definitions around 'outdoor recreation', including four-wheel driving, recreational motorcycling and trail bike riding, prospecting and fossicking and horse riding and equestrian activities; and also, when it comes to outdoor recreation interests, which is a little bit of a concern, insert definitions that include motorised and non-motorised recreation, hunting and fishing, prospecting and fossicking and equestrian activities. The rationale for that is to prevent arbitrary interpretation of what outdoor recreation interests are and ensure consistent inclusion in governance and conflict provisions. When it comes to having a board for this, we think that people who have voluntary roles in outdoor recreation should not be excluded from the board – in fact they should be encouraged, because we need that sort of expertise.

We will make an amendment to clause 7 with respect to fishing and aquaculture to include additional objects to promote and support access to aquatic resources for sustainable wild catch and aquaculture and to optimise the social, cultural and economic benefits of commercial fishing and aquaculture.

There is a concern that there is nothing in the legislation about services, particularly licensing services, to be provided in non-digital channels, so we are looking at an amendment to that. As the member for Murray Plains just raised in his contribution in members statements, there are always concerns. Every time the government does something and it is online only, we all get – and I am sure government members must get them as well – complaints from people who either are not technologically literate or do not have access to the internet or do not have access to devices. We need to ensure that there are paper-based or personal options to deal with that.

We will have an amendment with respect to reporting to ensure that the new agency prepares and publishes an annual report on public land access, which is critical. If I get time at the end, I will come back to that issue of public reporting.

Regulatory independence – there are aspects of the legislation that give the minister significant powers. One thing that we want to ensure, though, is that ministerial powers must not relate to a particular

person or a specific licence or permit. That is critical. That should be, I would have thought, taken as a given, but it is important that ministers cannot intervene in a particular case. With respect to decision-making, clause 10, we will insert a requirement that ORV must consider sustainable commercial fishing and aquaculture and access to aquatic resources.

Clauses 16 and 18 clarify what the definition of 'best available information' is. This is important. What we are looking to do is to include that best available information when we are making decisions about outdoor recreation may include scientific research, regional data, stakeholder knowledge and on-ground evidence. Too often we see governments making decisions based on academic theory, based on scientific knowledge but absolutely ignoring those on the ground who live and breathe it every day. That is critical.

We will continue on with respect to board governance and an amendment to require the board to collectively include experience in outdoor recreation, commercial fishing and/or aquaculture and, as far as practicable, hunting, recreational fishing, public land access and management, and regional Victoria. Again, this goes to that question. We do not want a board for Outdoor Recreation Victoria that is made up of a whole lot of city-based academics or public servants or scientists. We need people who understand what this is about and can bring some lived experience to it. I hate to use that terminology, but it is relevant in this case.

The bill has access panels, including a Land Access Panel, and we will make amendments to require a majority of external members, allow advice beyond the ministerial terms of reference and require written responses from land managers, to put some transparency into it. We also are seeking to establish an aquatic resources access panel. This is a new clause that would establish an aquatic resources panel just as there is a Land Access Panel. We need, for both our recreational and commercial fishing but also aquaculture, to have access to advice and input to government on access to aquatic areas.

That is a broad summary of the amendments that are being proposed. As I have said, it is important that the commercial fishing interests are understood and that their views are well represented and they do not become an afterthought in this new body, because it already is a little bit the case where the Victorian Fisheries Authority was both recreational and commercial, and putting it into another body potentially dilutes their influence, their expertise and their representation. We have certainly heard from commercial fishing stakeholders who have expressed concern that the bill does not adequately safeguard fisheries management and science, including the continuity of stock assessment. That is one of the issues that are very concerning to them, ensuring their specialist scientific staff and long-term research programs. They are the things that that the commercial sector is concerned about.

In summary, there are good parts of this bill. I think time will tell as to whether putting the hunting and fishing sectors together and putting the regulatory and promotion sectors together is the right thing or not. We are not opposing it, but we do think there are significant amendments that need to be made to ensure that our hunting and recreational outdoor pursuits are protected and so is commercial fishing.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (17:22): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026. It really is a pleasure to speak on this bill, because the Bellarine very much recognises that the outdoors is really important to us. But we do not see it really as recreation; it is almost just a part of who we are. Living on the Bellarine there are incredible natural environments where you can go and explore or participate in activities, whether that is fishing from your local jetty or heading out on the bay in your boat or a kayak. There are a lot of people who sail and paddle in our waterways. We have a lot of snorkellers and diving sites that people like to go and explore. There is walking on our magnificent beaches and in our coastal reserves. We have a Bellarine Rail Trail, where you can cycle right through the middle of the Bellarine from one end to the other into Geelong. You might want to catch a wave and do some surfing along our coastline. We have camping under the stars, maybe not 5 stars but lots of stars over the Bellarine. It is really woven into almost our everyday lives across the Bellarine. We certainly enjoy people coming to experience it as tourists as well.

I am very fortunate to live in a beautiful place. The Bellarine has so much to offer outdoors, and what that really does too is bring people together. It certainly connects people and communities. It creates sporting clubs, walking clubs, volunteers and environment groups, and some of the strongest community connections are formed through them. It has an economic benefit to our region as well. When people come to visit and experience our wonderful Bellarine environment, they stay in local accommodation, they eat in our local cafes and restaurants and they support our local businesses. On the Bellarine tourism and outdoor recreation are closely linked, and they do help drive economic activity across our region. I also want to touch on that being outdoors and in the outdoor recreation space certainly contributes significantly to our wellbeing – it is great for our health. In an increasingly busy world, connecting outside is certainly something that is invaluable. It improves your physical health and your stress levels and supports your mental health and wellbeing. Whether it might be a morning walk on the beach or camping or fishing, it certainly is very good for your health as well.

We have talked a little bit about fisheries today, and I would also like to talk about fishing and the fisheries activity as well – I will come to that in just a moment. When I am talking about connecting communities and bringing community together in the outdoors, I would like to give a shout-out to Richelle, who has an organisation called Escaping Your Comfort Zone. She is about supporting women coming along with other women and bushwalking at different various levels – some really hard walks and other quite easy walks. She brings generations together and women who maybe have come to the Bellarine anew. They have come from a different area and they are wanting connection as well, but they are doing that outdoors, they are getting healthy and they are walking. I would like to thank Richelle for her passion in creating this organisation where it is women supporting women and challenging themselves at the same time.

We do have a very passionate fishing community across the Bellarine as well. We have got great fishing and boat ramps that we have invested in so people can come safely and participate in their boating, recreation and fishing. I think the previous VRFish CEO used to call it the 'Bellarine seafood basket'. You are able to go out and you can catch a whiting, you can catch a flathead or you can get squid and calamari. There are a selection of fish that you can come home with if you head out off the Bellarine.

As we want our communities to be engaged in the outdoors and as we want our outdoor spaces to be public spaces, we do need to make sure that we have a well-managed outdoor recreation entity, which is what this bill will do. It is about accessibility and protecting and enhancing for our future generations, and that is why this establishment of Outdoor Recreation Victoria is so important. It is about putting a new statutory authority together that will strengthen the Victorian Fisheries Authority and the Game Management Authority. It also is going to expand their role to ensure that they have support and a much broader vision for our outdoor recreation.

I know that the last speaker was saying 'time will tell'. I am really excited about this. I think it is a really great opportunity to support what we are trying to achieve here in the state to make sure people have access to our outdoors, and this bill is going to do that. This bill goes a bit further in making sure that we have robust education, robust compliance, robust enforcement and also those research functions. This new role is encouraging that participation in the great outdoors, and it might be fishing, boating, camping or four-wheel driving. The authority will help create that simple pathway for people to find information and how they can participate responsibly.

I do want to just put on the record and acknowledge the work of fisheries, because it is a really important part of the Bellarine community. I want to acknowledge the work that has been undertaken by fisheries officers, particularly those who have served communities on the Bellarine. I know and some members in this place will know that I took a really strong interest in the fisheries workforce changes that occurred last year. I certainly raised concerns on behalf of my community. I understand the importance of maintaining a really strong local presence on the Bellarine. We want to ensure our coastal communities continue to have the support, the education and, really importantly, the compliance service that they rely on. I love fishing myself – our family go fishing; my son loves

fishing. We certainly want to see a sustainable fishing industry and sector, and we want to make sure people are doing the right thing.

Sometimes the work undertaken by our fisheries officers is not really widely seen by the public, but it is certainly very important. These officers play a really vital role ensuring our fisheries resources, educating our recreational fishers – obviously compliance with regulations is really important – and safeguarding our marine environments. We know that when you have a really strong marine environment that is ensuring a sustainable fishing sector and also making sure we are keeping our fish healthy and our stocks healthy for future generations.

I also acknowledge it is not easy work. Fisheries officers frequently work in really challenging conditions on the water. They also go onto some pretty remote stretches of coastline. They work outside normal business hours, and they are required to undertake those compliance activities and enforcement activities which can be complex and on occasion can be quite dangerous. I really want to take this opportunity to place on record my appreciation of their professionalism, their dedication and their commitment to serving Victorian communities. Their knowledge, expertise and local understanding really make an important contribution to the sustainability and the management of our fisheries. I want to just thank them, and I want to thank them for engaging with me last year particularly in conversation and advocacy for their sector. I want to put that on the record as well. I am really pleased that this bill is going to create this authority that is, importantly, going to continue the regulatory functions that the authorities currently have. That is not going to change. We want to ensure that both these sectors can have a really strong future.

We want people to enjoy the outdoors. For regional communities such as those on the Bellarine these types of bills are really significant because they talk to our everyday lives. As I have talked about, outdoor recreation is the way we live and it is who we are. It does bring economic value to the Bellarine communities. They support local businesses. They come to our local attractions and our beautiful environment that we have. It really defines the character of our region. As our population grows and as more Victorians and others want to come and seek this experience – I suppose across Victoria, not just on the Bellarine – we certainly want to make sure that this legislation improves and strengthens the availability and accessibility for people to enjoy the outdoors, just like I do and just like I did when I was growing up. We want our future generations to enjoy the same opportunities. For the people of the Bellarine and right across Victoria this investment and this bill are really important. It is worth making these decisions, and I commend this bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (17:32): Outdoor recreation is critical in my electorate. I have the hills of the High Country, the heavily forested areas of valleys and the rivers, so game hunting and fishing and all forms of outdoor recreation are particularly important. I want to mention as part of that not just game hunting and fishing but boating and aquaculture and any of the four-wheel driving activities and biking activities. There is so much that is undertaken in the great outdoors, particularly in my area.

This bill is not really going to set the world on fire, because it is merging two existing organisations, not creating something new and something different. The licensing and those things that happen already are going to continue to happen; they are just going to happen in a different way through a merged body. Why are we pursuing this? The Silver review was the main driver here. The Silver review was an independent review of Victoria's public service that was undertaken by Helen Silver. It was undertaken because of the financial pressures the government was under with the mismanagement of their budget and to have a look at areas for efficiency in service delivery. We know this is because the state is broke and the government are looking for every opportunity to repair the budget. Not only is there spiralling debt but there is spiralling spending as well. With the interest rate as it is, with $1.2 million in interest every hour, the government needs to look at doing something. I

want to quote from the Silver review, because she recommended the merging of GMA and VFA, the Game Management Authority and the Victorian Fisheries Authority, to:

> … create a unified regulator body for wildlife management, improving coordination and reducing administrative duplication. Over time, a single entity would enhance data sharing, streamline enforcement, and provide a more consistent regulatory experience for recreational and commercial users, while supporting a holistic approach to ecosystem and species management.

The important elements are going to be transferred and picked up here. The staff and the assets and the liabilities of the game management and the fisheries authorities are going to be transferred to this new body. There are a number of things that I really want to flag with the government that are important when you undertake merging. Whilst the bill talks about the governance structures, the board structures and how some things might look, there is a really important piece there about bringing people together and how you do that and maintain morale, because I can tell you already the morale is not always great, especially with the fisheries, where they have had government cuts imposed on them previously. The people piece is really important and often that gets left behind. Structures get put in place, people are told 'Do this, do that' and there is no real buy-in and blending of the people to that new organisation. I cannot stress enough the importance of that. If the government want this to go successfully, that people piece is really important.

I have mentioned outdoor recreation, and whilst there are a number of outdoor activities that are undertaken generally, there are quite a number of activities that are not mentioned specifically, and that is causing a little bit of grief for those being excluded, because essentially this is just about merging game and fisheries. In doing that, merging the fisheries into this, the commercial fishers do have some concerns and have raised concerns – and I thought maybe the member for Bellarine might have actually been tuned into that – that because this is a recreation-focused Outdoor Recreation Victoria the commercial seafood industry risks being overlooked or marginalised despite its role as a food-producing primary industry and significant regional economic contributor. That is important, and I know the government know that this is something that is particularly important to us.

I will mention fisheries, though, more specifically in relation to my electorate. I have mentioned that I have lots of valleys and rivers. Snobs Creek fish hatchery is just in Eildon, and we have Lake Eildon and the pondage. The pondage is where a lot of fish get released for the different programs that governments have to stock the rivers. It is really important that these are done with temperatures at the right level, because sometimes if it is too hot or too cold the fingerlings might not have a long life. In the Goulburn River and its tributaries, whether that is from Eildon, Thornton, Molesworth, Killingworth or from Yea and going on to Seymour, fishing is really important in those areas. I did mention earlier that there have been government fisheries and compliance officer cuts. In May 2025, not so long ago, the Allan government announced cuts of approximately 44 to 47 fishery officer positions statewide, reducing the numbers from around 69 to as few as 39. The member for Bellarine said she made a lot of noise and made sure that they were maintained in her area. If that is correct, then we have all dipped out, because they have been stacked in Labor-held seats.

There is an emphasis from enforcement here to engage in education and engagement, and there are concerns about how this will go, because there is activity around illegal fishing, there are safety risks and sometimes there are organised crime activities. We hear a lot of this around the bay and the coastal areas as well; it is not something that is particular to my electorate. But commercial fisheries – I have Goulburn River Trout. It has been up since the 1970s. In the mid-80s the Meggitt family took over, and Ed and Derrick Meggitt continue to run this business, which is a major hatchery. It is a fish farm. They breed, they process, they distribute. They have got 25 employees, and they have over a thousand tonnes of fresh and smoked rainbow trout. They do an amazing job there. They have also suffered a little bit with some of the floods over time. I cannot help but mention that the VFA were the drivers behind camping on licensed riverfrontages, which has caused no end of grief, and there are huge risks associated with that in my electorate.

I want to talk about deer hunting because deer cause incredible grief. It is difficult to know the numbers in the High Country and across all of the forests in the northern and eastern parts of the state. They do enormous damage to the environment and to agricultural businesses. There are too many very close interactions between vehicles and deer as well. There is no doubt that deer hunting is particularly important in my electorate. It has economic importance for small towns like Jamieson and Kevington and larger towns like Mansfield. Mansfield Hunting and Fishing, who I have mentioned before, do a particularly great job in responsibly working with and servicing hunters. The Game Management Authority does licensing and renewals for people who want to be involved in hunting, and that is going to continue for the some 4 million hectares of public land available. Also in that game are duck and quail, but essentially in my area it is about the deer. There is not enough being done to manage the exploding population, which is estimated to be well over a million deer.

The bill is generally supported by hunters and shooters, but what is a concern for me also is the composition and structure of the board, because with the way it is we could end up with a board that does not have people who really, truly understand the core businesses of outdoor recreation, fishing or game and have that practical knowledge. I think it is particularly important that this is recognised. We would be looking to make amendments around this to clarify that these roles should have people that are experienced in hunting, recreational fishing and aquaculture as well, and perhaps a regional perspective, because the biggest risk is having people who might pop up to the High Country or down to the coast every few weeks, or maybe not – maybe every six months. They have a peripheral understanding, but they may have skills in other areas. I absolutely endorse the need for skills-based boards, but you have to complement it with those who have a very detailed understanding of what it means at the grassroots, on the ground, so they can truly represent the people at the board table. That is particularly important.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (17:43): It is really good to rise to speak on the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026. I will begin with what in some respects might seem to be a very self-evident observation but one that I think is nonetheless quite important and can get forgotten sometimes. Public land belongs to the public, and Victorians should have the opportunity to responsibly enjoy the outdoor experiences that that public land offers. This bill is a step towards that. It is about making outdoor recreation more accessible, more affordable and easier to enjoy for people across our great state. It is practical reform that at its heart involves an amalgamation of the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) and the Game Management Authority (GMA) into ORV – so the creation of a new acronym.

Whether it is recreational fishing, hunting, boating, four-wheel driving, bush camping or other outdoor pursuits, Victorians deserve practical pathways to access our public land and waterways. Outdoor recreation is not a niche activity; it is a valued part of life for hundreds of thousands of Victorians and a vital contributor to our regional communities and local economies, as the member for Eildon noted. It is an activity that is deeply held and passionately engaged with by tens of thousands of those in the communities that I represent in Meadow Heights, Roxburgh Park, Greenvale, Westmeadows and Craigieburn. Indeed across Melbourne's northern and outer suburbs, like Greenvale, Roxy and Meadow Heights, many migrant and multicultural communities have embraced outdoor recreation as a way to connect with family, friends and the beautiful Victorian landscape, from the High Country to the Prom to the lakes of the Wimmera – all of it. On any given weekend you will find families from a wide range of cultural backgrounds – Turkish, Maltese, Italian – heading into regional Victoria to camp, to fish, to hunt, to explore public forests, to enjoy four-wheel driving tracks and to participate, as I said, in those lawful hunting activities. For many, outdoor recreation provides an opportunity to build a connection with Australia – a new home for many – bringing together grandparents, parents, children and cousins in shared outdoor experiences. It is so important.

The demand for access to public land is growing because of that participation in outdoor recreation. It is not confined and it should not be – it must not be – confined to a narrow section of our community. Communities across Melbourne's north, including many culturally diverse communities, are demonstrating an increased interest in camping, four-wheel driving, fishing and hunting as accessible

and affordable forms of recreation, and it is public land that provides the opportunities for people from all of those backgrounds to experience nature, to develop outdoor skills and to enjoy activities that contribute to physical and mental wellbeing. We do not want to be a country like the UK or others where access to rivers, to land and to beautiful open spaces is locked up and where it is prohibitively expensive for people to engage in those pursuits. It is something that we as a society and we as a Parliament I think hold dear, and it is something that this bill helps to safeguard. But as Victoria's population becomes more diverse, our approach to outdoor recreation must also recognise and support the diversity of people who use and value public land. Expanding opportunities for lawful outdoor recreation is about ensuring that future generations of Victorians, regardless of where they were born or the language that they speak at home, have the same opportunity to enjoy the bush as those who came before them. This bill helps to ensure that public land remains accessible and welcoming for the broad cross-section of Victorian communities who increasingly see camping, hunting, fishing and four-wheel driving as part of their lifestyle and connection to the outdoors.

The creation of Outdoor Recreation Victoria recognises that access matters. It brings together expertise and resources that better support participation in the bush and remove unnecessary barriers to getting outdoors. Crucially – and I want to emphasise this point – the reforms are not about dismantling existing arrangements but rather preserving strong regulatory oversight, which is really important in the context of activities such as hunting which have a dimension of risk inherent in them. They instead create a more coordinated approach to supporting outdoor recreation and ensuring that our environment and the fish, the wildlife and so forth that exist within it are properly managed. In doing so we are building on the success of the Victorian Fisheries Authority and the GMA, organisations that have delivered real benefits through very significant infrastructure investment, improved management and strong compliance outcomes.

I want to acknowledge the leadership of both organisations. Just a couple of weeks ago we had the leadership of the VFA, led by Travis Dowling, here at the Parliament to celebrate and showcase the work that they do in so many communities across our state. And that is not confined to beautiful rural areas. The VFA has also been involved in working with councils in my local area in Melbourne's north, where they have stocked lakes with fish, which is deeply valued by many recreational anglers. I also note that an organisation that represents the interests of many of my constituents, the Australian Deer Association, welcomed the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill and its associated reforms and suggested – indeed asserted publicly – that the new authority will improve advocacy for recreational hunting, expand opportunities for public land access and ensure that hunters are represented through a dedicated hunting advisory committee. They have, under their fantastic leadership, described the reforms as a positive step for the future of recreational hunting in Victoria.

By bringing all of these functions together we can better champion the interests of outdoor recreation participants and deliver a stronger voice for access to public land and waterways. As I have said, responsible access to public land should be encouraged, not treated as an afterthought, and this bill places public access at the centre of future planning and decision-making. ORV will work with land managers, work with traditional owners and work with local communities and stakeholders across Victoria to identify practical opportunities to expand and improve access for recreational users, and I think the establishment of a dedicated Land Access Panel is a significant step forward. It creates a mechanism to identify new opportunities for community access and ensure that those opportunities are considered across government, not just in silos.

Public land management should recognise multiple legitimate uses, including recreational activities that connect people with nature, support wellbeing and foster the stewardship of the environment. Greater access does not mean lower standards. Stronger regulation, compliance and environmental protections remain fundamental to the operation of Outdoor Recreation Victoria, and as I have also emphasised, existing authorised officers and compliance capabilities will be retained and strengthened to ensure that outdoor recreation continues to operate with robust and science-based regulatory frameworks.

This bill acknowledges an important principle: people who value and use public land are often amongst its strongest advocates and custodians. I want to reflect on a conversation I had on the weekend in the context of that. I was at Meadow Heights on Saturday morning talking with constituents, and a young man – in fact a school student – came up to me and was talking about how much he loves fishing. It is the first time, he said, he had engaged with a local representative, but what he wanted to talk about was the stocking of fish, specifically redfin, which I used to fish for in Lake Fyans up in the Grampians. It is quite a good eating fish by freshwater standards. He wanted more redfin to be stocked in the lakes locally so that he and his friends could engage in recreational fishing. He was talking about how their work had helped to get rid of the carp in those local lakes, and I think it was a good exemplification of how the people who are engaged in these pastimes are really keen to ensure that invasive species like carp are not taking over our local waterways but instead native fish like redfin are able to thrive, so that they can then in turn be fished and propagate so that there is enjoyment for generations to come. It struck me as a really insightful contribution from a young man. I will not call him out by name in this place, but I want to acknowledge his contribution not just to my thinking on this bill but to our local environment.

Communities like Meadow Heights are passionate about fishing and indeed about hunting. I note that there are over 50,000 licensed game hunters in Victoria. Many of those would be in Greenvale. As I have alluded to before, the Italian, the Maltese and the Turkish communities are all passionate about the outdoors and enjoy spending time there. Traditional cultures, as it were, of those communities have involved sharing food, sharing a meal, curing salami and all those things, which are a downstream effect of recreational hunting. The added bonus of their engagement in that pastime is that it injects $356 million of economic activity across the state. It pains me to say not all of that may be generated by Greenvale residents, but I suspect a significant proportion of it is. In addition to that, thousands of jobs are created. This is an important bill. I commend it to the house, and I hope it has a speedy passage.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (17:52): It is wonderful to be able to contribute in this place on outdoor recreation, and it has also been amazing to hear of so many members of this place who love outdoor recreation and particularly love to come and visit my electorate of Lowan to enjoy all that we have to offer. It was wonderful to hear the previous member speak about how wonderful the Grampians are – Lake Fyans, our wonderful wetlands, our river systems. We have the best of everything in the electorate of Lowan. We are so fortunate to have a natural environment that we want people to enjoy.

That is the message that the Nationals have always held at our heart – that we love the environment. We are conservationists at our heart, and we want to make sure that as many people as possible can get into the great outdoors and enjoy it, because if we lock up our national parks, if we lock up our state parks, we only see them overgrown with weeds, we see pests thrive and we see destruction of our native wildlife and our flora as well. We see that there is absolutely the balance that can be met in educating the next generation on how to look after our environment, about what we can do when we go into our forests to ensure that we can clean up what should not be there, whether it is around any pests that are in the area, whether it is weeds, whether it is rubbish or whether it is things from yesteryear that can be taken out to reduce our footprint on the land. I commend all of the people who contribute to that and enjoy our great outdoors, because it is not just good for the environment, it is good for our mental health and it is good for our physical health. If people have not looked after themselves recently, if they are feeling like the world is getting a bit too heavy for them: go out to the Grampians National Park for a week, and I can tell you, you will come back a happier, healthier and more grounded human being.

The crux of this bill really does touch on a lot of issues that are very, very important to the people of my electorate of Lowan. Of course this does touch on a repeal of GMA, the Game Management Authority. For many people in my electorate and who visit my electorate, hunting is very, very important. I have spoken in the past around visitors from Melbourne who would stay at our farmhouse every year for duck-hunting season. They did it because they loved that connection to a beautiful part of the state where they could go camping with their mates, do something that they love, harvest some

ducks and enjoy dinner together – the meal they had harvested – that evening. It is an enormously healthy activity, and it is fabulous that now we have got an adaptive harvest management framework, because it means that the amount that hunters can harvest fluctuates depending on the availability of ducks. That is sensible. It means that when we do not have as much water, when we have had drought and there are lower duck numbers, bag limits are reduced or the season is reduced, but when we have a huge number of ducks something that some do not recognise is that ducks can become a pest. They create havoc, particularly in the horticultural sector. Ducks love to eat lettuces. I am sure you understand, Acting Speaker Mercurio; you have some horticultural businesses in your electorate. Ducks can be a pest, and they need to be managed.

We also have dingoes in my electorate – wild dogs or dingoes, whatever you want to call them. They are all *Canis familiaris*. It is causing so much havoc and destruction and heartache for farmers, who are regularly contacting my office just absolutely distressed by what they see on their farms. Farmers care about their stock. They have a connection to their stock that I think people who have not experienced farming really do not understand. They care about their stock, and I can tell you what they do not love at all: they hate going out to their paddock in the morning, driving around and finding lambs slaughtered, their guts hanging out on the ground – they might still be alive and walking along – and to see any sheep who have had the back end ripped out by a wild dog. They cannot be treated. There is no medical intervention. It is a horrific and cruel death. Unfortunately, farmers in my electorate of Lowan around that north-west region, which used to have a protection zone for wild dogs, are seeing this every single day. It is costing a huge amount of money. Lamb prices are not too bad at the moment, and we have got lambs that are being killed in the hundreds on a regular basis.

These farmers cannot access an ATCW, an authority to control wildlife. They cannot do anything to control these pests that are attacking their own stock. It is a failure of the Allan Labor government. It is a failure not to protect landholders, not to allow them to protect their stock against the dogs that are coming out and attacking their lambs. It is absolutely disgraceful. When the minister was asked about this during the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings, their response was, 'Well, we've got companion animals going out there.' I am sorry, but companion animals are not very good mental health support for some farmer who is looking across their paddock and just seeing dead lambs. It is not working. So I do urge the government: please release some ATCWs to allow farmers to protect their stock. If the government cannot do that or will not do that for whatever reason, then compensate our farmers, because they are paying the price for Labor's failure to look after the dingoes they want to protect on public land. They are not keeping them on public land. I am sorry, but when you have got hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometres of public land in the north-west of the state, 16 kilometres of fence line does not keep dingoes out – what a surprise. Farms are a little bit bigger than just 16 kilometres of fence. It is not keeping the dingoes out. Stock continue to die, and it is simply a cruel death. Give compensation to those farmers; they deserve it.

We also know that there is a huge reduction in farmers being able to access the fox bounty at the moment. There has been an increase from $10 to $14 a scalp, which is a good thing, but the actual total bucket has been reduced to just $2.2 million. It was $6.7 million just five years ago. This is something that Labor do not like to talk about. They do not like to talk about what they are doing because they are cutting things like the fox bounty, but they will not cut the $15 billion that goes to strippers on Big Build sites. That is okay. But they will make sure that what they cut is harming Victorian farmers, and Victorian farmers are the heart of our economy. They are the heart of our regional communities. They need more support, they need protection and they feel like the Allan Labor government simply is not listening at the moment. So I urge the new minister to take heed and make sure that farmers can protect their stock from dingoes, make sure they can protect their stock from foxes and make sure that they can control the kangaroos on their property that are grazing our pasture and causing immense damage to land as well.

I also want to briefly mention the other aspect which is of great importance to my electorate, and that is rock climbing. Rock climbing is not mentioned in this legislation, and I cannot believe that, for such

an important sport for so many Victorians, not just in my electorate but in Melbourne in particular. We have one of the best rock-climbing sites in all of the world at Mount Arapiles. Punks in the Gym is one of the best climbs around the world, and people have for generations come to Mount Arapiles, to Nati, to enjoy climbing Punks in the Gym and for the challenge of Punks in the Gym. It is closed at the moment. We have got so many rock climbs that are closed in the Grampians National Park and at Mount Arapiles. I know that there have been discussions ongoing, but this is 4½ years now that these climbs have been closed.

The rock-climbing community have been absolutely coming to the party, having the discussions and making sure they are working with particularly Parks Victoria and Barengi Gadjin Land Council. They are coming in good faith, and I understand that now we are at a point where it is understood that only 3 per cent of the climbs at Mount Arapiles need to be closed to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage. Nobody says that that should not happen, but we do not need to shut down the entirety of the park and some of the best climbs in the world, because that is not where the Aboriginal cultural heritage is. If we need to build walkways to cover up the rocks to make sure we do not harm the rock chips that are there, the areas of cultural heritage, then let us get on and do it. But 4½ years is too long. It is creating division, and it is something that does not need to happen.

It never needed to happen. It always could have started with a conversation, with ideas coming forward on how we can do both. How can we climb? How can we protect cultural heritage? How can we make sure that we can enjoy our parks, learn more about cultural heritage, enjoy our environment and conserve our environment to make sure that future generations can get out there and enjoy it? Because if people can get out into the environment, no matter how they like to do that, then we know they will understand how important it is, they will fight for it in the future and they will protect it. I urge the Labor government to ensure they are supporting our farmers and our locals to make sure our public land is available and accessible.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (18:03): It gives me great pleasure this evening to rise and make a contribution in favour of the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026, a bill that, last time I checked, was about outdoor recreation, not dingoes or foxes or fences or crops. The last time I checked it was a bill about outdoor recreation and a bill that moves in Victoria for the GMA, the Game Management Authority, and the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) to be merged into one authority called Outdoor Recreation Victoria –

Members interjecting.

Dylan WIGHT: a move, if I could hear myself think, to ensure that we have the most efficient regulators possible to make sure that as many Victorians as possible can enjoy our great outdoors, whether that is to go hunting for duck or for deer or for quail or for dingoes, or if that is to go fishing in one of our amazing inland waterways or Port Phillip Bay, adjacent to my electorate of Tarneit, or whether that is to access one of our amazing state parks to camp, to hike and to spend a weekend with friends and family.

Outdoor recreation, as the member for Greenvale so eloquently put – he is always a pretty hard act to follow – contributes $356 million to the Victorian economy each and every year and supports thousands of jobs in the process, the vast majority of which are regional jobs. The lion's share of that $356 million is going into Victoria's regional economy. As he said quite rightly, access matters. Making sure that people on the weekend or during the week – whenever they would like to go – can easily and readily have access to our fantastic state parks, waterways et cetera to be able to undertake their recreational activities is incredibly important.

That is why the Land Access Panel as part of this legislation will be incredibly important. Incorporating feedback from Victorians, the bill establishes a Land Access Panel inside ORV to provide advice and information to government to identify new opportunities for community access across public land and waterways. Like the member for green whale – do not hunt them. Like the member for Greenvale, I

have a thriving migrant community in my electorate of Tarneit; second- and third-generation migrants, principally in Hoppers Crossing, of Italian and Greek heritage that have taken to outdoor recreation over generations with their families really well. Whether that be hunting, whether that be camping or whether that be bushwalking or hiking, outdoor recreation is something that helps sustain those families and communities in Hoppers Crossing in particular and something that I think has become absolutely fantastic and a fantastic feature of some of our migrant communities in Victoria.

Unfortunately, in my electorate of Tarneit there are no state parks and there is no real opportunity to undertake much outdoor activity. There is Mount Cottrell. You could climb to the summit of Mount Cottrell. Unfortunately the summit is only 32 metres high, only about 4000 times smaller than Mount Everest, so if you wish to undertake that activity on the weekend, it will not take you long. But each and every weekend people from my community are migrating from Hoppers Crossing and Tarneit into some amazing state and national parks or game reserves to undertake the recreation that they love to do.

Whilst, as I said, my electorate is not really one for state or national parks or to be able to undertake outdoor recreation, it is on the doorstep of some of the most picturesque and amazing state and national parks anywhere in Australia. Only about 20 minutes south of my electorate, I believe in the member for Lara's electorate – it would be right on the border of the electorates of Werribee and Lara – we have the You Yangs. It is a pretty easy walk up to the top of the You Yangs. You can go there with your children. You can take your children up there. I have done so with my boys on several occasions. There are barbecue facilities down at the bottom and car parking facilities. You can spend an entire day at the You Yangs with your family getting some fresh air and some physical activity. We have got Werribee Gorge further up towards the member for Melton's electorate, which is absolutely amazing as well. It is the perfect spot for a picnic or to paddle around in a canoe. It has an amazing hike as well – slightly more challenging than the You Yangs – which I have also done. Lerderderg State Park is dog friendly and has some amazing camping spots as well. There is also a great pub near there at Blackwood. You can take your dog away and go camping with your family and with your loved ones, which is a really amazing aspect, particularly of our state parks. Do not try and take your dog to a national park; the ranger will fine you. We have also got the Organ Pipes National Park, which is a must-see, located at the easternmost edge of the world's largest ancient volcanic lava flows. If you would like to go a little bit further west, we have the Otway national park, which I believe is on track for UNESCO recognition. On the way down to the member for South-West Coast's electorate and the member for Polwarth's electorate are some of the most beautiful rainforests and national parks that you will see anywhere in the world, full of amazing waterfalls like Stevensons Falls.

As I said at the outset of my contribution, merging the VFA and the GMA is incredibly important just to make sure that we have got the most efficient regulators that we possibly can in Victoria, so as many people as possible in Victoria can enjoy our great outdoors. Victoria is the most beautiful state in the country. I would argue it is one of the most beautiful states anywhere in the world, with picturesque state and national parks, picturesque beaches and fantastic fishing. Go down to Portland during tuna season – absolutely amazing.

Outdoor recreation, as I said, contributes $356 million each and every year to our economy and supports thousands of jobs, but what it also does, and the member for Lowan was absolutely right, is in its own way reduce a burden on Victoria's health system by making sure that people are fit and physically active and are also looking after their mental health. I can tell you right now, if you have had a hard week, going out into one of our fantastic state or national parks and camping for the night, being amongst nature, going for a hike, doing some exercise, apart from having a surf, is probably the best tonic to get you back into a good frame of mind.

I will repeat: this legislation is incredibly important both for the efficiency of the regulations but also for access as well with that Land Access Panel that will exist in the new ORV. It is great legislation, and I commend it to the house.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (18:13): I rise to speak on the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026. This is a bill that abolishes two longstanding specialist agencies, the Victorian Fisheries Authority and the Game Management Authority, and replaces them with a new single body called Outdoor Recreation Victoria. The new authority will oversee fishing, hunting, boating, compliance, licensing, public land access, infrastructure and recreational activities under one centralised structure. The government says it will streamline administration and improve coordination.

However, the concerns raised by stakeholders, industry groups and the shadow minister are significant and should not be dismissed. The bill increases ministerial control, weakens specialist representation and creates a real risk that important sectors, particularly commercial fishing, will lose their voice inside a broad, recreation-focused bureaucracy. We have an important and strong fishing industry in South-West Coast, and I have heard loud and clear their serious concerns about the governance arrangements and the lack of guaranteed regional representation, the absence of safeguards around commercial fishing interests and the failure to guarantee adequate fisheries enforcement capability into the future. There are also concerns that the authority attempts to combine advocacy, promotion and enforcement all under the one roof. This creates a very real tension. Regulators are supposed to regulate, advocates are supposed to advocate, and combining both can blur accountability and weaken confidence. The shadow minister has rightly identified the risks around weakened independence, reduced stakeholder representation and the lack of protections ensuring commercial fisheries' science and expertise remain central to the decision-making.

As a former Shadow Minister for Boating and Fishing, I particularly want to focus on the concerns surrounding commercial fishing and fisheries management. Commercial fishing fleets across Victoria, particularly in South-West Coast, feel nervous about this restructure. Commercial fishing is not a recreational pastime; it is an important and proud primary industry. It supports jobs, regional economies, exports, tourism and local food security. Victorians value our local seafood industry enormously. People buy Victorian seafood because they trust it. They trust the clean waters, they trust the sustainability and they trust the people catching it. Frankly, most Victorians would far rather eat seafood harvested from the pristine waters of Portland, Port Fairy or Warrnambool than seafood imported from parts of Asia where environmental standards and water quality can be uncertain. Our seafood industry has spent decades building that strong reputation.

Commercial fishers are not environmental vandals, as some activists like to portray them. In fact many are amongst the most passionate custodians of our marine environment because their livelihoods depend on healthy fisheries for generations to come. South-west fishers understand sustainability better than most people sitting behind desks in Melbourne bureaucracies. They know if you abuse or destroy the resource, you destroy your own future. That is why much investment has gone into fisheries science, stock assessments and sustainability programs funded through industry levies and partnerships with government and researchers. This is an industry that has embraced science, this is an industry that understands stewardship and this is an industry that has worked hard to ensure sustainability is not just spoken about but actually delivered.

I saw this many times firsthand over the years, working alongside both commercial and recreational fishers. One of the best examples came from Portland years ago with what became known locally as a gentlemen's agreement: commercial fishers volunteered to stop netting in the bay because they understood the importance of protecting local fish stocks and maintaining balance between recreation and commercial interests. That was about 40 years ago. It was not imposed by bureaucracy; it was achieved through cooperation, trust and local knowledge. And when one rogue operator threatened later to undermine the arrangement and potentially ruin it for everyone, something remarkable happened: commercial and recreational fishers stood shoulder to shoulder. They worked hand in glove to protect the long-term sustainability of the fishery for fishers and preserve a fair outcome for all users.

I was really pleased to help facilitate those discussions at the time, because it showed what regional communities can achieve when people work together with common sense and local knowledge instead

of ideological division. That is what many commercial fishers are now deeply concerned about in this bill. They fear that specialist fisheries' knowledge, local understanding and practical expertise will be swallowed by a giant, centralised recreational authority where commercial fishing becomes little more than an afterthought. Unfortunately these concerns are made even worse by the actions this government has already taken. At a time when the Allan Labor government claims to care deeply about sustainability and environmental protection, it has drastically cut fisheries officers across Victoria. You cannot claim to care about sustainability and the environment while removing the very people who are responsible for protecting them. Fisheries officers are absolutely critical. They enforce the rules, they monitor illegal activity and they protect fish stocks. They ensure sustainability measures are meaningful and applied. Without proper compliance and enforcement, laws become little more than words on paper. Regional communities are rightly alarmed that fishery officer numbers have been slashed so severely, because everybody knows what happens when compliance disappears. That is what the Labor government have done by cutting the fisheries officers.

Victoria has seen this before. We all remember the bad old days when illegal abalone poaching exploded. Organised crime infiltrated parts of the industry and sustainability came under enormous pressure. Those lessons should not be forgotten. Healthy fisheries do not happen by accident; they require proper science, proper monitoring and proper enforcement. Once stocks are damaged, recovery can take years or even decades. That is why cutting fisheries officers is such a dangerous false economy. It risks undermining decades of good work carried out by responsible commercial fishers, recreational anglers, scientists and fishery managers. It sends the entirely wrong message to people doing the wrong thing.

The bill talks extensively about recreation, access and participation, but many in the commercial seafood sector feel their role as primary food producers and custodians has been diminished. That is why the amendments proposed by the Liberals and the Nationals are important. They seek to strengthen governance, preserve specialist expertise, guarantee proper representation for commercial fishing and regional Victoria, improve transparency and ensure the fisheries, science and enforcement remain protected. Commercial fishermen deserve confidence that their industry will not simply disappear into a bureaucratic mega agency dominated by Melbourne-based administrations. When it comes to fisheries management, locals matter. Their knowledge matters, practical experience matters and regional voices matter. The fishermen of south-west Victoria have spent generations proving they are responsible custodians of our marine environment. They deserve respect for that work, not uncertainty about whether their industry will still have a strong voice into the future. I support sensible reform where it improves outcomes, but I do not support changes that weaken specialist expertise, undermine compliance capability or leave commercial fisheries wondering whether they have been forgotten altogether.

This is a government who pretend to care about the environment. They talk a big game and talk the talk, but when it comes to action, what we see are cuts. They make claims that we here on the Liberal–National side of the chamber are threatening cuts, but they are actually making cuts, and the evidence is clear to see. The evidence is clear in the fisheries. The evidence is clear in Regional Development Victoria funding. The evidence is clear in the funding cuts through the agricultural department, with the amount of people that have been taken out of that department and the corporate knowledge that has been lost. That has been supporting farmers and fisheries for some years, and it has been absolutely slashed by this government. This is a government who gets up in this chamber and says, 'The Liberals will cut.' Well, no, we are not the ones doing the cutting.

That is what I am seeing every day when I walk out of this chamber and go home to South-West Coast. With Tower Hill and the management of that state game park, it is absolutely covered in weeds, the paths are overgrown and the vermin are absolutely taking over. I see a government who say, 'We care about the environment,' but what we see in real life, on the ground, is the evidence of those cuts that this government have made. The Victorian seafood industry is too important to be treated as an

afterthought and the environment that we care for in the regions is too important. But this is not a government that cares; this is a government that cuts.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (18:22): As we get underway with the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026, what a great legacy of outdoor recreation and investment in all the activities that take place in the great outdoors it will be. I am sure, Acting Speaker Cameron, you would see me as a great aficionado of outdoor recreation. We get the big wide-brim hat on and out we go with the 4 litres of sunscreen. We love to get amongst it. Normally my outdoor recreation is scuba diving out in Bass Strait, which I think is classed as outdoor recreation.

But when we think of outdoor recreation, it means those formative memories out in various areas of country Victoria and rural and regional Victoria that really connect to who we are, and those formative memories can be with families, can be with grandparents and can be with friends. When you think of those moments, what do they mean? It could be recreational fishing and the investment that this government has made. From Target One Million it has gone absolutely brilliantly with that policy setting. We have had the first Minister for Fishing and Boating, an outstanding contribution to put on the radar that we as a government are for the outdoors, for recreation and for that connection that comes from some of these key activities. I think we had one of the nation's first outdoor recreation ministers. I want to give a massive shout-out to the former minister, Minister Dimopoulos. He gets out in the countryside. He has gone all around the state to all points of the compass. He is now the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs. This is one of the most significant parts of our portfolio and our truly Victorian story, which is that these activities and these connections are more than just for the sake of it; they are our identity and who we are. It connects families, it keeps people connected to their mental health and wellbeing and it is truly something we need to lift up and appreciate. The former parliamentary secretary, who is now the Minister for Youth and Minister for Carers and Volunteers, did an outstanding job in that space, bringing about the awareness and lifting up the investment and that engagement.

On the back of that work, on the back of the validation of this as a key ministerial responsibility, we see the creation of Outdoor Recreation Victoria. This looks at bringing together the Game Management Authority and the Victorian Fisheries Authority into a new statutory agency. This is about strengthening and uplifting two organisations into one and the efficiencies that come from that, rather than the two standalone identities.

I want to give a shout-out as well in awareness of some of the work of the Game Management Authority. There are a few parliamentarians in here that were on a parliamentary committee into invasive species. It might not surprise you, Acting Speaker Cameron, that that is not really my forte. We have had a few deer run through Mordialloc before, probably from Mildura, just letting them down, coming through.

Jade Benham: We don't have deer in Mildura.

Tim RICHARDSON: They do not have deer up there. It is very much in Warrandyte, but very much in the north-east and the Grampians. We said that there could be a million deer that are feral and invasive and have huge impact on farmers. What is the crossover there between how we manage that? We had a full inquiry into the role of recreational shooting and hunting in that. Now, to be honest – and this is one of the most beautiful things about parliamentary inquiries in this place – you learn so much with colleagues, and we had regional and rural. I am probably peri-urban at best, that is how far out I have gone. But I have a curiosity and an interest, and to team up with a range of different colleagues to understand that and the impacts was really important. It validated the generational place of recreational hunting in Victoria. That was quite clear. It explored some of the opportunities around harvesting of a range of game species and varieties and that impact as well. And on tourism, I think the member for Mildura might have mentioned – I think you have been on this, or maybe I imagined it, member for Mildura; maybe the member for Lowan made this point as well – the place of tourism and attendance in these regional and rural towns. Of the people who are going out, a lot of them are

generational contributions, spending money in the patch, spending money in regional and rural areas and then making that contribution as well.

The Game Management Authority has had a really important role in best practice in safety and regulation, and the regulation that the shooting and hunting community does of each other. We know that if a wide section of people bring down the standards of safe hunting practices and shooting practices, it impacts on everyone. So if everyone has a collective buy-in to that important work in that oversight, including bag limits – limits on what can be shot and taken and the harvesting of game as well – then everyone is strengthened with that as well.

I obviously have a lot more awareness of the Victorian Fisheries Authority, being in one of the best parts of Victoria. Port Phillip Bay is pristine, absolutely pristine, and is one of the most significant parts of our communities. My electorate of Mordialloc obviously straddles the bay. When the snapper season happens, we are all out there – out on the boats, out in the tinnies. Mordialloc was, post changes to the First Nations presence in the 1800s, known as a fishing village, so this is part of generations that have gone through and what Mordialloc has been known for. And when it is absolutely packed down at Patterson River, at Mordialloc Creek and Western Port Bay, it is absolutely a hive of activity.

I am really buoyed by the fact that this is about the strengthening of two agencies by coming together, the work that will be done in that space, the investment, the fairness and that real understanding that this is a big part of our responsibility as well. The bill also establishes a strong framework for governance of Outdoor Recreation Victoria. It will be led by an independent skills-based board, and that transition and continuity from the basis of those two organisations into what we will see will be really formative in getting those skills right and for the people that drive the strategic direction of Outdoor Recreation Victoria going forward as well. Importantly, I am heartened by the fact that there will be no losses of jobs through this transition and transfer as well.

I am also heartened on behalf of my community that Outdoor Recreation Victoria will receive base funding currently assigned to Game Management Authority and the Victorian Fisheries Authority of approximately $29 million per annum, giving them that certainty, and the Better Boating Fund and Recreational Fishing Licence Trust Account will remain unchanged. These are reassurances in the transition of organisations and how they front up going forward. This makes a lot of sense in terms of the modernisation and the expectations that this government has created around our want and our need to invest in outdoor recreation in all its facets. Hundreds of thousands of Victorians have a great connection to it, whether it is on long weekends, whether it is during school holidays or whether it is over that Christmas period, and some of those generational, formative moments that make us, as individuals, the people we are today have been experienced in some of those activities and those outcomes. When we look at all those facets together, it makes sense.

It probably would not have been possible to get to this point if the Allan Labor government had not put outdoor recreation so heavily on the agenda. I know at the time there was some interesting commentary around why this was created, but when you look at it as a portfolio area, when you look at the economic contribution, when you look at the benefit for regional and rural towns and when you look at all of those things together – and the investment this government has made in recreational fishing, in Go Fishing Victoria and in a range of different areas around our state – you see that that has set up this organisation with a great structure and a great charter to really thrive into the future. I love the recreational fishing stats: it provides employment for almost 20,000 Victorians and contributes $2.3 billion to the Victorian economy. Some of the most avid recreational fishers are down at Port Phillip Bay – along Mordialloc, the Kingston–Frankston areas and the Greater Dandenong areas – and are out there each and every time. As soon as we kick into snapper season it absolutely goes off down in my community.

This is a bill that makes a lot of sense. I want to recognise the work of the department to get to this point. It is a cluttered legislative program, as we know, but there has been some outstanding work from the department to make this happen. I want to acknowledge that work and the work of the former

minister, his parliamentary secretary and now the new minister, who is up and about in the other place, Minister Erdogan. I think he is very excited. I think he is going to set a new tone in outdoor recreation. I do not know if you can get more excited than Minister Dimopoulos, but Minister Erdogan is going to try to set the tone, so we wish him all the very best. We are going to see him out in every bit of hunting and shooting and fishing in the next little while.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (18:32): I rise on behalf of the Victorian Greens to oppose the Outdoor Recreation Bill 2026. This bill repeals and amends various acts and then establishes Outdoor Recreation Victoria and the Land Access Panel. The government presents this bill as a positive consolidation to get more Victorians outdoors and to make access easier. The Greens are all in favour of getting Victorians outdoors. We support people being able to walk, camp, paddle, picnic, hike, birdwatch, swim, ride and enjoy public land. But public land is not just a blank recreational asset. It is habitat. It is country. It is threatened species, waterways, old trees, wetlands, coastlines, forests and cultural landscapes. It is also a place for quiet recreation, family recreation, nature appreciation and recovery. When the government talks about access, the question is always: access for whom, for what purpose and with what safeguards?

Outdoor Recreation Victoria is not simply being established as a neutral access body. The bill gives it regulatory functions over game hunting, fishing, aquaculture and recreational boating. It also gives the organisation functions to promote participation in outdoor recreation, support sector development, facilitate access to public land and optimise the social, cultural and economic benefits of outdoor recreation. This is a serious governance tension. A regulator should regulate; a promoter should promote. When a single body is asked to do both, the public is entitled to ask which function wins when there is a conflict. We know the answer to this because the government was warned about this nearly a decade ago.

In 2017 the government's own independent Pegasus review of Game Management Authority compliance and enforcement functions warned about exactly the structural conflict that this bill now recreates. The review found that the GMA had not been able to effectively fulfil its compliance and enforcement responsibilities. It found noncompliance with game hunting laws was commonplace and widespread. It found the GMA was widely perceived as unable to ensure compliance with game hunting laws or effectively sanction offenders. It also found that, as a small statutory body, the GMA was vulnerable to influence from the interests it was supposed to regulate. Most importantly, the Pegasus compliance report found tensions and potential conflicts between the GMA's regulatory role and its other roles, and it said that the GMA was sometimes perceived as playing and occasionally slid into advocacy and promotional roles that conflicted with its responsibilities as a regulator. Pegasus recommended separating regulatory functions from advisory and promotional activities. The government is now literally doing the opposite. The bill gives Outdoor Recreation Victoria, ORV, regulatory functions over game hunting, fishing and boating, but it also gives them functions to promote participation in outdoor recreation, but only a very limited and particular type of outdoor recreation. ORV will only promote recreational fishing, boating, four-wheel driving, bush camping and game hunting.

We see that risk being sharpened by the new Land Access Panel, which the bill establishes to advise the minister on community access to public land for outdoor recreation. The minister appoints the members. The bill only requires that members have knowledge or experience relevant to the panel's function, which, according to the minister's second-reading speech, is limited only to recreational fishing, boating, game hunting, bush camping and four-wheel driving. When the minister appoints members of the Land Access Panel, will there be a seat at the table for conservation organisations or another seat for passive recreation users? No, I do not think so. Nor will there be representation of birdwatchers, bushwalkers, photographers, citizen scientists, volunteers, families who use parks for picnics, or communities who want safe, quiet, nature-rich public land. Collectively those people are far from a fringe group. They are the majority of Victorians, as we can clearly see in recent reporting and polling. First Nations stakeholders have also contacted us, asking simply: if the public land under

discussion is Aboriginal land and the Victorian government is committed to Aboriginal self-determination and partnership, why does this panel about access to traditional owners' land exclude their voice and decision-making?

This government talks about access, but access is not neutral. Access for whom? Access for what? Access to drive massive four-wheel drives further into fragile landscapes? Access to shoot in more places? Access to intensify pressure on parks and waterways already struggling under climate change, invasive species, underfunding and biodiversity decline? Funding for Victoria's national parks, home to our threatened species, is at record lows. Eighty-four per cent of Victorians say national parks are important to them, and 80 per cent support the creation of new national parks, with those figures showing very similar levels of support across Labor, coalition and Greens voters as well as across metropolitan and regional Victoria. When Victorians are asked what they actually do in the bush, the most common activities are not shooting or hunting or trail bike riding; they are short bushwalks, picnics, photography, camping and birdwatching. When asked what would encourage them to visit national parks more often, people nominated waterfalls and rivers, peace and quiet, and more walking tracks and trails. That is the silent majority this bill is locking out from decisions about what comprises outdoor recreation in this state.

Victorians care deeply about our native wildlife, and we want to see it protected. But at a time when native species are already at risk due to climate change, bushfires and drought, Labor continues to roll out policies across the state that are harming the very animals it should be safeguarding, and it is chronically underfunding our biodiversity initiatives and our wildlife rescue services. In 2025 Wildlife Victoria responded to 189,000 reports of wildlife in danger. As greenfield developments expand and more native habitat is destroyed, and as outdoor recreation is encouraged to threaten our native wildlife even further, their task simply grows, and yet their funding has flatlined. This year in Labor's recent budget only 5 per cent of their operations were funded, leaving them to scramble to meet costs for their 365-days-a-year, 24-hours-a-day service that they provide across the state to coordinate our wildlife rescue. They do incredible work in advocacy as well, particularly around stopping brutal duck shooting here in Victoria.

It is unbelievable that duck shooting under Labor is still legal here in Victoria. Waterbird numbers are in long-term decline due to drought and habitat destruction. Our native ducks are struggling. The final report from the parliamentary inquiry into bird hunting recommended the end of duck shooting here in Victoria, and yet Labor continues to cater to the shooting lobby by greenlighting the slaughter of ducks in yearly shooting seasons. Duck shooters represent less than half of 1 per cent of Victoria's population. Most Victorians want duck shooting to end, and Victoria is lagging behind the other states, with WA, New South Wales and Queensland all banning the practice decades ago on animal cruelty and environmental protection grounds. Plantation forest is dismally under-regulated too, which leads to hundreds of koalas being bulldozed and starved. Labor's ongoing disregard for wildlife habitat and the animals that depend on it is completely out of step with what Victorians expect from their government.

This bill sits within a much broader pattern of environmental agencies being asked to do more with less while biodiversity continues to decline and compliance work is weakened. We have seen continued pressure on Parks Victoria and cuts and restructuring across the environmental department, and Victorian Fisheries Authority workforce changes have caused concern about loss of frontline capacity. The real test of this bill is whether it strengthens independent regulation, protects biodiversity, respects traditional ownership, safeguards the quiet enjoyment of public land and gives the public a genuine seat at the table. On every one of those tests this bill fails, and the Greens will oppose it. My Greens colleagues in the other place will have a number of amendments.

Danny Pearson: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I would like to draw the house's attention to the fact that the member for Richmond was speaking on an environmental bill and stood down with 10 minutes and I think 18 seconds left on the clock, so she has failed to use her allotted time to speak on an environmental matter when she is a member of the Greens political party.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Martin Cameron): That is not a point of order.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (18:43): It was interesting; I was actually thinking I was just going to miss out on getting up tonight because I thought you would go your full 20 minutes, but anyway, not to worry. I rise to support the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026. At its heart this legislation is about something simple but deeply important: making it easier for Victorians to get outdoors. We all love doing that and enjoying our environment and connecting with the natural surrounds and spaces that belong to all of us. Too often in this place we speak about infrastructure, regulation, policy and technical terms alone, but of course outdoor recreation is not just about administration; it is about people, it is about our families spending time together, it is about our children learning patience and respect for nature and it is also about our mates camping by a river, people getting out for a walk, anglers standing by the water – hopefully they are throwing a line and trying to catch some fish – and communities rediscovering places that have too often been overlooked or locked away. That is why I welcome this bill and the establishment of Outdoor Recreation Victoria.

People here will probably know that I have a great love for the outdoors, and come December I will be off experiencing and exploring the outdoors right around the countryside not only in Victoria but interstate. I am heading west in February next year and looking forward to it. I map out my trips by looking where the closest wineries are; I normally do that. I am heading towards Margaret River in February next year, and we will be going via the Eyre Peninsula. I can assure you that the wineries will enjoy me calling through, let me say.

This bill brings together the Victorian Fisheries Authority and the Game Management Authority into a new authority with a broader purpose, not simply regulating activity but actively promoting participation and helping people access the outdoors. Victorians have made it very clear that they want more opportunities to enjoy nature and participate in outdoor recreation. I think it was brought home during the COVID pandemic how important our outdoors and recreational opportunities are, and that came to fruition obviously during COVID. Whether they are out fishing, boating, camping or bushwalking or simply just spending time near water and open spaces, people want access to the outdoors and they want government to help remove any barriers that stand in the way of enjoying those activities in our outdoor areas.

I am hoping to do a lot of that, as I have said, later this year. This is something that I had to delay eight years ago. I have lost eight years of that travel, but I will be making up for it. Hopefully I last long enough to make up for the lost eight years. We will be revving up the motorhome very shortly, at the end of the year, and we will be off. You will not see us for dust. It was interesting that I saw the former member for Lara coming back into the house today. It was great to see him, and he looks great. He looks well, but I can assure you I do not think you will see me back here very often, let me tell you. Not unless you put a winery out the back. Anyway, we will move on.

Of course the enjoyment of the outdoors is exactly the direction that this legislation takes us. We have got a fantastic long weekend coming up this weekend. We will see an example of it this weekend with many, many people getting out in the outdoors, whether that be camping, fishing or boating. Whatever it might be, people will be out and about this weekend regardless of what the weather is, and that is the great thing about it. People can find a recreational source that suits their needs, and it is fantastic to see. There will be thousands of people out, and I am sure there will be thousands in the campgrounds. They are probably booked out already. Again, it is a good reminder of how important our outdoors and recreational facilities are.

I particularly welcome the inclusion of the Land Access Panel, because one of the greatest frustrations that our communities raise is not the lack of interest in outdoor recreation but the difficulty of access. Again, people want to have greater access to those outdoor and recreational facilities. We have great waterways and parklands and natural assets across Victoria, but too often communities encounter a bit of confusion, fragmented responsibility or longstanding barriers that prevent them getting out. This bill recognises that challenge and creates a mechanism to identify opportunities and work in a

collaborative way across government and with land and water managers to improve access, and that is a practical reform.

We know the benefits of outdoor recreation are significant – the physical benefits, the mental benefits in getting outdoors and having nature around you, which are just amazing, and of course the social benefits of getting outdoors with either family or friends and enjoying that social aspect of it. We know that spending time outdoors improves everyone's wellbeing, which is so important these days. It reduces social isolation and it strengthens the community connections, and that is a great thing to see. It is so important in the current times that we have.

People going fishing and boating alone support thousands of jobs, and they have contributed billions of dollars to the Victorian economy. It is great to see when you go. I remember the member for Mordialloc spoke about the beautiful bay that we have on his doorstep, and there is fishing and boating. It is great to see, when you go to places around the coastline, all the boaters and fisherpeople – not fishermen but fisherpeople – out there enjoying themselves.

I was telling a story at the transport event before about being – I do not know how I did it – conned by a couple of young guys in New South Wales to go out game fishing one time. I get seasick, and I knew I would get seasick. Of course there I was camping in New South Wales, and these two young guys had the most magnificent boat, and they convinced me to go out at 5 o'clock in the morning. What idiot would get up at 5 o'clock when you are on holiday camping? I did. I went out on the boat just out through the heads at South West Rocks, and the first thing that happened was a big wave came over the boat, and guess who caught the lot of it? Me. So it was a great start to the fishing expedition. I do not know how far we went out – probably an hour from the coast. As soon as they stopped the motor, that was the end of me. The boat went up and down, the stomach went up and down and, I tell you what, I put plenty of burley into that sea. We never caught a fish, and the two young blokes looked at me as if to say, 'Why the hell did we bring him out?' Thank God, an hour or two later we were back on land. The greatest thing for me was to get back on land, and I said to them, 'If ever I'm going to go fishing again, it'll be around the corner to the fish shop,' so it will not be out on a boat chucking my guts up and not catching any fish. It was just ridiculous. Sorry about that story.

My electorate of Melton is one of the fastest growing communities in the country, and of course we are a community of very young families. It is such a diverse community, and they love the outdoors, they love recreational facilities, and it is fantastic to see. We have some great waterways in Melton, in Navan Park and the Melton Reservoir, and of course there is a nice little lake in the middle of the Melton Botanic Gardens. It is fantastic. And we have stocked those waterways. It is great to see kids, after school or on holidays, going down to those waterways and doing some fishing. We gave out the fishing rods to I think the year 5s only about 12 months ago, and it was fantastic to see them using those rods. In fact, there is a local story that a few of the parents knocked the fishing rods off the kids, unfortunately, and used the rods for themselves rather than allowing their kids to use the rods.

As I said, we have fantastic waterways out in Melton, very close to central Melbourne. You have the Melbourne Runabout and Speedboat Club on the Melton Reservoir – a fantastic club. They do a lot of waterskiing and things out there, and they have a lot of skiing competitions. We managed to get some money to have a jetty put into that reservoir, and I know there was some opposition to it. The jetty has not been built yet, but there is some planning in that for it. There is a group, a committee, through the Melton City Council trying to work through that issue. Unfortunately, I have not been invited to any of the meetings. For some reason the Melton City Council have decided that they do not want me at those meetings, but that is okay. That jetty was to provide for people wanting to do fishing in their little tinnies off the bank and for whatever – a picnic area. Again, it is a great asset for Melton to have that waterway, that reservoir there. Yes, the boat club can still have their skiing and boat races and things like that, but the fishing can be at the other end of the waterway. It is a great asset. This is a really important bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (18:53): I have not got long and I have got a lot of things to talk about with this bill, so I will get straight to it. I want to start with the member for Richmond. I just want to offer a couple of little insights, but that is a really good insight there on why local knowledge is really important on boards and advisory councils where outdoor recreation, fisheries and game management are concerned.

Let us talk about ducks and duck shooting. Yes, we still control ducks in this state with duck season, and the bag limits are probably too low. When the member for Richmond said that duck numbers are dwindling, I would invite anyone that wants to see duck numbers exploding to come out. Farmers have been incentivised in the past to create wetlands on their land, which is fantastic. But let me talk you through botulism and what happens with avian botulism when it gets into duck populations, and that tends to happen in wetlands like those are away from a naturally flowing waterway like the Murray River, for example. Avian botulism gets into duck populations. It can also then affect pets, and it can affect humans. But what happens to the ducks – and this happens in times of overpopulation during the warmer months, for example – is they will drown. It is botulism, right, so they become paralysed, which means they can drown or they cannot move. So I think the more savage death of a duck is a virus like avian botulism. When it goes through a wetland or gets into a farm dam, then it can infect the crop that that water is going to, if in fact it is going to a crop. But that is just one of the reasons why game management in this state is still really important.

Full disclosure: I am a card-carrying member of Field & Game Australia and a member of the Sunraysia Field & Game club, so I know a thing or two about this. There are a lot of people that travel up for what is now a very, very short duck season with a very, very small bag limit. But they love it. They come and camp and they love it, and it is a great way and a cost-effective way for farmers – because they are all under pressure – to control duck populations in those wetlands that have been created and to make sure those environments remain healthy, because honestly, if we had an outbreak, then it could be all sorts of detrimental.

I want to also address the member for Tarneit, who pulled up the member for Lowan, although – and I will have to check *Hansard* – I am sure he said later that the member for Lowan was right. I do not know what exactly he was referring to, but she was probably right; she usually is. But he also made a point of saying he does not know what game management and wild dogs have got to do with this bill. Well, game management, kangaroos – that is game management. That is one of the organisations that is now being merged into Outdoor Recreation Victoria.

The simple fact of the matter is that the member for Lowan's electorate covers 20 per cent of this state, and in my electorate, which covers nearly 17 per cent of this state, I have almost half a million hectares of national park. The perimeter: it would be hard to measure accurately, but there is anywhere from 350 kilometres to 450 kilometres of boundary to Wyperfeld National Park. Another reason why local knowledge is important for things like this: anyone that knows that national park knows that it is referred to as 'whipper-field', not 'wiper-feld', national park. Local knowledge is important. Sixteen kilometres of eradication fencing does not really help keep the dingoes out of the flocks. It just does not. There used to be a wild dog fence – quick history lesson – which was built in the 1800s, that spanned from Nyah, up on the Murray River, and wound its way down over to the South Australian border to keep the dogs out or to keep them in, depending on what side of it you were on. So the 16 kilometres of fence that the government are funding and patting themselves on the back for makes absolutely no difference. The guardian animals that are out there to protect sheep flocks from wild dogs do very little. As much as I love a llama or an alpaca and I love a maremma, I have seen some maremmas out there that are scared of thunderstorms – not very effective at being guardian animals all the time. So that is what that has to do with that.

If we get on to other forms of game management, on farm again, and kangaroos, if you get an authority to control wildlife on your property, the maximum that you can harvest per year is 35. I could get that in a night, particularly –

Will Fowles interjected.

Jade BENHAM: The member for Ringwood I am sure knows, being from near the High Country, that you can go out and it would take you sometimes 2 or 3 hours. You could get 35 pretty easily. However, the member for Mordialloc did make reference earlier to the fact that it does create the hunting and game tourism market, and it really does. Getting back to the benefits of duck shooting for areas like mine and the kangaroo harvesting program, the restrictions around the authority to control wildlife and the lack of ability to get one to control wild dogs because of a loophole are an issue, but it does create tourism. There are a lot of people that come to our region to hunt, particularly in duck season, and if you have got one of those ATCWs then that is also a way. I was out shooting kangaroos from a very, very young age. It was something that we loved to do with my grandparents when they were out on a farm at Warrenmang.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (19:00): (1669) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, and the action I seek is for her to immediately call a royal commission into corruption on government worksites. After years of resisting calls from experts and the Liberals to give Victoria's corruption watchdog the powers it needs, the Premier has performed the most extraordinary backflip. Now she says they do need more powers. It was just March of this year that Labor voted down a cross-party bill to give IBAC the powers to track down the $15 billion stolen in the worst corruption scandal in Victoria's history. I wonder what has changed. Perhaps she realised Victorians do not want their taxes funding strippers on worksites. Perhaps the polling made her realise that Victorians know she was the minister responsible for the Big Build when the corruption started and that her claims that she did not know about it just do not stack up. Or perhaps it was her doorknocking that made her realise regional Victorians are furious that their taxes funded Ferraris for gang members instead of fixing the potholes on their roads. The reality is that the Premier changed her position because there is an election coming. But even now she wants to bury the truth. She only plans to give IBAC powers in 2028, long after this year's election.

Enough is enough. The Liberals will give IBAC the powers it needs immediately. We will call a royal commission immediately and will crack down on criminals profiting off taxpayers money immediately. Victorians deserve a fresh start, and the Liberals will deliver one. Victorians want a government that shows respect for taxpayers money and that invests in the services they need instead of waste and corruption. Under Labor there is a pattern that has emerged: $70,000 to install and then replace plaques because they did not say 'Honourable' correctly before the Premier's name; $100,000 to make a new logo for Triple Zero Victoria; $200,000 to rent pot plants for government offices; $400,000 on jelly beans and yo-yos to promote the SEC; $13 million on machete bins; $137 million on wasteful delays on the Myki system upgrade, which, newsflash, still does not work; $600 million on a Commonwealth Games that never happened; $15 billion lost to corruption and criminal behaviour on the Big Build; and the list goes on and on and on. Labor has lost all respect for the people really paying the bills – everyday Victorians.

But there is hope. A future Liberal government will put an end to the waste, because we understand that every dollar the government spends is a dollar first earned by a worker, a family or a small business. We will have honest and open budgets, not budgets full of mystery and secret billion-dollar slush funds. We will invest in frontline services, not strippers on worksites. We will restore integrity to government and hold a royal commission into corruption. It is time for a fresh start.

Keysborough Gardens Primary School

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (19:03): (1670) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Education. The action I seek is for the minister to update my community on the timeframes for the commencement of early planning and works for Keysborough Gardens Primary School, which is an $8 million investment in the 2026–27 budget. This is an amazing school in our area. Keysborough South is a newly established area in the south of Keysborough. Thousands of people now call this area home. Keysborough Gardens Primary School was opened by a Labor government. It was the former member for Keysborough Martin Pakula who worked hard on securing this investment. We see now that the second stage has been completed, and we are building the third stage, with upgrades to deliver a library and improve classroom spaces. I want to give a big shout-out to principal Sherri Jenkins, an amazing leader in our community and one of the best principals you can come across – such an incredible leader; her principal leadership team; and the teachers and education support staff, who do such a great job. The aspiration and the hope at this school and its inclusivity are the hallmarks of what make this school amazing. You feel it going into the place. You feel that the kids are safe and that their learning is absolutely enhanced with some of the best educators we have got.

I take this opportunity as well to acknowledge the incredible work of the education minister to really put forward an in-principle agreement for the education enterprise bargaining agreement with our teachers and education support staff. It is Labor governments that back our teachers and invest in our education system each and every time that we get the opportunity to be in government. We have reformed education substantially, building back the education regions. We have recruited more and more teachers and education support staff, and we are truly the Education State as a result of that. That investment, that support of teachers, is on the back of the great leadership of the Deputy Premier and the Premier, but I know the education minister has done a truckload of work. This has been a constant focus. He has been building works across the state, and he is an outstanding leader. I am really happy to submit this adjournment to him and get an update on how Keysborough Gardens Primary School will progress.

Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (19:06): (1671) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria in the other place. The action I seek is for her to review the funding for food relief in the regions, particularly to ethnic community councils and particularly in Sunraysia. The Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council does a huge power of work. They punch well above their weight. They are the hub of food relief, really, in Mildura, and they are seeing people now that they have never seen before. The neighbourhood houses are too, who are not funded to provide food relief but do that because, again, they punch well above their weight. They also rely on the Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council, affectionately known as SMECC. They have a social supermarket. They rely a lot on donations from local supermarkets. They also rely on a certain amount of Department of Premier and Cabinet funding every year. I have come to learn that the grant funding stream that SMECC applied for was cut by three-quarters this year. They were offered an allocation of one-quarter of what they had been getting previously and of what the maximum was, and they had 24 hours to accept that offer. So I am asking the minister now, in a cost-of-living crisis, in one of the largest multicultural communities in Victoria, to review this funding model for Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council, because they are desperate to keep their doors open. There are families with young children and kids at school that cannot put food on the table; they simply cannot feed their kids. It is absolutely abhorrent that this government would cut their funding by so much in a time of absolute crisis in this state, coming into winter. Some families are having to choose between switching the heater on and giving their kids dinner. It is absolutely disgusting, and I am calling on the minister to review it urgently.

Bus route 236

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (19:08): (1672) My adjournment is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, the action I seek is for the minister to visit the seat of Albert Park to see firsthand the positive impact that the improvements to bus route 236 will have on our community, as announced in the Victorian budget this year. For many years residents in Albert Park, South Melbourne, Port Melbourne and surrounding suburbs have advocated for better public transport connections and more reliable bus services. The improvements coming to route 236 will help provide greater connectivity and improved access to local services and make it easier for residents to travel to work, education, health care and community activities. Since the changes were announced I have heard positive feedback from local residents, who appreciate the enhanced service and the greater convenience it will provide. Improved public transport helps people move around more easily and also supports local businesses, reduces congestion and contributes to a more sustainable transport network. I look forward to a response from the minister and welcome her for a visit.

Narracan electorate battery energy storage systems

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (19:09): (1673) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is that the minister consider all factors when assessing the BESS projects in my electorate. I have numerous BESS projects occurring in my electorate, and it is of great community concern that these projects will be decided by the minister. They do not get decided by the local council. What my community is asking is that the minister consider all factors when assessing these projects. We are talking about rural farmland in my area. This is farmland that is zoned rural. Farmers jump through hoops just to get a shed put on these properties, yet these BESSs, the battery energy storage systems, can be just put there at the direction of the minister. What my community is also concerned about is that the minister can remove overlays to let these projects happen. In my area we do have significant, catastrophic bushfires from time to time, unfortunately. Again, my community is concerned about the impact that the bushfires will have in the areas where these projects are going. My colleague Mary Aldred, the member for Monash in the federal Parliament, and I are very much on a unity ticket on this. We believe the community should be consulted and the council should have a say.

But what is even more confusing for my community with these BESS projects is that there is no renewable energy zone in the Baw Baw Shire Council – none at all. These BESS projects are outside these renewable energy zones, and we cannot understand why they are not targeted in the renewable energy zones, given that is what they were set up for. It seems to be that this government is riding roughshod over regional Victoria when it comes to these renewable projects. They have taken away all consultation. They have taken away the say of the community. There has not even been a government representative down there in any community engagement that has gone on. Not one person from government has come down to listen to the concerns of the community. I really do urge the minister to have a look at the locations of these things and assess them properly. If you have a battery energy storage system in a bushfire overlay zone, it should not occur there. Or if it is in a cultural heritage area, it should not occur there. I have brought this up several times, but I know the assessments are due, so I am urging the minister to assess them properly and have my community concerns front of mind when making those judgements.

Pascoe Vale electorate schools

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (19:12): (1674) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to consider, support and invest in the proposals put forward by a number of my local schools to continue improving local learning infrastructure and resources across the Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West communities. Since 2014 our Labor government has continued to invest in and back all of our local schools, teachers, education, admin support staff, students and families to thrive, succeed and be supported. However, in this regard and

further to my adjournment matter of 13 May, there is always more to do, including for Pascoe Vale North Primary School and for Coburg Primary School.

When it comes to Pascoe Vale North Primary School, ongoing support is also of course warranted. Now home to 350 students and 40 staff, I welcome the school's development of their new concept master plan with three master plan options, including stage 1 priority: the need for a covered outdoor learning area, a COLA, which would support students access to regular and reliable whole-of-school assemblies and enhanced sport, health and wellbeing, recreation and learning outcomes. A COLA that is capable of accommodating whole-of-school gatherings and all-weather physical education would also help support the school and broader Pascoe Vale North community to hold more out-of-hours events, initiatives and opportunities and meet the school's needs to provide safe and inclusive spaces for all community activities. Stage 2 and subsequent priorities also include upgrades across three different master plan options and scenarios and also provide for the need for new flooring and surfacing of the basketball courts, a grassed oval, a running track, soccer goals, fixing the sandpit, a new cricket pitch, a new nature-based playground, upgrading the grades 3 and 6 toilets, makeovers for the new portables, new decking for accessibility, a bike shed expansion, better fencing around the school, a ball pit, new digital school signage and ultimately new STEAM facilities and a new indoor gymnasium. I am pleased to be currently sponsoring a parliamentary petition to support the new master plan vision currently signed by almost a thousand signatures. The school community will be at Bunnings doing a sausage sizzle this weekend to collect more signatures and to raise some funds towards these plans. I commend Deborah Crane, the principal, and school council parents, reps and advocates Bala Lange, Peter Van Buuren, Simeng Tan and Catherine Duniam especially for their efforts in developing the school's first-ever concept master plan, the advocacy of which I am supporting.

When it comes to Coburg Primary School, further investment is supported and warranted. One of the oldest schools in Victoria, it was first opened in May 1853. Originally known as the Pentridge National School and now home to 350 students and 45 staff, the school is in the heart of the newly identified central Coburg activity centre. That is why the school shared in $10 million of statewide funding in last year's budget to progress planning for much-needed future upgrades, and we appointed Law Architects earlier this year to lead the planning and design for future upgrades of block B – that is the northern campus on the north side of Bell Street. The Victorian School Building Authority, I understand, continues to progress towards schematic designs, which I support the community's continued engagement on. Just last week, on 26 May, I met the school council and parent advocates Caroline Hughes, Emma Burrows and others to progress this important work, and I commend the principal Matt Kirby. I welcome the minister's consideration of these plans, and he is welcome to visit the schools any time to see these plans firsthand too.

Maroondah Hospital

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (19:15): (1675) I am going to proceed at a more leisurely pace here. My adjournment matter this evening is for the Premier. The action I seek is for the government to get on and build the Maroondah Hospital redevelopment it promised to my community. At the 2022 election the Victorian government committed more than $1 billion to the full redevelopment of Maroondah Hospital. It was a major promise to a community that relies on this hospital every single day. Patients, healthcare workers and local families were told a modern, world-class hospital was on the way. Today that promise appears to be disappearing before our eyes. The recent state budget contains no funding to deliver the redevelopment – none. There is no construction timetable. There is no commencement date. There is no certainty for the community that was promised this project.

What there has been, however, is a whole lot of ducking and weaving. Whenever I ask questions about the future of Maroondah Hospital, ministers refuse to give a straight answer. Rather than fronting up and taking responsibility, the government prefers to hide behind anonymous spokespeople and carefully crafted media lines. Meanwhile, residents are left wondering whether the biggest healthcare promise ever made to Melbourne's east has simply been abandoned.

My office continues to hear from residents who feel angry, disappointed and betrayed. They remember the announcements, they remember the promises and they remember being told a new hospital was coming, and they will never forget the betrayal. Doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers continue to provide outstanding care in ageing facilities that were meant to be replaced – they have my deep respect. Patients continue to rely on infrastructure that is failing – they have my sympathies. The government can only duck and weave – they have my contempt. The people of Melbourne's east do not need more spin. They do not need more talking points. They do not need more snarky commentary from anonymous government spokespeople. They just need the government to honour its commitment. Premier, the people of Melbourne's east deserve the truth. It is time to either get on and deliver on this promise or just come clean.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind members about unparliamentary language.

Glen Waverley electorate parks

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (19:17): (1676) My adjournment matter this evening is directed to the Minister for Environment in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me on a visit to Jells Park and ngarrak nakorang wilam park in my electorate. Jells Park is one of the great community assets of Melbourne's south-east, located in the south-eastern corner of my electorate next to Caulfield Grammar. It is a place where generations of local families have grown up. It is where children learn to ride their bikes and where families gather for barbecues, celebrations and community events. But Jells Park is also an important environmental asset. Its wetlands, lakes and native vegetation provide habitat for local wildlife and strengthen biodiversity across our suburbs. In the middle of a growing city, places like Jells Park allow residents to remain connected to nature close to home.

That is why I am proud of the investments our Labor government has made into improving this much-loved community space. Last year I joined the then Minister for Environment to mark the beginning of construction of the new sporting ovals at Jells Park. This $4 million investment is upgrading the Ashes and the Oaks into high-quality multipurpose sporting fields, including synthetic cricket pitches, for local clubs and families to enjoy for years to come. An additional $5.9 million investment has delivered new shared-user trails. We have replaced ageing jetties and revitalised the Oaks playground. These are practical upgrades that improve accessibility and create better spaces for local families.

I also want to acknowledge the exciting progress being made on ngarrak nakorang wilam park, which stretches from Forest Hill, Vermont and Vermont South all the way to Dandenong Creek. Along with upgraded play spaces, these 35 hectares of open space will have picnic areas, barbecue facilities and areas of passive recreation. Importantly, it will also deliver major environmental benefits through native plantings, habitat restoration and biodiversity improvements that will preserve green open spaces for future generations. These projects demonstrate the Allan Labor government's commitment to investing in the parks, open spaces and community infrastructure that growing suburbs need. Parks like these are not luxuries, they are essential community assets that support healthy lifestyles, social connection and community wellbeing.

I recently had the opportunity to enjoy the facilities at Jells Park alongside the member for Mulgrave and local Wheelers Hill residents. Over dumplings and a barbecue we had fantastic conversations about how valued our local parks and open spaces are by families across our community. I look forward to welcoming the minister to Jells Park and ngarrak nakorang wilam to see firsthand the difference these investments are making for the community of the Glen Waverley district.

Frank Drive–Murray Valley Highway, Yarrawonga

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (19:20): (1677) My adjournment is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that I seek is an urgent onsite meeting with VicRoads in Yarrawonga to assess some major safety issues. The Murray Valley Highway runs through Yarrawonga in an east–west direction. Many, many heavy vehicles use that road. It also has local town traffic from other

towns – Cobram, Echuca – going to Albury and local traffic from Yarrawonga and Mulwala. In 2020 we were very grateful to see Bunnings come to town. They set up on the corner of Frank Drive and the Murray Valley Highway. A couple of years later Aldi came to town, which is terrific as well. We welcome those respected businesses. Then last week we had Coles open on that same road. Yarrawonga has been waiting for these respected businesses for many years, and we are very grateful to have them all here, but they are all situated on Frank Drive at this intersection with the Murray Valley Highway. Since Bunnings opened back in 2020 the intersection has seen a massive increase in traffic flow. We have seen traffic accidents; we have seen near misses. Since Aldi joined the scene only 12 months ago and now Coles, we have seen a massive increase in traffic and accidents, and we really need to do something in the short term and the long term to resolve this problem. I am not being critical of Coles, because they just opened last week. We welcome those businesses, but traffic management is needed desperately. James Brogan from Yarrawonga was the first to alert me to the accidents and pending accidents, and since then I have had about 10 or 15 other emails, walk-ins and telephone calls from people concerned about this intersection.

There is a short-term solution in terms of the service road, which we could talk about with Moira shire, and VicRoads could look at a longer term solution, whether that is a roundabout or lights or whatever. But the community is very concerned about this. I will not say it is an accident waiting to happen, because it is just happening all the time. That is why we have got to try and look at some short-term solutions, and then we can put some long-term options on the table. Yarrawonga is the fastest growing town in regional Victoria, and we have got to keep ahead with basic infrastructure. We urgently require an inspection, with Moira shire, VicRoads and me, to look at the short-term and the long-term options and put all the options on the table.

Planning policy

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:22): (1678) My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is that the minister update me on how the government is ensuring Melbourne's future housing growth is more fairly distributed across the city, including by reducing pressure on outer suburban communities like those in Melbourne's west. That remains a really important question, because the housing policy put forward by the Liberal Party makes very clear what their vision for Melbourne looks like: more growth on the suburban fringe and protection from change in their own established suburbs. For communities like mine, this is going to mean more families pushed further and further to the edge of the city and more pressure piled onto roads, onto schools and onto public transport and health services and all of the infrastructure outer suburban areas are still fighting to catch up on.

That is exactly why our Labor government has pursued activity centres in established areas close to trains, trams, jobs and services, because a growing community cannot be planned on the assumption that the outer fringe must always absorb the burden. Yet those opposite have made it clear that when it comes to these well-serviced suburbs their instinct is not to share responsibility for growth but to protect their own backyards from any meaningful change. They oppose the very activity centres designed to create more housing choice in areas with the infrastructure, the public transport and the employment access to support them. Their alternative is to fast-track more development on the fringe and tell outer suburban communities like mine to keep carrying the load – more homes for Truganina, more homes for Tarneit, more homes for Point Cook; less change for Kew and less change for Brighton. That is the absolute substance of what they are offering. Outer suburban communities like mine have already done more than their fair share in accommodating Melbourne's growth. They should not be told yet again that they must keep taking more while better serviced suburbs are separated from contributing.

Our government takes a different view: if Melbourne is to grow, then that growth must be shared and it must be shared fairly across the city, including places with strong public transport links, established services and real access to jobs. Those opposite want to protect privilege in the inner east and push the consequences of growth into the outer west. That is the choice at the centre of their policy. And that is

the reason I ask the minister to update me on how the government is ensuring Melbourne continues to grow in a fairer way and how it is standing up for outer suburban communities against a planning approach that would once again leave them carrying the burden alone.

Responses

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (19:25): The member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the Attorney-General. The member for Mordialloc and also the member for Pascoe Vale raised issues for the Minister for Education. The member for Mildura raised a matter for the Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria. The member for Albert Park raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The member for Narracan and also the member for Laverton raised issues for the Minister for Planning. The member for Ringwood raised a matter for the Premier. The member for Glen Waverley raised a matter for the Minister for Environment. The member for Ovens Valley raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I shall refer them accordingly.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:26 pm.