Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 29 July 2026

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

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Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

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David Southwick (from 28 January 2026)

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

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O'Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Anthony Carbines (from 15 April 2026)

Mary-Anne Thomas (to 15 April 2026)

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

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

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

Members of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

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

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

Party abbreviations

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

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Wednesday 29 July 2026

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:34 am, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Bills

Magistrates' Court Amendment (Workplace Protection) Bill 2026

Introduction

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:36): I move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Magistrates' Court Act 1989 to provide for the Magistrates' Court to make orders to prevent and reduce unacceptable conduct engaged in by members of the public in certain workplaces and for other purposes.

In the last year retail workplaces have seen 30,000 incidents of theft and, for the workers in those workplaces, 5000 incidents of assault. That is an average of 13 a day across Victoria. And what has this government done? Nothing. 250 days ago in this place we tried to change the law, and every Labor member of Parliament voted against it when we tried to change the law and include workplace protection orders.

What have we seen today? We have seen a stuntish Premier propose to change the law around workplace protection orders. But you have got to read the fine detail with this guy, because what he said is that he might do something in 350 days time. What does that mean? Well, firstly, he will not be Premier. But secondly, it means that, if we look at the last year, 5000 people will be assaulted. Think that through – 5000 people. That is why the Liberals and Nationals urgently propose to introduce a workplace protection scheme – guess when – today. We will make sure that it is in place the second it receives royal assent, because we tried 250 days ago.

I acknowledge the work of the member for Caulfield, who at the time did a power of work to make sure that 250 days ago we had a scheme ready to introduce into this place, which the new Premier voted against. At the time he was sitting next to the former Premier, and together they voted against this proposal. Then today, in a performative way, he announces a workplace protection scheme that will not come into place for a year. Where is the bill? Where is their bill? We have a proposed set of laws today.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Polwarth is warned.

Anthony Carbines: Speaker, given where we are at here, the point of order I am raising is on relevance in relation to the matters before the house. I do not consider the matters to be relevant.

The SPEAKER: This is about the introduction of a bill, not about the bill per se.

James NEWBURY: Of course I can also give background and illustrate why it is so urgent. I can understand why a government without a bill would be offended that we have one – because they are embarrassed. It is urgent that we introduce a bill and change the law to protect retail workers today. If this bill is introduced into this place, we commit to putting it through the Parliament with speed. We will see later today, when it comes to other bills, how the government is very quick at passing bills that it wants to. So we say on workplace protection orders: if this government is proposing a set of laws that do not come into place for another year, well, firstly, I would hope by the good grace of Victorians they are not in government, but secondly, it means 5000 retail workers will be assaulted.

Roma Britnell interjected.

James NEWBURY: Or more – absolutely. That is why we have a bill. It is urgent. It is here on the table. We are ready to pass this today, and we ask this government not to vote against these measures twice. What hypocrites you would be if you were to vote against this twice. Pass it right now, today.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (09:41): The only part of that torrent which was remotely sincere was the member for Brighton's opening stanza, which suggested that he is nothing if not performative. What this government is doing is protecting retail workers in their workplaces. The Carroll Labor government's first action was to strengthen integrity in this state through the announcement of a royal commission, to ensure that every taxpayer dollar is spent with probity and with respect for those taxpayers. The second step of the Carroll Labor government was the Premier's announcement this morning that worker protection orders will be introduced into this state, and I am astonished by the Johnny-come-latelies on the other side who have decided that they are the friends of the retail workers.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, it has to be factual.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for South-West Coast, you are warned.

Brad Battin: The member on his feet has to be factual when he is coming to the chamber. Isn't this an admission that 12 years of failure from this Labor government cannot be fixed by what they are trying to put forward now?

The SPEAKER: Points of order are not an opportunity to make a statement to the house. I do ask members when they are on their feet that it is an important point that members are to be factual.

Iwan WALTERS: I will continue being factual. Let us rewind to 1992, when this mob last came into government. They began to systematically –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Rowville can leave the chamber for an hour. The member for Polwarth can leave the chamber for an hour. When I am on my feet, there will be silence.

Members for Rowville and Polwarth withdrew from chamber.

Iwan WALTERS: They do not like the truth, but they systematically undermined the pay and conditions of retail workers for seven years. And then what did they do at a federal level? They undermined the pay and conditions of retail workers with the introduction of Australian workplace agreements undermining the rights and dignity –

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker: relevance.

The SPEAKER: I remind members that this debate is about the introduction of a bill. It is the bill that is to be talked about, not in depth but about why it should be introduced.

Iwan WALTERS: I reiterate my opposition to this motion, because it comes from those opposite, who have no sincerity when it comes to genuinely caring about and protecting the rights, the dignity, the pay and the conditions of retail workers. I am astonished and I am surprised at their latter-day interest in the fine work of the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association in this state, led by secretary Michael Donovan, which has been working assiduously in partnership with this government to introduce workplace protection orders to keep retail workers safe. It is unacceptable that retail workers encounter abuse from customers and danger in their workplaces, which is why our Premier this morning, a retail worker who had his first job at Kmart Airport West –

Jade Benham interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mildura, you are warned.

Iwan WALTERS: began the process of his government, the second action of his government, to ensure that we deliver workplace protection orders in this place. It is not a stunt. It is not a latter-day conversion to the fine work of the SDA that those opposite appear to be exhibiting today. It is genuine work. It is committed work. It is representing retail workers as part of this government in this place. I am proud to stand with retail workers, proud to represent them –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Berwick! Member for Euroa, you are warned.

Iwan WALTERS: and proud to stand up for their pay and conditions – not to cut them, not to undermine them, not to do what this party has always done and will continue to do. This party over here, the opposition, has systematically undermined the rights and dignity of retail workers and systematically undermined their pay and conditions, and they have the temerity to come in here and suggest that they are the friends of retail workers. I tell you, they are not. That party opposite will systematically cut the pay and conditions of retail workers, and the member for Brighton knows it because that is his plan.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Berwick and member for Euroa, this is your last warning.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the current speaker is not speaking anywhere near the substance of the motion.

The SPEAKER: The member for Greenvale to come back to the motion.

Iwan WALTERS: I reiterate my opposition to the motion and my support for retail workers.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:46): Even I can say what a rant that was from the member for Greenvale. It is absolutely all talk and no action from a government that claims to support workers, when they have the opportunity to support workers today – to support the member for Brighton's private members bill to ensure retail workers are protected today, not in 500 days time and not 257 days ago, when it was first promised from the previous Premier's wish calls. All we are getting is more spin from the government – more spin, no substance. 257 days ago this government said they would protect workers. Where are we? Nowhere to be seen. And what does the manager of government business say? 'Well, we've got a number of other important bills to discuss.'

What could be more important than protecting workers? We have got 13 assaults each and every day on retail workers. Those behind the check-out and those in retail stores are not protected by this government that claims to be the friend of workers. How can the government be the friend of workers if they do not protect the very workers that they claim to be supporting? There is an opportunity to do that by supporting the private members bill that the member for Brighton is introducing today. We have seen it happen. We have seen it each and every day. We have got retailers calling for it. Michael Donovan, who the member for Greenvale quoted, was actually here a year ago on the steps of Parliament calling for it. This did not happen yesterday. This has been years in the making, but for some strange reason the government still does not want to protect retail workers, the very group that they claim to be the friends of. If the government were serious about protecting workers and standing up for workers, they would support this private members bill today.

You only have to hear what people have said: Woolworths, which called for the government to implement workplace protection orders following a violent incident involving a baseball bat at a Kyabram supermarket, and Bunnings, whose managing director Michael Schneider has spoken publicly about worker abuse and which reportedly spends an extra $6 million a year on tactical security in Victoria. When Bunnings spends $6 million on security, we all pay for that at the check-out. The workers pay it in terms of the abuse, and the customers pay for it because it has all got to be paid for somewhere when that extra money is spent. Master Grocers Australia, representing independent,

family-owned retailers, have been calling for it. IGA, which I am part of a WhatsApp group with, each and every week talk about worker abuse, about assaults and about, again, crime – theft – which has been happening. We have seen under this government over 30,000 thefts that have been happening. So there have been thefts on the rise. We have seen abuse: 13 assaults each and every day under this government. And what does the government want to do? Kick it into the long grass, kick it down the road and say, 'Well, you know what, we'll send the new Premier out to Kmart to talk about it, but we'll wait another 500 days before it gets introduced.' What an absolute joke that is. If the Premier was serious about it, he would not be doing photo opportunities at Kmart, he would be in the Parliament supporting this bill. That is what the Premier should be doing, not photo opportunities in Kmart. Get out there and actually support workers.

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate, and I do not see the member for Caulfield as being relevant to those matters when the Premier is out talking about work from home with retail workers today.

David SOUTHWICK: On the point of order, Speaker, this is absolutely important and is why this bill needs to be introduced today, not the Premier doing photo-ops at Kmart.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not to do with the point of order. The member for Caulfield to continue on the motion.

David SOUTHWICK: It is imperative that we need to pass this bill today to protect retail workers. Enough talk. Talk is cheap. That will not protect workers on the front line, that will not protect workers at the check-out, that will not protect the workers that are being assaulted each and every day. But I guess this new Premier has got form. He is not protecting the education union in terms of supporting them, not standing up alongside them when they are underpaying teachers. He does not care about workers.

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, I again do not see how the member for Caulfield is being relevant to the procedural debate before the house.

The SPEAKER: The member for Caulfield did stray somewhat from the motion.

David Southwick interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Caulfield, I do not appreciate that response. Disrespect in this chamber has gone beyond a joke. Indeed, you might want to scoff at that. It is absolutely disgusting. Member for Caulfield, do you have something else to contribute?

David SOUTHWICK: Yes, I do. I apologise, Speaker. I was actually speaking to the manager of government business, not to you.

The SPEAKER: Irrespective, I remind members that this is a place of debate. This is not a place of accusations and bullying across the chamber.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (09:52): I rise to speak on the government's position on this stunt which has been confected this morning by the opposition. It is a stunt because just this morning, prior to those opposite entering the chamber, it was quite evident that the Premier said that we as a government are introducing legislation for workplace protection orders, not next year at all. Those opposite will just have to keep their powder dry, and all shall be revealed. Those opposite, as my dear friend the member for Greenvale so clearly elucidated, like to pretend they are on the side of workers. But how many of those opposite have supported retail workers in any decisions they have made or their federal counterparts have made? Let us talk about other ways in which they have absolutely ensured that retail workers are at the bottom of the pile. What is their position on adult rates at 18? I bet they are not supportive.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate.

The SPEAKER: I remind members that this is a procedural debate. It is not about accusations across the chamber.

Daniela DE MARTINO: In this procedural debate I will outline precisely why the government will not be supporting any bill introduced into this chamber by those opposite –

Bridget Vallence interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Evelyn is warned.

Daniela DE MARTINO: because the bill that will be coming from the government side is the bill that has been worked in conjunction with the SDA over many, many months, with Michael Donovan leading the charge to ensure that it is in the interests of retail workers, not the interests of oppositions who like to go out with headlines slamming everything that is done by our government. It is not in their interests for actually good, constructive legislation to be introduced. It is in their interest to grab a headline, pull a stunt and try and make themselves look relevant. Well, the relevance is here with the government, and the introduction of the bill will be –

Emma Kealy: On a further point of order, Speaker, the member is defying your previous ruling. This is a procedural debate.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order. But, member for Monbulk, I remind you about why this motion is before the house.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Apologies if I have strayed, but I am quite passionate about retail because that is where I started my work at the age of 12. I started in retail, and I worked through –

Emma Kealy: On a further point of order, Speaker, it is a procedural debate.

The SPEAKER: The member for Monbulk has an opportunity to talk to the procedure, but it is okay for her to talk about why she thinks it is important to introduce the bill.

Daniela DE MARTINO: I think it is important to outline that there are many, many members on this side of the chamber who have a background in retail, including the Premier himself, who made an announcement at Kmart this morning – quite symbolically – about the fact that workplace protection orders will be absolutely pursued and will be robust in this state of Victoria. Those opposite may want to check the news this morning. Then they can catch themselves up on precisely what we will be doing. But it will be robust. It will be done in conjunction – the legislation –

Emma Kealy: On a further point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate, and if the member cannot adhere to your rulings, then I ask you to sit her down.

The SPEAKER: Member for Monbulk, come back to the procedural motion.

Daniela DE MARTINO: We will not be supporting any bill introduced by those opposite, precisely because we have no faith in the content of that bill because we do not believe what underpins what they have brought into here actually has retail workers' interests at heart. What we believe is that underpinning the bill that has been introduced is a desire to create another stunt and to grab a headline and to try and deflect attention from the fact that the Premier himself this morning has come out clearly and strongly that workplace protection orders – basically it is the second announcement made by the Premier. All those opposite are trying to do with this bill that they are introducing is take away any attention from the fact that we are getting on with this. We have done it with the work of the SDA. I also –

Emma Kealy: On a further point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate. If the member cannot speak to the procedure of the motion, then I ask you to sit her down.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold your point of order, member for Lowan.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Lastly, the reason we will not be supporting it is because we have no faith in it. We know that the work has been done in conjunction with the union. Our bill will be better.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:57): I stand to support the member for Brighton in introducing this legislation, but I stand in a little bit of confusion. We have just had those opposite –

Anthony Carbines interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: I am confused by your position, Minister, because we have just had the other side elect a new Premier. The new Premier has gone out this morning and announced a policy to introduce workplace protection orders – not for over a year, I will grant you that. Now we come to Parliament, and the opposition, for the second time – not a stunt today, for the second time – brings in legislation to introduce workplace protection orders, and now the members of the government are going to vote against it. They are going to vote against what the Premier has just announced. I am confused because I thought the no-confidence motion was yesterday, but now we have members of the government already voting a vote of no confidence in the new Premier because they do not trust his policy.

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, I am just very keen that the opposition, who have brought in this bill that they would like to introduce, keep the focus on the procedural debate about why it is timely to do so now.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Nationals to come back to the motion before the house.

Danny O'BRIEN: I think that is exactly what I was doing, Speaker, and he is arguing what the –

The SPEAKER: Order! It is not appropriate for members to argue with my rulings. The Leader of the Nationals will come back to the motion before the house.

Danny O'BRIEN: Exactly what I am doing, Speaker, is arguing why this bill should be brought in. If the member for Monbulk does not trust the Nationals and Liberals and what they are doing, how about letting us bring the bill in and you can have a read of it? That is exactly what the process does. We have done the work, and we know that this is an important issue because there are 5000 attacks on retail workers every year. We have got situations where Coles has shut down its Elizabeth Street store because of the undesirables and the retail crime and the attacks on their workers in that area, and it is moving it out. This government is saying, 'Yes, we think it's an issue. We'll deal with it in 12 months – 365 days.' They had an opportunity previously. 253 days ago the opposition moved amendments to the Crimes Amendment (Retail, Fast Food, Hospitality and Transport Worker Harm) Bill 2025, and the government opposed them.

Is it simply that it is only a good idea when they do it? It just does not stack up. The evidence is there from the business community. We had literally a group of major businesses – and I believe the shoppies were there at the time – highlighting the issue of retail crime. Leah Weckert from Coles said:

> … it is definitely the case that in Victoria, retail crime is escalating more than … we are seeing in the other states.

The Rebel Sport chief executive said in relation to retail crime:

> We've seen a disproportionate increase in Victorian stores. No doubt about that.

The Reece chief executive Peter Wilson was reported as saying Victoria is the toughest place in the country to do business. The co-founder of Seek Paul Bassat said:

> Whenever something that is done in this country that's anti-business, the reality is there's a good chance it is being done in Victoria.

Those opposite have liked to quote from the shoppies. The Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association has said:

> If the government is serious about addressing the retail crime epidemic, introducing WPOs is a no brainer.

Well, what has taken so long? Why are this mob on the other side so indolent that they actually cannot get anything done? They make announcements all the time, but they do not actually bring the legislation forward. They do not do the work. The opposition has actually done the work for you. If you were half sensible, you could actually just say, 'All right, we'll adopt it.' We would be happy to say, 'You're welcome'. We are all on the side of good here, yet the government is just going to put it off for another 12 months. I say again to those opposite: the legislation is here. You do not need the new Premier to announce it. It is right here. All they have to do is say, 'Bring it in. Let's debate it. Let's have a look at it.' We might even consider amendments, member for Brighton, but the government needs to support this. It is about supporting retail workers.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (10:02): Well, fiddle-de-dee, the opposition are reinventing themselves. They suddenly care about workers. Who knew? Did we know this? It is a surprise, but it is a new day today. They have declared suddenly that they are there for the workers. But let me tell you, any time there is a pay rise on the horizon or we are protecting workers rights, what do they do? They run for the hills.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, it is a narrow procedural debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind the member for Albert Park to constrain her debate to the purpose of either introducing or not.

Nina TAYLOR: Thank you very much, and I take your advice very sincerely. I am just noting that it is pretty galling on any front, from any perspective, to think that those opposite are actually representing workers. Let me think about just the last 24 hours. Premier Carroll has announced a royal commission with a special prosecutor to work in parallel alongside it. He has also announced follow-the-money powers for IBAC.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I think the speaker is defying your ruling. This is a very narrow procedural debate, and I would ask you to make sure that she is relevant.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I do not want to anticipate, but I imagine that the member for Albert Park is coming to her point in regard to introduction of the bill.

Nina TAYLOR: You have absolutely read my mind, Deputy Speaker, because Premier Carroll has announced the government is introducing a tough new workplace protection order scheme, and those opposite are criticising him for coming out and committing to this. How dare he have publicity! This is such an important issue, but they want him to not talk about it, to suppress it. Oh dear. He has come out and shown our commitment on this side following intense and positive collaboration with the SDA, because that is how proper and appropriate legislation that reflects the needs of workers is developed, but how dare he have publicity on this issue, because heaven forbid that the community should know what we are doing. I mean, the audacity of the member for Caulfield. Come on – you have plenty of publicity yourself. I have seen plenty of selfies – and that is all good; that is what we do – so I do not think you are in a position now to be –

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is continually using the phrase 'you', which is a reflection on the Chair.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank the member for Narracan for his assistance. I did hear a 'you', and I counsel the member to go through the Chair.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, and I made those comments with utmost sincerity and to reflect on promotion, as we must do in terms of having transparency with our community, letting them know exactly what we are doing. That is exactly what the Premier has done. I think we should get on with this wonderful and positive program. We have already passed the procedural elements, so let us get on with our work this week.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (29): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Anthony Marsh, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

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

Motion defeated.

Workplace Protection Orders Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning, Minister for Violence Reduction, Minister for Finance) (10:11): I am absolutely delighted to move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to provide for orders, to be made by the Magistrates' Court or the Children's Court, that impose restrictions on persons who engage in unacceptable conduct that is connected to certain workplaces and to make consequential amendments to the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 and the Magistrates' Court Act 1989 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:12): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning, Minister for Violence Reduction, Minister for Finance) (10:12): I am pleased to. This bill will protect retail and transport workers by allowing their employers or unions to seek an order with any condition necessary to protect the worker, including banning them from the worker's workplace. Breaching the order is a criminal offence with a penalty of up to two years imprisonment or a $50,000 fine.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:13): General business, notices of motion 49 to 50 and 74, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Committees

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into the Recruitment Methods and Impacts of Cults and Organised Fringe Groups

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:13): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Legal and Social Issues Committee on the inquiry into the recruitment methods and impacts of cults and organised fringe groups, together with appendices and transcripts of evidence.

Ordered that report and appendices be published.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Electoral Act 2002 – SR 108

Victoria Police Act 2013 – SR 107

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 76, 100, 101.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026

Council's amendments

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:14): The Speaker has received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026

Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026

Council's agreement

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:14): The Speaker has received messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026.

Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2026

Appropriation

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:15): The Speaker has received a message from the Lieutenant-Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2026.

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) (10:15): I move, by leave:

> That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended on Wednesday 29 July 2026 to allow the member for Brunswick to make a valedictory speech for a maximum of 15 minutes at the conclusion of the matter of public importance.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Motions by leave

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:15): I move, by leave:

> That this house dissents from the ruling of the Speaker on 28 July gagging the no-confidence motion on the Labor government.

Leave refused.

Business of the house

Standing orders

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Local Government, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Corrections) (10:16): I move, by leave:

> That so much of standing orders be suspended to allow the following motion to be considered: 'That the scope of the Corrections Amendment Bill 2026 be extended to enable consideration of amendments and a new clause to amend the Corrections Act 1986 to validate certain actions taken without delegations in place between 29 April 2024 and 18 May 2026.'

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Corrections Amendment Bill 2026

Extension of scope

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Local Government, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Corrections) (10:16): I move, by leave:

> That the scope of the Corrections Amendment Bill 2026 be extended to enable consideration of amendments and a new clause to amend the Corrections Act 1986 to validate certain actions taken without delegations in place between 29 April 2024 and 18 May 2026.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Motions by leave

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:17): I move, by leave:

> That this house notes former Premier Steve Bracks' admission that the new Premier has been plotting against the member for Bendigo East: 'I know he has been preparing for this moment for some time.'

Leave refused.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:17): I move, by leave:

> That this house condemns the member for Bendigo East for voting no confidence in the government behind closed doors –

Leave refused.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (10:17): I move, by leave:

> That this house condemns the member for Carrum for voting no confidence in the government –

Leave refused.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (10:17): I move, by leave:

> That this house condemns the member for Thomastown for voting no confidence in the government behind closed doors but then doing the opposite in the chamber.

Leave refused.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (10:18): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bayswater for voting no confidence in the government –

Leave refused.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (10:18): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bass for voting no confidence in the government –

Leave refused.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:18): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Footscray for voting no confidence in the government behind closed doors –

Leave refused.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (10:18): I move, by leave:

That the member for Bentleigh has no courage for voting no confidence –

Leave refused.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:18): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Macedon –

Leave refused.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (10:19): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Oakleigh –

Leave refused.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (10:19): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Clarinda for voting no confidence in the government –

Leave refused.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (10:19): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Eureka –

Leave refused.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (10:19): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Hastings for voting no confidence in the government –

Leave refused.

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (10:19): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Melton for voting no confidence in the government –

Leave refused.

Members statements

Nocturne: Healesville After Dark

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:20): Huge kudos to the Healesville traders association, who put on a ripper night on Friday last week. Nocturne: Healesville After Dark saw the beautiful lamplit main street come alive. There were so many people – locals and visitors and the young and the old, all out and about having a great time. With late-night shopping, fire pits, chestnuts, tastings, winter-inspired

menus and entertainment, everyone was well catered for. Venues ran out of produce, such were the crowds. There was life drawing in the street, and they ran out of paper. The streets were lively and the atmosphere euphoric. It was so well done. I had such a great time.

Panton Hill Football Netball Club

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:21): It was a remarkable effort by the Panton Hill Football Netball Club, clocking up 100 years. It has not been easy, with challenges from the start. The club were formed in 1926, but they realised quickly they did not have a home ground to play on. Several dedicated locals got together and diligently worked with picks and mattocks in their spare time to carve out the hill so they could have a relatively flat surface. Three years later they had a home ground. It is hard for a small club in a small town to stay afloat for 100 years. Neighbouring clubs have succumbed to the challenges. The club celebrated its centenary recently and announced inductees into its inaugural hall of fame to acknowledge those who have made an exceptional and lasting contribution over the years. I want to acknowledge Warren Emson, who played 238 games; Ron Archer; 60s legend Roy Woolley; goal kicker Mick Carns; long-serving committee man Ron Dwyer; and leaders Scott Walker and Will Box, who have done a remarkable job.

Broadmeadows electorate sports clubs

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:22): Football fever has certainly been in the air, with both the world game and our very own Aussie rules. I have had lots of fun celebrating ladies days at Oak Park, Hadfield and Coburg districts; reverse draws at Glenroy and Oak Park; home games at Upfield Soccer Club; the inaugural car park derby between Glenroy Lions and Moreland Eagles; Hume's magnificent Festival of Football; Hadfield footy club's road safety forum; and even a soccer tournament hosted by the World Lebanese Cultural Union. Let us not forget the other codes: I love getting down to our magnificent rugby centre of excellence at Seabrook Reserve, and it was an honour to open NRL Victoria's female footy festival last Sunday. Back to the round balls, it was great to celebrate Italy's foundation as a republic at the Italian Golf Association's annual Coppa Italia golf tournament. I really enjoyed watching our men and women's Broncos give it their best at Broady stadium, and it is always special to be part of Fawkner Netball Club's end-of-year celebration and presentation night. Thank you to all the clubs for inviting me to come along.

Sporting clubs are the lifeblood of our communities, and I thank all the volunteers who turn up week after week to ensure local people have the chance to connect and to get active. The sporting clubs grant program is open again, and I thank the Minister for Community Sport for joining me to announce recent grant winners: the Somerton All Stars basketball club; Eritrean Families in Hume and the North; and the Fawkner Saints, for whom we also got to see the new lights installed, which will make a huge difference to the club.

Bairnsdale hospital

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (10:23): I want to put on record yet again that Bairnsdale needs a new hospital and that stage 1 needs to be the new emergency department. This week with our new candidate Gemma Rendell we launched a petition to gain community support, which I think all sides should agree to and support this project. The ED cannot cater for current demand, let alone future demand. It is a major factor in ambulance ramping, and I encourage everyone in the electorate to sign it.

Labor Party leadership

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (10:24): I think at times it is important to reflect on what is said in this place, and this week's goings-on give reasons to do this. In the last sitting week the member for Pascoe Vale Mr Cianflone ridiculed the opposition on leadership unity. The member for Werribee, who has said a few silly things in this place, I might add, in his short time here has lectured the opposition constantly on the dumping of leaders. We have also had the member for Yan Yean see fit to criticise leadership changes, as has the member for Frankston Mr Edbrooke. But onto the medals. Bronze goes to the member for Mordialloc, who seems to focus on it every second speech; he only

gets the bronze because, in fairness, he did support the Premier, but it is time for him to review things internally. Silver goes to the member for Kororoit, who said under Premier Allan that the party was 'united and unstoppable', only to be one of the main traitors. The gold goes to who else but the new Premier for his constant barbs across the table about counting numbers – exactly what he has been doing this week – and saying he supported the Premier 100 per cent. His pants are on fire.

St Scholastica's Primary School

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (10:25): It has been a big couple of months – no surprise there – and the great kids at St Scholastica's Primary School in my patch came into Parliament. We met them here, and I have got to tell you, they had some very good questions. Our democracy is pretty safe with that next generation. Then a couple of weeks later I joined them again because the Suburban Rail Loop team had their young construction ideas, which they call the student workshop event, and some of the ideas are fantastic. I think my favourite was the idea of having potentially driverless trains and having a holographic conductor that could assist passengers, whether it be in emergencies or just knowing where to go. I thought that was a great idea. These kids are pretty switched on.

Motor neurone disease

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (10:26): The other thing we did – obviously with MND we were all paying our respects and our funds too. A shout-out for our member for Pakenham, with her new ad to raise funds, and everyone should obviously get behind that. I managed to get myself iced once again by the Monash Demons, and a shout-out to mayor Stuart James, who came. I did not really put too much into the dress-ups, but he came in as Wally. It was pretty impressive, and he got a few splashes.

Waverley District Netball Association

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (10:26): To the Waverley District Netball Association we made a commitment in 2022. We have just opened up their tiered spectator seating and shelters – fantastic.

Hampton Central Probus Club

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:26): With much fanfare, streamers, a big song and cake, Hampton Central Probus Club recently celebrated their first birthday. Probus is a social club for retired and semiretired people. Hampton has flocked to the new club, with 50 new members and strong interest from the broader community. Congratulations to the energetic president Angela Norris, who is without a doubt the life of every party.

St Mary's Primary School, Hampton

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:26): St Mary's Primary School in Hampton has served our community since 1924. The wonderful students have started their own podcast, which spreads the exciting news and activity of the school. Lara and Zara recently invited me onto the show, and we talked about the school and what the students have been up to. Congratulations to the students and to principal Steele Anderson on their leadership.

Hampton East School

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:27): Hampton East School is a school that offers a place for prep to year 12 students with a mild to moderate intellectual disability. On a recent visit I joined the assembly to present flags, hear about the exciting activities and talk about the features of the Australian Aboriginal flags. Thank you to the students, to the school and to the acting principal Tom Otworowski for his leadership.

JAM Music Therapy

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:27): Since 1998 JAM Music Therapy has supported people of all ages and abilities through the transformative power of music. Led by Helen Cameron, JAM has been an active and vibrant Hampton-based therapeutic experience for the disabled in our community.

We recently celebrated and sang along at their annual concert. I sang nowhere near a microphone. Thank you to the clients and Helen for a wonderful concert.

Angliss Hospital

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:28): I was elated to officially open the Angliss Hospital's redevelopment and expansion, the biggest investment our government has made in the Monbulk electorate. This $112 million investment has resulted in the complete transformation of this much-loved hospital, and not a single day goes by when someone does not tell me they were born there or their children were. The new 32 inpatient beds, four new operating theatres and allied health areas are state of the art and now match the quality of care and professionalism of the extraordinary nurses, doctors and staff at the Angliss. I could not be happier for them or prouder of what we have built there. Public health care is in our DNA. It is what Labor governments do.

Mount Dandenong Preschool

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:28): We also invest in free education. I was thrilled to officially open the Mount Dandenong Preschool, alongside the Minister for Children. The devastating storms of June 2021 destroyed the original kinder, so we built a new one, co-located with the beautiful Mount Dandenong Primary School. The children clearly love their kinder and their terrific teachers. The fact that they can attend for free is another testament to our government's investment in nurturing our youngest people and giving them the best start to their best life.

Country Fire Authority The Basin station

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:29): I was delighted to join the member for Bayswater and our Labor candidate for Bayswater Julie Buxton at the sod turn for the new CFA station in The Basin. This investment in our local brigade is critical, and it means there will be a place to fit in the next-gen pumper that we have announced to go alongside the new tanker they received last year. Our CFA volunteers run towards danger when the rest of us go in the opposite direction, and they do not do it for financial reward but because of a sense of duty to their community. They are the best of us.

State election

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:29): People sometimes ask why I raise my voice in this chamber so much. The truth is I get fired up because outside Parliament people are hurting. Victorians are struggling under the weight of cost of living, a crime crisis, the worst corruption in our state's history and knowing that this Labor government continues to squander and waste their hard-earned taxpayers money. I will not apologise for fighting for them. I will not apologise for fighting for every battler, working family, quiet Australian and Victorian who feels like they no longer have a voice in Labor's Victoria. I did not come in to be a wallflower. I came in to be a voice for the voiceless and to make a difference. If I have to raise my voice over Labor, who always try to shout me down or shut me up in the chamber, I will. If I have to stand up against the bullies and the disrespect of those in this chamber, I will. I will not be silenced. I am not here for the people in this room; I am here for the people outside of it. I would rather stand up and fight than shrink back and fail the people I am here to represent. I am their voice and it is my job to fight for them in Parliament. I refuse to let them down. The Allan Labor government has let you down. The new Premier is sure to let you down, and that is why it is time for a fresh start and a Wilson coalition government.

Tormore Reserve, Boronia

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:31): I want to just give my gratitude and thanks to every single person who has been involved in the redevelopment of the Tormore Reserve pavilion in Boronia. It is honestly the best place to watch footy and cricket anywhere in Knox, and I would argue anywhere in the outer eastern suburbs. To the wonderful people like Paul Noone, Matt Smyth and Greg Hannon, to everyone on the executives of Boronia Hawks Football Netball Club and Boronia Cricket Club, and especially to someone who I have a great deal of affection and love for, Wayne Preston – mate, you

are an absolute legend. This project started well before my time. I was very, very pleased and really honoured to help shepherd and support the project. To now see it delivered in collaboration with the state government, with the federal government and with Knox council is an amazing outcome. They are absolutely deserving – these two wonderful clubs that do a great job supporting the local community of Boronia and the broader Knox community.

Boronia train station

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:32): We are looking forward to trains coming back through Boronia station on 4 August. It is all happening down at Boronia station. The new landscaped plaza is starting to take shape. The new pedestrian crossing, which has been relocated from down the road, is starting to take shape. There is the new Lupton Way, the new Erica Avenue and new canopies. The new platform is looking absolutely schmick. Works will continue, but trains will come back to Boronia station for 4 August. I appreciate everyone's patience while we get on and deliver a brand new Boronia station precinct.

Maxwell John Turner

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (10:32): Bendigo has lost an outstanding community champion with the recent passing of Max Turner. Max's passion, strength and drive for the Bendigo region has extended beyond his one term as a Liberal MP for Bendigo West in this place. The former carpenter, police detective and newsagent won the seat of Bendigo West in the Kennett government's landslide victory of 1992. He used that time in office to be instrumental in the transforming of the former Bendigo rail yards into the marketplace and the Bendigo Discovery Science & Technology Centre. Max played a key role in enabling the transfer of the Bendigo livestock saleyards after their 130-year tenure in Charleston Road to the new facilities at Huntly. Post politics, Max has continued to champion issues on behalf of the Bendigo region for the last 30 years, including community advocacy for better flood mitigation along the Bendigo Creek through Epsom and Huntly and always keeping an eagle eye on the affairs of Greater Bendigo City Council, including challenging the cost to ratepayers of the council's involvement in the GovHub project. To his wife of 60 years, Shirley, to his daughter Sharon and to the wider Turner family: thank you for sharing Max with us. A life of service well lived.

Clare Reilly

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (10:33): Not all heroes wear capes, and some are on wheels. Clare Reilly is someone who dreams big and refuses to let challenges stand in her way, and she is a Bellarine hero. She is an advocate, virtual assistant, podcaster and passionate advocate for disability awareness and accessibility and supporting people living with chronic illness. With a background in outdoor education, adventure has always been a part of who Clare is, but she also happens to live with multiple sclerosis. Six years ago Clare launched a podcast, *MS Understood*, and since then she has shared the stories of almost 100 people living with MS. But she has had to adjust her life with MS. Clare is still determined to prove that adventure does not end with disability – it just looks different.

She set herself an extraordinary challenge to become the first person to complete the entire Munda Biddi trail – 1000 kilometres of off-road cycling through Western Australia – using an electric wheelchair. Supported by her family and a dedicated team, Clare documented every step – or roll – of the journey. Following on social media, you could not help but feel the emotion, the excitement, the setbacks, the exhaustion and the determination, and ultimately that incredible sense of achievement. Clare's adventure has been captured in an upcoming book, *Wheelchair Meets Wilderness*, a story of courage, resilience and grit. Knowing Clare, I am sure there are a few tears and laughs in there too. Clare, you have shown us that courage is not about never facing obstacles – it is about refusing to let those obstacles define what is possible. Clare, you have shown us that some heroes are on wheels, and some leave tracks that inspire others. Congratulations. The Bellarine is incredibly proud of you.

Canterbury Council of Churches

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (10:35): The Canterbury Council of Churches is an exemplar of the remarkable contribution that faith-based organisations make to our community. At Saturday's winter breakfast at St Dominic's Catholic church in Camberwell, guest speaker Paul Linossier reminded us of the vital role churches and faith groups continue to play in serving others. Whether it is supporting families in need, combatting social isolation or bringing communities together, these organisations strengthen the fabric of our society every day. I thank the council, Denis Fitzgerald and the many volunteers whose quiet generosity and humble service enrich our local community.

Hawthorn electorate junior football clubs

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (10:35): Junior football clubs in the Hawthorn electorate deliver Auskick programs every year for our eager young footballers and facilitate the clubs' involvement in the Yarra Junior Football League. I place on record our sincere appreciation for the countless hours contributed by the leaders, coordinators and volunteers at junior football clubs right across my community, including at Hawthorn Citizens, Canterbury Cobras and Camberwell Sharks junior football clubs, along with St Dominic's and Canterbury Auskick. These programs bring kids and families together in the joy of sport. These programs build friendships and confidence and strengthen our community. I wish them good luck for the remainder of the season.

Transit Soup Kitchen and Food Support

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (10:36): I rise to speak about my recent visit to Transit Soup Kitchen and Food Support Narre Warren, where I was once again able to see their excellent work. Transit provides crucial food relief while also supporting people experiencing financial hardship across my electorate and surrounding areas. It was great to catch up with the team, including manager Michelle Pinxt, for a tour of their updated facility and to see the many volunteers providing free hot meals and distributing food to those who need it most through their community pantry. Transit also connects people with a range of supports, including mental health, medical or government services, through their Beyond the Meal program. They understand that, while food is the immediate concern, Transit can also provide broader access to vital wraparound support to help people get back on track. A really big thankyou to Michelle and her whole team of volunteers at Transit for their ongoing kindness and hard work that services our community.

Narre Warren South electorate charities

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (10:37): I also want to give a shout-out to all our food relief and community support charities across my electorate for their continued commitment to helping people across the outer south-east. This includes the Find a Penny Foundation, the crew at BK 2 Basics, the Gethsemane church, Sikh Volunteers Australia, Hampton Park Uniting Church, Holy Trinity Anglican church, Hampton Park Community House, Oakgrove neighbourhood house, Casey North and Cranbourne Community Information Support Services and all the other organisations as well. It has been a privilege to work with these organisations.

Helen Chakman

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (10:38): Our community health practitioners work so hard, and today I would like to acknowledge and thank long-term Collingwood Cohealth nurse Helen Chakman. Helen has made a remarkable contribution to our local communities over four decades of service, and her compassion and care have touched the lives of so many. Thank you, Helen, and all the best for your retirement.

Housing

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (10:38): Private developers have started building a 36-storey private development between the public housing towers on the Flemington estate while the buildings are still full of residents. Without warning the construction started clanging and drilling from 4:30 in

the morning, seven days a week, with building entrances closed off, cranes looming over bedroom windows, asbestos warnings in English only and no visible protection for residents, all while the maintenance of their own homes is being completely neglected. One of the government's main reasons for not retrofitting the towers was that it was inappropriate for residents to be living on a construction site, but now residents are living with a construction double the height of the current buildings just metres from their windows. Why has the government now decided that it is appropriate for public housing residents to live on a construction site for the benefit of private developers but not for retrofitting their own homes?

Calder Park Drive interchange

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham) (10:39): I rise today to highlight the vital progress that is being made on Calder Park Drive and the new interchange project and thank the federal government for their contribution in working with us on this project. The major upgrade will significantly improve safety and streamline access along the busy Calder Freeway – a freeway that I use every day. The project will deliver a full diamond interchange at Calder Freeway and Calder Park Drive, raising the freeway over Calder Park Drive. To eliminate dangerous conflict points, existing access to the freeway at both Calder Park Raceway and the Organ Pipes National Park will be closed. Access alternatives will be built into the redevelopment and are currently in the planning stages. These critical safety changes will allow the freeway speed limit to be increased to 100 kilometres an hour at Calder Park Drive, which is something residents have been calling for for decades. We are currently in the preconstruction phase. Key planning activities are well underway, including refining the design, obtaining planning approvals and preparing a cultural heritage management plan. Crews are conducting detailed environmental investments, and the groundwork is underway, as are site investigations. This project is a massive win for road safety and local residents.

Euroa electorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (10:41): After months of Labor infighting Victorians have watched one Premier rolled and another installed, but changing the person at the top means nothing if the same government continues to ignore regional Victorians. During the winter break I welcomed Leader of the Opposition Jess Wilson and Leader of the Nationals Danny O'Brien to the region for our Fresh Start tour. We visited Kestrel Aviation, Creightons Creek CFA, the Longwood Avenel footy club and the White Hart pub, and everywhere we went people raised the same concerns: crumbling roads, cost of living, unreliable power and community safety.

Nowhere was that clearer than Strathbogie, where I walked through the January bushfire response with CFA group officer David Hamilton. During one of the state's most dangerous fire periods the town lost power, phone reception and CFA radio at once. It literally ran out of water when the Longwood bushfire was just 2 kilometres away from the township. Volunteers operate from a CFA shed that has poor power, no water and no toilet. It is not OH&S-compliant and borrows Di's garage next door to house a vehicle. The bushfire inquiry already told Labor what it needs to change to properly fund our CFA, but it continues to ignore it.

Those conversations continued during Australian Hotels Association Victoria Mates Day visits at Toolleen pub, Seven Creeks and the Northo. Our country pubs are being crippled by the 70 new or increased taxes that Labor has introduced, so if you can, get out and support our pubs, buy a meal and have a great day with your mate, because they are being crippled by the Labor government.

Reservoir planning

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (10:42): I rise to again raise the controversial local issue of the Merrilands single-dwelling covenant, which prevents landowners north of Broadhurst Avenue in Reservoir from subdividing their properties and building townhouses or apartments. It is a popular policy in that part of the world – a lot of people bought a home there and moved there because of that particular restrictive covenant – but clearly it is also a covenant that is at odds with this government's

housing policies. We are not seeking to stop townhouses and apartments. In fact we are seeking to build more of them in order to reduce congestion, reduce emissions, improve housing affordability and, perhaps most importantly, give people, and particularly young people, the opportunity to live close to the job opportunities, training opportunities and cultural opportunities that they need. So we have reformed the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to make it easier to remove that restrictive covenant. Previously, you had to go via the Supreme Court; now you can do so through Darebin council's ordinary planning system. However, there does remain a decision to be made about whether those applications to remove the covenant will be type 2 or type 3 applications, and we do strongly support the idea they should be type 3 applications. We are definitely seeking to make it easier to build homes in Victoria, but in doing so of course we recognise the pre-existing structure that was there. Restrictive covenants are an unusual but nonetheless legitimate part of that existing system. Our position is not necessarily popular with everyone up there, but at least we have a position. At this point, with only 122 days to the election, we still have not heard anything from the Greens or Liberal candidates on this issue.

Melton electorate level crossing removals

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (10:44): It was fantastic to drive over the new Ferris Road overpass, which is now open to traffic, making it the first completed level crossing removal in the Melton electorate. For years local families, commuters and businesses have been delayed by the boom gates. Their removal now means safer journeys, less congestion and traffic moving more freely. The other two crossings in Melton are also nearing completion. The Exford Road level crossing removal and the brand new Melton station, as well as Coburns Road level crossing removal, are next. Together these projects are transforming the way locals move around Melton.

Kangan Institute Melton campus

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (10:44): The new Ferris Road overpass also provides an important connection to the future site of the new Melton TAFE campus, but you do not have to wait for its completion. Students are already benefiting from courses being delivered at the temporary Western BACE site just across the road. I was pleased to join the Minister for Skills and TAFE last week to meet students and staff and see some of the wonderful courses being offered and already underway.

Melton hospital

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (10:44): As you drive over the Ferris Road overpass, you are greeted with a view not just of the new TAFE site but also of the progress being made on the new Melton hospital, which is making remarkable progress. Every time I pass the site I am struck by just how quickly it is taking shape. It is another major investment that will deliver health care for the growing community needs close to home. These projects are all part of the Labor government's investment in Melton's future, improving roads, expanding education opportunities and delivering better health services for our growing community.

Koonung Secondary College

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Local Government, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Corrections) (10:45): Congratulations to Koonung Secondary College on its successful production of *Mamma Mia!* the musical. I would like to praise the fabulous cast: Emily Nash, Ambra Mazza, Zarah Buchanan, Stephanie Coleman, Wilson Li, Victor Azubel, Ashton Lonnen, Lachlan Cartledge, Gwen Mander, Charis Gibson, Zach Watkins, Jack Moran, Kiki Beamish, Lilla Buchanan, Ruth Chen, Olivia Long, Sophie Newbury, Chloe Wightman, Milla Wightman, Alyssa Boyd, Shion Chenhall, Aanya Engineer, Poppy Fukushima-Taylor, Devan Erajh Gunaratne, Meika Guy, Nathan Hanslow, Olivia Hanslow, Alayna Johnstone, Vista Kalhori, Abby Li, Josie Mander, Quinn McNeil, Juliette Perl-Gurovich, Millie Porcaro, Rosemary Rice, Aliyah R-Shakeel and Khloe Whyte.

A performance such as this does not happen without many contributors who cannot be seen on stage, so a big shout-out to all of the crew: Jennifer Molloy and Lucy Cooper and their team on backstage;

Chelsea Thomas and Daniel Goulding and their team, front of house; Chelsea Thomas and all of her team for the hair and make-up; Josh Verco, Lucy Cooper and Simon Cronin and their team on sound; and Mark Anderson and Sabrina Hutchinson and their team on lighting. Finally, I would like to congratulate and thank the amazing band, as well as all of the wonderful parents who assisted with the costumes and construction.

Kevin Hillier

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Cost of Living, Minister for Renters, Minister for Men and Boys) (10:47): Today I would like to recognise the outstanding contribution of Kevin Hillier and the lasting legacy he leaves as president of the Frankston RSL sub-branch. Under Kevin's leadership the Frankston RSL has continued to strengthen its reputation as a place of remembrance, support and community connection. He has always led with respect, brought people together and placed the interests of members and veterans at the heart of every single decision. It has also been a genuine pleasure to work alongside Kevin through the ups and downs, at times, across the various years. His professionalism, his friendship and his willingness to collaborate have made a real difference, and I have greatly valued his support and commitment to our community. On behalf of the Frankston community I extend my sincere thanks to Kevin Hillier for his outstanding leadership, dedication and service. His contribution has left a lasting impact on the Frankston RSL, its members, veterans and our wider community, and his legacy will continue to be felt for many, many years to come. To Kevin's family I say: thank you for lending Kevin to us for those years. I wish Kevin well in his future endeavours.

Cranbourne electorate community

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:48): There is a lot going on in Cranbourne. I am really pleased to be able to host another 'meet your neighbour' event, and it is going to be this Friday at the Cranbourne community centre from 3:30 until 4:30. Come on down. As always we will have free face painting, and we are going to have lots of Christmas in July type dishes. We might even have a candy cane or two. Everyone in our community of Cranbourne is welcome to attend and have a cup of tea and get to know each other.

I would like to also take the opportunity to congratulate so many of our organisations who are working tirelessly, toiling away locally to provide the care, compassion and support that is a hallmark of our Cranbourne community. It is an opportunity for me to thank the Cranbourne Uniting Church for the food truck and food service and for not just being able to provide the compassion of a warm meal but also being one of those organisations that really does listen and make a conscious effort to never judge and always be there for people. I would also like to take the opportunity, in a similar vein, to thank St John's church, who also provide food service. It is so important to be able to have organisations where people care, people listen and people provide the sort of meals that are needed. And as always, the Sikh Volunteers are rockstars.

College Road, Werribee

John LISTER (Werribee) (10:49): As members of Parliament we often get contacted by constituents by a range of means, whether or not that is doorknocking, over Facebook or by direct messages. But this morning was particularly unique, taking a constituency concern over ABC Radio 774. Thank you to Sarah for raising her concerns around traffic around the College Road precinct in Werribee, particularly College Road Kindergarten, which is a beautiful little kindergarten down there. I have to say that already this morning I have contacted our local inspector, who is looking into the enforcement that highway patrol do around our schools. This Labor government has also supported, through the TAC, funding for Wyndham City Council to work with our school principals network on improving traffic safety around places like College Road and our other busy school precincts. As someone who is a road crash rescue operator, I want to make sure that everyone is safe around our schools and kindergartens.

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) (10:50): I move:

> That the government business program resolution agreed to by this house on 28 July 2026 be amended to change the completion time of the Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2026 to 7 pm on 29 July 2026.

Motion agreed to.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into the Recruitment Methods and Impacts of Cults and Organised Fringe Groups

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:51): I take pride in rising today to speak on the Legal and Social Issues Committee's latest inquiry, the inquiry into the recruitment methods and impacts of cults and organised fringe groups. As I said, I am very proud to be standing here as part of a number of speakers here today that are going to talk about this inquiry.

This was a pretty challenging inquiry. It relied on deeply personal lived experience alongside contested language and grey areas. Also in that mix were the existing legal and service frameworks. Our committee was absolutely fair and genuine in our approach, and all committee members took this so seriously. We had really strong debate so that we understood and fleshed out a number of different areas. Our inquiry was not a review of academic research worldwide; it was not a literature review. And there were submissions that tried to take it in that direction. It was not an attack on organised religion, but what it was was an inquiry to find out what is happening in this space, fair and square in Victoria – what was happening with regard to recruitment methods and then the impacts of cults and organised fringe groups.

The language itself was challenging, because whilst we all understand what the word 'cult' is, we all have our ideas in our minds of what a cult is and we have seen things from overseas and also certainly from Victoria and in and around my electorate in Eildon with the Family, which certainly springs to mind. But when we have changes that we are looking at through policy or legislation, it is really difficult to use the word 'cult', so we have consistently referred to 'coercive high-control groups'.

We had almost 300 submissions, and many of them were confidential. People were worried about what they were going to put forward and how they could be identified and wanted to make sure that they were not. People were living in fear, and it was particularly courageous and brave of a number of people who spoke freely to the cameras and put their opinions and experiences on the record. I cannot thank them enough, because the lived experience really meant so much to us as we went through this.

Equally, I want to commend not just those who made the submissions but the 317 people who responded to an anonymous questionnaire, which was an unusual step. It was something that was done prior to us really getting underway to get an understanding of what was out there and what we might know. Of those 317, just over 80 per cent shared their own experiences and 14.8 per cent shared experiences close to them. Nearly 95 per cent outlined psychological harm, which is just really alarming; personal restrictions, 85.8 per cent; and physical harm, 20.2 per cent.

What surprised me through this was the number of people that were born into these coercive high-control groups. We tend to think of the recruitment and people hanging out at university campuses or train stations or preying on people in different scenarios – people at their most vulnerable. We tend to think about that. But there was a very large cohort of people for whom this is what they knew because they had grown up in this situation; it was their life. They did not necessarily know that what they were experiencing was perhaps different from many, many other people. Even at schools, it was very

difficult for a number of people to navigate the situation that they were in, whether it was a type of religion or doomsday or whatever.

I do want to thank the secretariat. I have been here a long time and had a number of secretariats. These guys were fantastic. There was a lot of work that we had to do in making sure that submissions were redacted and kept confidential where they needed to be, because people were feeling very unsafe. They had to field a number of phone calls. People wanted to have their arguments between different groups through our inquiry, and that was just not appropriate. We wanted to keep very much focused on what is happening here in Victoria, and I commend the secretariat for that. I do want to mention that one of the most unusual things was volume 2, *In their Words*, which documents absolutely, for those who came forward, their own words, so there can be no doubt about what they said.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into the Recruitment Methods and Impacts of Cults and Organised Fringe Groups

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:56): I rise today to make a contribution on the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee's report *Coercion and Harm in High-Control Groups: Inquiry into the Recruitment Methods and Impacts of Cults and Organised Fringe Groups*. It has been a privilege to chair this committee and guide this inquiry since March last year. Over the past months I have heard the experiences of hundreds of Victorians who have been impacted by the insidious behaviour of coercive high-control groups. We heard evidence from ordinary Victorians from every corner of our state: from young students who were recruited on their university campuses; from adults who were born into high-control groups that their parents were members of and had no say in joining; from people who were recruited in a time of vulnerability and coerced into joining a group and giving up their lives; and from Victorians whose family members were recruited, cut off from the people they love, unable to make contact, unable to help. Through 291 submissions, 317 responses to an anonymous online questionnaire and eight days of hearings, the committee heard this devastating evidence. That is hundreds of Victorians who have lived experience of coercive high-control groups, either directly or through someone they cared about. And for many this inquiry was the first time their experiences had been formally heard and acknowledged.

We heard evidence that I will never forget. We heard about the deep and long-lasting harms caused by coercive high-control groups, and after considering the evidence we made a number of findings. We found that psychological harm is the most prevalent and enduring impact of coercive high-control groups. We found that many groups use physical and sexual violence and abuse. We found that women and girls experience distinct and disproportionate harm, and we found that the impacts on children are devastating. The harm caused to children in coercive high-control groups is serious and often lifelong. Children born into these groups do not consent to join or participate in the group and they have no real ability to leave.

This evidence speaks for itself, and it makes one thing clear: more must be done to protect Victorians, particularly young Victorians, from the harms of coercive high-control groups. The committee's 98 findings and 39 recommendations chart a pathway for the Victorian government to better support people who have been part of coercive high-control groups and better protect Victorians from harm. This includes a recommendation to review legislative options to criminalise group-based coercion in Victorian law.

The evidence we heard was not all bad. We met the most incredible survivors who now dedicate their lives to helping others. They are bringing hope. They are shining a light on a pathway out for people who are members of coercive high-control groups and want to get out. Our first recommendation recognises the role that lived experience plays in all future policy reform by recommending that the Victorian government establish a formal lived experience advisory group.

I wish to thank my fellow committee members: the deputy chair and member for Euroa, the member for Geelong, the member for Eildon, the member for Werribee, the member for Prahran, the member

for Clarinda and former committee member the member for Bayswater. I thank them for their contribution to this inquiry.

I also wish to thank the committee secretariat – Jess, Caitlin, Dani and Imogen – for their dedication to this important work. To every Victorian who made a submission, thank you. We could not have written this report without the deeply thoughtful and considered evidence put forward, and I thank them for their trust in the committee and their trust in this process. People came forward not for recognition, but to help others and ensure that no-one else experiences the same harm. This generosity of purpose has been central to the inquiry and underpins our findings and recommendations. To those who did not share their experiences but wanted to, the committee recognises the harms you have experienced and the impact of coercive high-control groups on your lives. I hope that this inquiry is an important step in healing. I hope that this inquiry's work will prevent further harm, and I hope that this inquiry's report sends a clear message to those currently within coercive environments: that support is available and there is a pathway out to safety. I commend the report, its findings and the recommendations to the Parliament.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into the Recruitment Methods and Impacts of Cults and Organised Fringe Groups

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (11:01): I need to correct the record for earlier this week saying I would not cry when I made my contribution after hearing my colleagues and committee members speak on the Legal and Social Issues Committee's report. This is something we are really, really proud of. This is seeing who is in the gallery today and the dedication that they have made, not just to our inquiry and the submissions but in their personal life in making sure that we are here. It is their personal contribution; it is their professional contribution. It has been a mammoth amount of effort and huge personal sacrifice to get this here today, and it is something that our committee is really proud of.

I want to just take a moment to thank my committee for their graciousness in allowing me to take a physical and emotional step back when the fires ripped through my community, because something that people do not understand in this job is you only have so much capacity. It is a huge amount of emotional work for everyone involved in this committee to listen to the trauma of those that are brave and courageous enough to contribute, and that is why it is such an outstanding report. Today here in the gallery we have some extraordinary, courageous people who will change the lives of individuals and children who never consented to a future and a life in a cult. It happens sometimes slowly, with those that you trust most. Catherine and Ryan: I am not going to look at you, Catherine, because we are really, really proud of the courage that you have shown your community.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Member for Euroa, I will gently counsel you to not refer to anyone in the gallery.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Oh, sure, absolutely. But they do deserve a shout-out – Laura McConnell, Richard Baker. I have got to put it on the record that he was my inspiration to get into journalism. I cannot say I was quite the investigator, but I was a little bit of a fangirl until I toned it down and realised that his work has also contributed to getting us to this place.

This has been some of the hardest work certainly that I have done in this place. Sitting and listening to the impact of coercive control and cult involvement does not leave you when you knock off – when you go home and have dinner with your family and you understand that there are some people whose whole identity has been taken from them, and without their consent. The evidence told us about that physical harm. As we heard from my colleagues, 95 per cent of people who responded to our questionnaire spoke about the chronic fear, the loss of identity, the lasting damage of being shunned by the only community they knew, and many of us would not even be able to comprehend that sort of loss of identity. A lot of those effects can last a lifetime. I do not think that anyone in the committee will forget some of the contributions that we heard.

I need to thank the secretariat. They are extraordinary. Not only are they fiercely intelligent and capable, and their depth of research is just admirable, but they are compassionate in all of their professionalism. Jessica, Danielle, Imogen and Caitlin, you are all just absolutely professional dynamites, and you should be deeply proud of your work. They have pulled an enormous amount of evidence together, and with a lot of it they had to navigate the sensitivity of anonymous contributions as well, and that is no small feat.

We set out as the committee to protect people who are living through coercive control now and to protect the children who are being raised inside these groups with no say at all. Children born into these groups are not recruited. There is no moment when they choose to join, and their whole sense of self is built by the group before they are even old enough to question it. Eventually, when they do decide to leave – if they are able to leave – they are not recovering from an old identity; they are building one for the first time. A lot of those recommendations go towards making sure that they are able to, and that is the point of this report.

A couple of things that I want to just put on the record: I personally had some misconceptions. I did not think my own electorate of Euroa was impacted, but we actually heard recommendations from people that live in my community right now that are impacted by a cult. I was also gobsmacked by the financial accountability. But all in all, I just want to say I commend this report to the house, and I deeply thank everyone who contributed.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Enhancing Victorian University Governance

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (11:06): Just before I talk to my committee report, I would like to also thank the people who have just contributed on their really important committee work. I think committee work is very important in this state, but probably its praises are not sung as much as they should be over time. There are times in this place when we do really important work in committee work, and the outcomes are to make this place a better place – to learn from the past, but also to make a better future. So I just want to thank the other committee members for their contributions today.

I am pleased to make a contribution and speak to the final report, which I tabled yesterday, which is the Legislative Assembly's Economy and Infrastructure Committee's *Inquiry into Enhancing Victorian University Governance*. Universities have played a really important role across our state. They are educating our next professionals, they drive our research and innovation and they certainly contribute to an enormous part of our society and our cultural and economic status here in the state. I want to make this really clear – and we heard this throughout the committee inquiry – they are there to serve the public good. However, throughout the inquiry it became clear that the tertiary education sector is facing some significant challenges.

In recent years, not just here in Victoria but across Australia, they have experienced what I would call a crisis of public confidence, and it certainly has raised some important questions around their governance, their accountability and whose voices are being heard when they are making key decisions at the council level. It is important to note that when the councils of each university have been under scrutiny there have been concerns raised around underpayment of staff, the spend on executive salaries, the spend on consultations and consultants, transparency around decision-making and potential conflicts of interest, and decisions about when to cut courses or cut staff. Due to those concerns we have seen the federal government also conduct inquiries into university governance. Obviously we have got ours, and New South Wales has also undertaken a report. For universities to continue to fill their important role, this report really goes to the heart of bringing trust back – rebuilding public trust in our universities.

We did throughout the inquiry hear from a range of stakeholders across the tertiary education sector, and we received evidence from vice-chancellors. We have made 17 recommendations in this report, but there were some different perspectives before we came to those recommendations. One of the

strongest themes that came through was the different views on the representation that sits on councils. Staff and students consistently advocated for legislative changes to increase that representation on university governing bodies.

Universities themselves, however, generally were reluctant to see those changes at a legislative level. A letter that the vice-chancellors sent to me and the committee shows their lack of support for these legislative changes. It was a joint signed letter, and I would just like to quote from it. It says:

> We acknowledge the Committee's interest in ensuring that the voices of students and staff, in all their diversity, are well understood and considered within universities' governance structures including their Governing Bodies. We note that the current legislative settings already provide us with the flexibility to increase the number of elected staff and student members within our respective University Councils.

Despite the fact that we can have an increase in elected student and staff voices on councils, prior to December 2025 no universities had done that. The committee acknowledges that some are trying to work towards that now and have started to increase representation, but it is certainly a challenge that we found in the committee's inquiry, as is making sure that legislation keeps pace with the outcomes that we are seeking.

I am going to run out of time, and I really would like to speak more on this. I would like to thank our secretariat and the staff that supported our committee, and I hope to speak more along these lines.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into the Recruitment Methods and Impacts of Cults and Organised Fringe Groups

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (11:11): There are many rewarding parts to the privilege of having been elected to Parliament, and one part of my work has been as a member of the Legal and Social Issues Committee undertaking this report into the inquiry into recruitment methods and impacts of cults and organised fringe groups. The committee deliberately moved away from the term 'cult' and instead used the terminology 'coercive high-control group', recognising that the issue is not about religion or about beliefs but about patterns of coercion, manipulation and abuse. The report focuses on behaviours rather than beliefs, to protect freedom of religion and association while addressing serious harm.

From the outset I would like to thank the secretariat, who worked tirelessly and professionally with my colleagues to coordinate what at times was a distressing and eye-opening look at a situation that is occurring across Victoria, across Australia and indeed globally. Listening to people's personal accounts was often exceptionally difficult. As a committee that is bipartisan, it was a collaborative process of listening to members within our community who either had been recruited into coercive high-control groups or had knowledge of them. Young people, old people, different ethnicities and different social groups were all touched. As community leaders, it was an important opportunity to protect those who may be vulnerable and unable to move away from them.

This inquiry was never about judging people's beliefs or religions. It was about protecting Victorians from coercion, from abuse and from exploitation. The committee deliberately focused on behaviour, not belief, ensuring freedom of religion, as I mentioned before, and association were respected while addressing serious harm. Survivors consistently told the committee that current laws and services do not recognise what they have experienced. Children raised inside coercive control groups deserve stronger protections and better pathways to safety. Victoria now has an opportunity to become a national leader and indeed a global leader by introducing modern laws that recognise patterns of coercive control in group settings while strengthening the support for survivors.

The committee heard stories about children being born into coercive control groups, put to work or abused at such a young age it was horrendous; overseas students who were targeted when they had just come to this country and were feeling isolated and alone; and people targeted at the most vulnerable stages of their lives – women who may have been coming out of an abusive relationship and were just exceptionally vulnerable. People's financial independence was taken away in these

groups. Their money was taken away, their choices were taken away and their friendships and families were taken away. They did not have trusted relationships. Children, girls, were removed from education or not given the opportunities that we would expect all people to have.

There were six key recommendations that came out of our report, and I will group them. Creating a new criminal offence for group-based coercion was one, and strengthening protection for children was another that was highlighted. Improving support services for people experiencing this was something that was just so clear and so needed, as was increased public awareness, more broadly in the public but also in educational institutions where young people are being targeted. There was also improving regulation and accountability, as well as putting lived experience at the centre of this.

In terms of key findings, the committee found coercive high-control groups exist across religious, ideological, commercial and wellness settings. Recruitment is gradual and often targets people during periods of vulnerability. Harm is psychological, it is financial, it is physical and it is social, and it extends well beyond the point someone leaves the group.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into the Recruitment Methods and Impacts of Cults and Organised Fringe Groups

John LISTER (Werribee) (11:16): I have to admit, in speaking on the Legal and Social Issues Committee report into coercion and harm in high-control groups, coming into this as a very new member of Parliament with the member for Prahran, I was not quite sure what we would be getting into. I have to say that in those first few weeks my Google search history was quite wild trying to find information out there about this topic. It is so fraught out there; the information is so loaded. We often think this issue is about what we see on Netflix documentaries, on podcasts or on things like that, but what we came to find in this inquiry was that this issue is so much more than what we see in that popular media space. It was brought home through our inquiry process, through the hundreds of submissions that we went through and the witnesses coming to speak to us, just how important it is to focus on what this actually means. This is a nation-first, nay, world-first report into this issue. It has been broached before by places like France, Austria, New Zealand and the United States, but I would be hard-pressed in those Google searches to find anything else out there that goes to the depth that this report goes to.

At the very start, and as many of my good colleagues have said, framing this in terms of cults is not always helpful. At times I thought I was going to get into theological debates, which I always am up for, talking about Constantine and the Edict of Milan with some of our Christian lobbyists. But I think what was most interesting in this whole process was engaging with those mainstream faith groups and talking about the risks of these behaviours to their congregations, because this is what this report goes to. It is not a report into faith, it is not a report into what people believe; it is a report into how people behave. Talking to those religions was quite insightful. I remember speaking to one of my local Baptist pastors who said that he had seen these in his community, and in fact in what is a pretty confronting section, volume 2, we have a pastor from a Chinese Christian community reference that as well.

Some may ask why the member for Werribee would take such an interest in something like coercive high-control groups. Are there groups like this locally? The answer is this inquiry was not there to find those groups; it was there to understand what the warning signs of this behaviour are. Faith is a key part of my community and all of our communities, and we have seen very small examples, in my community at least, of groups exerting high control on their members.

This report's recommendations and findings provide a framework for government – not just this government in Victoria but governments all around the world. It provides a framework for agencies and mainstream faith groups to look out for this behaviour and address it before we see the horrific impacts that a lot of our witnesses described with such bravery and candidness that it will stay with me for a very long time.

Most important to me as a former schoolteacher are the findings and recommendations on schools, recommendations 16, 17 and 18. A lot of work is being done in our schools around what respectful relationships look like, and it is quite clear that a lot of change has happened in our school system, but we need to look at what else we can do. How do we have those resources that help those teachers and those professionals in child protection to look out for those warning signs well before they turn into some of the horrific things that we have seen in our inquiry?

As I finish up and as one of the last speakers today, everyone here has thanked our fellow committee members not only for their bipartisanship but also for their commitment to what is a really, really important issue. The hundreds of people who submitted or gave witness testimonies we thank so much for revealing what is a really, really hard and personal topic for them. I think in particular I would also like to thank the secretariat, because in the end these reports do not come easy. Thank you so much for all your work.

Bills

Multicultural Victoria Amendment Bill 2026

Statement of charter compatibility

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning, Minister for Violence Reduction, Minister for Finance) (11:22): Under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility:

Opening paragraphs

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

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

Overview

The Bill is a fundamentally rights-promoting piece of legislation. The Bill lays the foundation for a renewed approach to working with Victoria's multicultural and multifaith communities, and strengthen Victoria's multicultural settings, institutions and frameworks. The Bill is expected to have positive impacts on Victoria's multicultural and multifaith communities through strengthened engagement between government and communities.

The Bill seeks to amend the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011* (**Act**), by abolishing the Victorian Multicultural Commission (**VMC**), and establishing a new statutory entity called Multicultural Victoria. Multicultural Victoria will promote Victoria's rich multiculturalism, deepen community engagement, strengthen accountability for whole-of-government multicultural outcomes, and enhance community engagement.

The Bill will retain the VMC's existing objectives for Multicultural Victoria while also enshrining the promotion of language services; place-based and regional engagement with multicultural and multifaith communities; and First Nations self-determination and Treaty as new objectives.

New leadership roles for Multicultural Victoria will be enshrined in the Bill through an independent Multicultural Coordinator General (**Coordinator General**), supported by two Deputy Coordinators General, one of which will be a designated regional appointee. This refreshed leadership structure will enable Multicultural Victoria to play a more influential role, provide an independent voice into government and become a trusted conduit between community and government. The Bill will require the Coordinator General and Deputies to act in accordance with impartiality when performing their functions, which will involve acting without bias and self-interest, acting fairly and equitably and supporting all individuals and communities from diverse backgrounds.

The Bill will also establish the Multicultural Community Advisory Group (**MCAG**), which will be an independent group of advisors to Multicultural Victoria and actively participate in community events, consultations, and government forums.

The Bill will also address recommendations made in Victoria's Multicultural Review (**Review**) led by George Lekakis AO and the Expert Advisory Group. The Review provided an opportunity to examine how multicultural institutions, settings and policies are operating; recommend ways in which government can enhance its support for Victoria's multicultural and multifaith communities; as well as strengthen

government's response to current challenges and future social cohesion issues. The Review made 41 recommendations, several of which required amendment to the Act. These recommendations have been considered in the preparation of the Bill.

Human Rights Issues

In my opinion, the human rights under the Charter engaged by the Bill are the:

- right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8 of the Charter);
- right to privacy and reputation (section 13 of the Charter)
- right to protection of families and children (section 17 of the Charter);
- right to take part in public life (section 18 of the Charter); and
- cultural rights (section 19 of the Charter).

For the reasons outlined below, I am of the view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter because, to the extent that some provisions may limit human rights, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society. I consider that other provisions of the Bill promote human rights.

Right to recognition and equality before the law

The Bill engages the right to equality in section 8 of the Charter because it promotes equality before the law. Section 8(3) provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination. Multicultural Victoria is being established under the Bill to promote unity and positive relationships among multicultural and multifaith communities and to encourage full participation in the social, cultural, economic and political life of Victoria. The Bill provides that functions of Multicultural Victoria include to represent and promote the interests of multicultural and multifaith communities, advise the Minister on a range of matters impacting multicultural and multifaith communities, undertake wide-ranging consultation and develop and maintain partnerships with public sector bodies, Councils and community organisations. These functions aim to provide opportunities for Victorians from a broad range of backgrounds to be heard, promoting equality before the law by ensuring their views are reflected in government decision making.

The Bill also recognises and promotes language services as an essential service for multicultural communities, which is necessary to overcome disparities which may have occurred due to language or cultural barriers. Members of multicultural and multifaith communities will be able to gain better access to essential services such as health, education, legal and housing. The Bill also provides a mechanism to require certain public sector entities acquire services from the Victorian Interpreting and Translating Service (**VITS**) LanguageLoop. The provision of consistent language services via VITS LanguageLoop in critical areas, which may include healthcare, court, and other frontline government services, will promote greater participation and engagement from multicultural and multifaith communities, supporting equal engagement with government programs and services, further promoting equality before the law.

For these reasons I consider that the Bill is compatible with the right to recognition and equality before the law.

Right to privacy and reputation

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

The Charter contains internal qualifications on this right, being that interferences with privacy only limit the right if it is unlawful or arbitrary. An interference will generally be lawful where is it precise and appropriately circumscribed and will generally be arbitrary only where it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust, or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim being sought.

The Bill abolishes the VMC and establishes a new statutory entity, Multicultural Victoria. The VMC and Multicultural Victoria will be subject to legal obligations in relation to the handling, use and protection of information. Various laws will apply (as relevant) to VMC and Multicultural Victoria, including: the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*; the *Health Records Act 2001*; the *Public Records Act 1973*, the Charter, and any other applicable information protection, secrecy, or confidentiality provisions.

Any information held by the VMC, and subsequently, Multicultural Victoria, must be managed in accordance with existing information, privacy or public record laws. This includes the lawful handling, disclosure or transfer of such information, where appropriate, to the Public Records Office of Victoria.

The Bill establishes reporting requirements for Multicultural Victoria. Under the Bill, Department Heads must make every reasonable effort to assist Multicultural Victoria with respect to a general report but also ensure

that no personal information is provided to Multicultural Victoria as part of this assistance. Further, Multicultural Victoria is required to remove any personal information in its annual State of Multicultural Victoria report, prior it being provided to the Minister for approval and tabling in Parliament. These provisions expressly contemplate and protect the right to privacy.

The Bill provides for the Premier to develop a new Multicultural Strategy, informed by advice from the Coordinator General and community consultation, which will consider and plan for initiatives across all government portfolios. If any personal information is collected and handled as part of measuring progress towards the Multicultural Strategy or as part of the consultation process, then the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* protections will apply to the data, for the purposes of complying with the Bill.

Although the Bill's provisions may engage the right to privacy and reputation, in my view any limitation is negligible or minimal, reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society, consistent with sections 7(2) and 13 of the Charter.

Right to protection of families and children

Section 17 of the Charter provides that families are the fundamental group unit of society and are entitled to be protected by society and the State, and that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection.

I consider that the Bill promotes the Charter right to the protection of families and children. The Bill embeds a requirement for Multicultural Victoria to provide support and advice in relation to community safety planning, in order to help prevent, manage or respond to emergencies or adverse local or global events and their impact on multicultural and multifaith communities. This will help to create a safer and secure environment for families and children, particularly when participating in multicultural and multifaith events.

The Bill seeks to strengthen the Act's principles of multiculturalism by recognising language services as an essential service for multicultural communities when accessing government services. This will help families and children access relevant healthcare, legal services, education, and housing without language barriers and in circumstances which preserve their cultural heritage.

Right to take part in public life

Section 18(1) of the Charter provides that every person in Victoria has the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs.

The Bill promotes the rights of Victorians from different multicultural and multifaith communities to participate in public life. The Bill will establish MCAG as an advisory group. When appointing members to MCAG, the Bill requires the Minister to have regard to the desirability of the MCAG having diverse membership, as well as members from different occupations and who reside in different parts of the State, with representation from regional and rural Victoria. One appointee will be a dedicated youth representative.

The Bill also enshrines a requirement for Multicultural Victoria to establish regional stakeholder engagement groups, which will include representation from all regions of Victoria. Multicultural Victoria will be required to provide feedback to group stakeholders on what action has been taken in respect of the matters raised during engagement. Embedding these groups in the Bill will protect and systematise regional and place-based community engagement on multicultural affairs, providing a dedicated forum for regional communities and groups to share their views and experiences.

The Bill also requires government departments to periodically produce Multicultural Action and Inclusion Plans. These plans will identify actions, activities or programs to increase cultural inclusion of government services, and actions to strengthen diversity in the Victorian public service workforce and of committees established, or engaged by, departments.

The Bill further promotes participation in public life by requiring Multicultural Victoria to have regard to the needs of multicultural and multifaith communities identified through ongoing community consultation when providing input into the development of the Multicultural Strategy, which is to be led by the Premier. The Multicultural Strategy may also be amended at any time to ensure it reflects multicultural and multifaith community needs.

Additionally, if Multicultural Victoria consults with representatives from multicultural and multifaith communities, such as through the multicultural community advisory group, regional stakeholder engagement groups or otherwise, Multicultural Victoria is required to report back to the representatives as soon as practicable, advising on what action Multicultural Victoria has taken in respect to matters that have been raised. This process will allow community members to determine how their input and feedback has influenced the conduct of public affairs.

For these reasons I consider that the Bill is compatible with the right take part in public life.

Cultural rights

Section 19 of the Charter provides that every person in Victoria has the right to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and use their language. The Charter also recognises that First Nations peoples have the right to enjoy their identity and culture, to maintain and use their language, and maintain their kinship ties to member of their community. The Charter also requires public authorities to adopt measures that protect and promote cultural diversity and inclusion.

The Bill seeks to strengthen the Act's principles of multiculturalism by recognising language services as an essential service for multicultural communities when accessing government services and recognising First Peoples unique status as the descendants of Australia's first people. This Bill also provides that it is an objective of Multicultural Victoria to acknowledge First Peoples' self-determination and Treaty. This will help preserve culture, maintain kinship ties and support individuals using their own language.

The Bill promotes cultural inclusion and acknowledges that multicultural and multifaith communities have intersecting and diverse identities, and values the richness that such diversity brings to the Victorian community. The Bill will help to address inequities experienced by multicultural and multifaith communities and preserve their cultural heritage.

For these reasons I consider that the Bill is compatible with cultural rights under the Charter.

Conclusion

I consider that the Bill is compatible with the Charter because, to the extent that some of the provisions may limit human rights, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

I commend the Bill to the House.

The Hon Sonya Kilkenny MP
Attorney-General
Minister for Planning
Minister for Violence Reduction
Minister for Finance

Statement of treaty compatibility

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning, Minister for Violence Reduction, Minister for Finance) (11:22): Under the Statewide Treaty Act 2025, I table a statement of treaty compatibility:

1. In my opinion, the Multicultural Victorian Amendment Bill 2026 (the Bill) is compatible with the matters set out in section 66(3)(d) of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025*. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

2. The Bill seeks to address recommendations arising from Victoria's Multicultural Review (the Review) and provide renewed leadership to the Multicultural and Multifaith portfolio through the establishment of a new statutory entity, Multicultural Victoria.

3. The proposed amendments to the Act will:

   3.1 Provide renewed leadership to the Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria portfolio by establishing a new statutory entity, Multicultural Victoria and abolishing the Victorian Multicultural Commission.

   3.2 Strengthen responsibility and accountability for coordinating rigorous whole of government strategic planning and reporting for the Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria portfolio by amending ongoing consultation and reporting processes.

   3.3 Embed a requirement for Multicultural Victoria to support and advise relevant agencies on community safety planning following adverse local or global events.

   3.4 Appoint a Multicultural Coordinator General and two Deputy Coordinators General to lead the new statutory entity.

   3.5 Establish a Multicultural Community Advisory Group (MCAG) to advise the new statutory entity.

   3.6 Require Multicultural Victoria to convene regional stakeholder engagement groups, with groups providing representation from all regions of Victoria

   3.7 Recognise and promote language services as an essential service for multicultural communities.

3.8 Recognise the unique status of the First Peoples of Victoria and acknowledge Treaty.

3.9 Make minor and technical amendments to improve the operation of the Act.

3.10 Provide for the Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria to direct particular public sector bodies to acquire language services from VITS LanguageLoop (VITS) unless VITS is unable to provide the services.

3.11 Authorise VITS's conduct for the purposes of Part IV of the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010 (Cth)*.

4. Further to paragraph 3.8, the Bill:

4.1 inserts a new principle of multiculturalism, recognising that 'First Peoples in Victoria, as the original custodians of the land on which the colony of Victoria was established –

a) have a unique status as the descendants of Australia's first people;

b) have a spiritual, social, cultural and economic relationship with their traditional lands and waters within Victoria; and

c) have made a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the identity and wellbeing of Victoria.

4.2 embeds a function of Multicultural Victoria to 'acknowledge First Peoples right to self-determination and the advancement of Statewide Treaty-making between First Peoples in Victoria and the State'.

Consultation with the First Peoples' Assembly of Gellung Warl

5. The First Peoples' Assembly was given an opportunity to advise on the Bill and indicated that it did not wish to give advice or make representations at this time, pending publication of its Community Governance and Answerability Framework, which is required under Part 14 of the Statewide Treaty Act. I understand the First Peoples' Assembly noted that the Framework provides the mechanism through which the views of Community are reflected in its advice and representations.

Compatibility of the Bill with each of the objects in section 66(3)(d) of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025*

6. I have considered whether the Bill is compatible with the objects at section 66(3)(d) of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025*:

6.1 advancing the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples; and

6.2 addressing the unacceptable disadvantage inflicted on First Peoples by the historic wrongs and ongoing injustices of colonisation; and

6.3 ensuring the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by First Peoples.

Advancing the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples

7. The inherent rights of First Peoples, including the right to self-determination, are recognised by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

8. The Bill positively affects this object by prescribing that Multicultural Victoria, comprising the statutory appointees of Multicultural Victoria and members of the Multicultural Community Advisory Group, undertake their functions in a manner that acknowledges First Peoples' self-determination and the advancement of Treaty.

9. These are novel inclusions in the Bill that require Multicultural Victoria to expressly consider First Peoples' interests. In this way, the Bill promotes advancement of the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples by enshrining an expectation that Multicultural Victoria must:

9.1 stay abreast of matters relating to First Peoples' self-determination and the advancement of Statewide Treaty-making in Victoria

9.2 act in a way that acknowledges self-determination

9.3 act in a way that is not inconsistent with Treaty.

Addressing unacceptable disadvantage inflicted on First Peoples

10. The Bill does not affect or limit the achievement of this object and is therefore compatible.

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

11. The Bill does not affect or limit the achievement of this object and is therefore compatible.

Conclusion

12. Accordingly, in my opinion, for the reasons stated above, the Bill is compatible with each of the objects in in section 66(3)(d)(i)–(iii) of the Statewide Treaty Act.

The Hon Sonya Kilkenny MP
Attorney-General
Minister for Planning
Minister for Violence Reduction
Minister for Finance

Second reading

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning, Minister for Violence Reduction, Minister for Finance) (11:23): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

Victoria is a proudly multicultural state – it is who we are. Victorians come from over 300 different ancestries, speak more than 290 languages and practise almost 200 faiths. Almost half of us were born overseas, or have a parent born overseas. All of us who are not First Peoples come from a lineage of migration, and that migration continues to shape Victoria today.

This Government is proud to uphold Victoria's reputation as a safe, diverse and inclusive State – where all people feel safe to be and express who they are.

Global conflicts, the cost of living, and the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are pressures that have touched every community, but they have placed a particular strain on our multicultural and multifaith communities.

It was in that context, that in December 2024, the Victorian Government commissioned Victoria's Multicultural Review (the Review) to examine Victorian multicultural settings. Led by George Lekakis AO – the longest ever serving chair of the Victorian Multicultural Commission – and supported by an Expert Advisory Group comprising of Hass Dellal AO, Carmel Guerra OAM, Miriam Suss OAM and Mark Duckworth PSM, the Review heard from over 640 Victorians across the state, including over 150 peak bodies.

The Review heard about the needs of multicultural and multifaith Victorians. This Bill delivers on key commitments arising from the Review.

It's long been recognised that when we develop policy, deliver programs, and provide services across portfolios, for multicultural and multifaith communities, that we need to consider the voices of those communities. We know that when we listen to diverse communities about policies, programs and services that impact them, we get better outcomes for all Victorians.

When we meaningfully engage with communities, we are better able to learn from our successes and challenges to continuously improve. When Victorians work together, we are better able to stand up for respect, unity and belonging.

The Victorian Government is committed to supporting Victoria as a multicultural and inclusive community, and combatting racism and hatred in all its forms.

To uphold our reputation as a safe, diverse and inclusive state, we need forward planning, coordination and meaningful engagement to inform our decisions and provide real accountability.

The Bill enshrines critical elements of this vision and lays the groundwork for a renewed approach to working together, hand in hand, with Multicultural and Multifaith communities in Victoria. These changes will ensure more voices are represented and heard.

Establishing Multicultural Victoria

The Review told us we need a fresh start and a stronger voice for multicultural and multifaith communities. This Bill will establish a new statutory entity, Multicultural Victoria.

Multicultural Victoria signals a reset in how we as a government listens to, collaborates with and supports multicultural and multifaith Victorians. It will bring multicultural and multifaith leadership to the forefront of discussions, and will raise the voices of those in the community who may not always be heard.

The new entity will bring together the functions of two separate bodies: the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) and the departmental functions of the Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria portfolio.

These changes reinforce this Government's ongoing commitment to stand together with multicultural communities – not against them.

The Bill will see the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) superseded by Multicultural Victoria. I thank past and present VMC Chairs and Commissioners for their tireless support, contributions and achievements. Since 1983, the VMC has played an invaluable role supporting multicultural and multifaith communities through its role as a conduit between government and community. However, the Review found that the separation between the VMC and the department's policy and programs functions resulted in an inconsistent and fragmented approach to the portfolio, and confusion among community on the role and function of each.

Multicultural Victoria will bring community engagement, policy and grants together, addressing the Review's finding that community voice needs to be much more closely connected into policy and grants delivery. The Multicultural Coordinator General's independent voice, speaking on behalf of our communities, will inform the development of policy and grants program design. Departmental staff will support the Coordinator General to deliver on their statutory community engagement and cross-government accountability functions, and the delivery of policy development and grants programs under the banner of Multicultural Victoria.

Strengthened leadership, effective engagement and an independent voice

The Bill provides Multicultural Victoria with new leadership positions: a Multicultural Coordinator General who will be the statutory leader of Multicultural Victoria, supported by two Deputies (including one from regional Victoria) and a new Multicultural Community Advisory Group. These independent appointees will support, represent and advocate for all multicultural and multifaith communities across Victoria.

The Bill requires the Multicultural Coordinator General and Deputies to act in accordance with the principles of impartiality – free from prejudice, bias or personal influences. This aligns with the Review's emphasis on Multicultural Victoria maintaining neutrality, to best advocate for all multicultural and multifaith communities.

One of the key responsibilities of the Multicultural Coordinator General will be to lead systematic and wide-ranging consultation, to hear directly from our multicultural communities about their experiences, priorities and needs – and report on these to the government. Multicultural Victoria will also have a legislated obligation to report back to those it has engaged with, to explain what action it has taken in respect of the matters raised.

To ensure that engagement has impact, the Multicultural Coordinator General will have new powers to drive change for multicultural and multifaith communities across government – including strengthened powers in relation to whole-of-government planning and accountability.

They will also play a key role in working with existing community safety and emergency services agencies, such as Victoria Police and Emergency Management Victoria, to support, and advise on, community safety planning with multicultural and multifaith communities affected by emergencies or serious global or local adverse events. This reform recognises that some emergencies and global events can have a disproportionate impact on multicultural and multifaith communities, and seeks to ensure that responses are cognisant of those impacts.

The Multicultural Coordinator General will provide independent advice to the government on current issues affecting our communities, the adequacy of government services, and any other matters relating to multicultural and multifaith communities, drawing on Multicultural Victoria's broad engagement and research, and advice from its advisory committees.

The Multicultural Coordinator General will also support the Premier in the development and implementation of a whole-of-government Multicultural Strategy, and ensure that community perspectives inform government policy and programs.

And we know that you can't address what you don't measure – which is why the Multicultural Coordinator General will also develop a yearly report, driven by community consultation. It will highlight what has worked and what more needs to be done across government. The State of Multicultural Victoria report will be tabled in Parliament each year, bringing transparency to the operations of Multicultural Victoria as well as efforts and opportunities to improve community outcomes.

Improving community outcomes across all government portfolios

The Review found that government's current approach to measuring whole of government outcomes for multicultural and multifaith Victorians has delivered inconsistent results and lacks accountability to drive measurable improvements in equity, inclusion and community wellbeing. The Bill responds to this by

strengthening accountability for multicultural outcomes through whole-of-government strategic planning and reporting.

In addition to the Premier-led Multicultural Strategy, informed by advice from the Multicultural Coordinator General and community consultation, government departments will be required to produce Multicultural Action and Inclusion Plans every four years. These plans will identify actions to increase cultural inclusion of government services, and actions to strengthen outcomes for multicultural Victorians through the public service. The plans must be approved by the Multicultural Coordinator General, and departmental Secretaries will be required to report to the Multicultural Coordinator General on their progress annually.

Improved whole-of-government reporting will allow for more intentional forward planning for multicultural and multifaith communities across government, in alignment with Victoria's overarching Multicultural Strategy. A data and community feedback-driven approach will allow the government to make evidence-based decisions around funding priorities, and corporate and operational planning.

These reporting and planning provisions will be key accountability mechanisms to identify and address any gaps or areas for improvement both within departments, and in our service delivery to multicultural and multifaith Victorians.

Multicultural community advisory group

Engagement and consultation with diverse groups – including with young people, faith leaders, regional Victorians and new and emerging communities – will be bolstered through Multicultural Victoria, as will engagement with multicultural community organisations, ethno-specific organisations, faith-based organisations and peak bodies.

As recommended by the Review, the Bill also establishes the Multicultural Community Advisory Group to provide strategic advice to the Multicultural Coordinator General and Deputies.

The Advisory Group will sit within Multicultural Victoria, embedding a genuine codesign component to the development of policies, programs and services. The Advisory Group will add depth, credibility and lived experience to advice to government on matters concerning multicultural and multifaith affairs.

Reporting to the Coordinator General, Advisory Group members will work collaboratively to bring to life the objectives and vision of Multicultural Victoria. Advisory Group members will actively participate in community events, consultations and government forums, in addition to attending formal Advisory Group meetings.

Advisory Group members will come from a range of cultural, faith and occupational backgrounds. Membership will include representation from rural or regional Victoria as well as a dedicated youth representative. The Advisory Group will be formed and informed by a diverse range of views and experiences.

They will engage actively at the grassroots level and ensure that the voices and perspectives of multicultural and multifaith Victorians are reflected in government policies and programs – to make sure that no one is left out, and no one is left behind.

Multicultural Victoria will also have the ability to establish other advisory groups and consultation mechanisms as required, to allow all Victorians of multicultural and multifaith backgrounds to have their voices heard right across our community.

This means Multicultural Victoria can continue to benefit from advisory groups like the Multifaith Advisory Group and the Multicultural Youth Network, established by the VMC.

Regional stakeholder engagement groups

The experiences of multicultural and multifaith Victorians differ across not only across culture and faith, but also in where they choose to call Victoria home.

This Bill recognises that the place where we live can shape our experiences, priorities, viewpoints and needs. To understand, celebrate and respond to our communities across Victoria, effective place-based engagement is critical.

Since 2011, Regional Advisory Councils have been an important platform for members to advise the VMC on matters of multiculturalism, settlement, service delivery and other important issues.

However, the Review told us that the model of the Regional Advisory Council is unwieldy and doesn't deliver the improved outcomes that it should and to abolish them in their current form.

I acknowledge and thank Regional Advisory Council members for their contributions and incredible work delivered over the years. Together with other committees chaired by the VMC. I thank all members for sharing their diverse identities and experiences of culture and faith.

But we know that regional and place-based engagement remains critical – and this Bill takes deliberate steps to ensure the representation and inclusion of regional multicultural communities through a new model of place-based engagement. This model will provide flexibility and will improve the way that multicultural and multifaith communities from all regions across Victoria.

The Bill requires that Multicultural Victoria provide feedback to the groups on outcomes achieved and how their advice has been received and used by government.

The Multicultural Coordinator General will be responsible for setting terms of reference for these groups – providing flexibility to ensure the engagement model works for communities. Regional stakeholder groups may include representatives of relevant local agencies, regional ethnic councils, and community organisations – as well as individuals not involved with an organisation. This method of engagement will be independently reviewed every four years to ensure it remains effective, and the voices multicultural and multifaith Victorians in regional and place-based locations are heard.

Language services

The Review also found that language services, including interpreting and translating services, are essential for Victoria's multicultural communities, especially in critical government settings such as health, policing, courts, justice, education and emergency management. The Review recommended assigning critical areas of government language service delivery to the government's state-owned provider, VITS LanguageLoop to improve the equity, quality and delivery of language services.

In alignment with findings from the Review, the Bill recognises that interpreting and translating are essential services for our multicultural communities within the Act's principles of multiculturalism.

The Bill also sets the framework for assigning critical areas of government work to VITS LanguageLoop by empowering the Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria to declare by written notice that a specified entity must obtain interpreting and translating services from VITS LanguageLoop. As a supply and quality safeguard, should VITS LanguageLoop not be able to deliver the requested service, prescribed organisations may then obtain the relevant services from an alternative language services provider.

In making the Ministerial declaration, the Minister must consult with the relevant portfolio Ministers. These reforms will not extend to the private sector or integrity agencies. It is intended that declarations will be issued to a specified entity as and when their current language services arrangements expire to ensure a smooth transition to VITS LanguageLoop provision.

Positioning VITS LanguageLoop as the default provider for prescribed organisations will ensure a consistent and high quality service that can readily respond to departmental and community language service needs.

Whether you are seeking medical treatment or facing an emergency – you will be able to access quality interpreting services. This is important for many Victorians, who worry about parents, grandparents, and themselves, being able to access essential services without a family member in the room.

Every Victorian, regardless of their language background, has the right to meaningfully engage with government services, make informed decisions and be given fair treatment.

Recognition of First Peoples

This Bill recognises that all of us who are not First Peoples come from a lineage of migration. The principles of multiculturalism enshrined in the Bill acknowledge that First Peoples of Victoria have a unique status as the descendants of Australia's first people with a spiritual, social, cultural and economic relationship with their traditional lands and waters within Victoria. In carrying out its functions for our multicultural and multifaith communities, Multicultural Victoria will acknowledge First Peoples right to self-determination and the advancement of Statewide Treaty-making between First Peoples in Victoria and the State.

What we have before us is a significant and timely opportunity to centre recognition of Victoria as a multicultural State, set the framework to engage meaningfully with our community, and stand up for respect, unity and belonging. The Bill delivers on the Victorian Government's commitment arising from Victoria's Multicultural Review, and will strengthen our multicultural settings, institutions and frameworks now and into the future.

This Government is proud to uphold Victoria's reputation as a safe, diverse and inclusive State, where people feel safe to be and express who they are – and I am immensely proud to be supporting this Bill today.

I commend this Bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:23): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 12 August.

Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2026

Statement of charter compatibility

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (11:24): Under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2026 (the Bill).

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

Overview

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios Act 2015 (the Act) to categorise and recategorise certain hospitals for the purposes of nurse to patient and midwife to patient ratios, with which the operators of certain publicly funded health facilities must comply.

Human Rights Issues

The Bill promotes the following human rights protected by the Charter:

- The right to life (section 9 of the Charter); and
- The right to protection of families and children (section 17 of the Charter).

Right to life (section 9 of the Charter)

Section 9 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to life and has the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life.

Clause 4 will improve nurse to patient ratios that apply to hospitals by recategorising 24 hospitals to a higher level.

Clause 6 will improve nurse to patient ratios that apply to hospitals with emergency departments by recategorising 11 hospitals to a higher level. Four hospitals with emergency departments will be newly categorised to ensure that the nurse-to-patient ratios are mandated.

Recategorising these hospitals to a higher level will result in an increase of nurse to patient and midwife to patient ratios. This will ensure safe and quality patient care and as a result, will promote the right to life of the patients receiving care in Victorian hospitals.

The protection of families and children (section 17 of the Charter)

Section 17(1) of the Charter recognises that the families are the fundamental group unit of society and that families are entitled to be protected by society and the State.

Section 17(2) of the Charter provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to protection as is in their best interests, in recognition of a child's special vulnerability because of their age.

Clauses 4 and 5 of the Bill improve nurse and midwife to patient care in antenatal and postnatal wards of prescribed hospitals. Requiring more hospitals to have a higher patient to nurse and patient to midwife ratio will ensure that babies, mothers and pregnant mothers receive a high quality of care by improving opportunities for dedicated patient care and as a result will promote the protection of families and children.

Other potential rights invoked

The right to equality (section 8 of the Charter)

Section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination and the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. The recategorisation of Victorian hospitals will differentiate between patients in different hospital settings, and the ratios required for their care. This may invoke the protected attributes of 'disability' and 'pregnancy' under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* and therefore engage the right to equality and non-discrimination. However,

distinguishing the level of care owed to a patient based on their setting in a hospital is reasonable and justified because patients with different illnesses and conditions require varying levels of care depending upon their clinical acuity and the associated treatment necessary to appropriately manage their illness or condition.

For the reasons outlined it is my view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

The Hon. Melissa Horne MP
Minister for Health Infrastructure
Minister for Ports and Freight
Minister for Prevention of Family Violence

Statement of treaty compatibility

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (11:24): Under the Statewide Treaty Act 2025, I table a statement of treaty compatibility:

1. In accordance with section 66 of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025* (Statewide Treaty Act), I table a statement of Treaty compatibility for the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2026 (the Bill).
2. The First Peoples' Assembly was not given an opportunity to advise on and did not make representations on the Bill, based on my understanding that it is unlikely to have a significant impact on First Peoples or Statewide Treaty.
3. In my opinion, the Bill is compatible with the matters set out in section 66(3)(d) of the Statewide Treaty Act. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

4. The *Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015* (the Act) mandates minimum nursing and midwifery ratios across all public hospitals based on clinical settings and shifts. The categories underpinning these ratios have not been updated to reflect the growing capacity and complexity of our hospital system, with hospital categories not reviewed since 2000.
5. The Victorian Government committed before the 2018 and 2022 elections to finalising a review of these categories. The Department of Health completed this in 2025 through the Hospital Classification Review (HCR).
6. The main purpose of the Bill is to amend the Act so that the hospital categories in schedules 1 and 3 of the Act are updated to reflect contemporary hospital capacity and complexity.
7. The Bill will amend hospital categories in the Act to determine the minimum nursing and midwifery staffing ratios that apply at all Victorian public hospitals based on clinical setting and shift:
   7.1 Schedule 1 categories apply to hospitals with general medical or surgical wards.
   7.2 Schedule 3 categories apply to hospitals with emergency departments.

Consultation with the First Peoples' Assembly of Gellung Warl

8. Due to the recent establishment of the First Peoples' Assembly of Gellung Warl, it was not possible to give the First Peoples' Assembly the opportunity to advise on the Bill or for them to otherwise make representations about the effect of the Bill on First Peoples.

Compatibility of the Bill with each of the objects in section 66(3)(d) of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025*

9. I have considered whether the Bill is compatible with the objects at section 66(3)(d) of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025*:
   9.1 advancing the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples; and
   9.2 addressing the unacceptable disadvantage inflicted on First Peoples by the historic wrongs and ongoing injustices of colonisation; and
   9.3 ensuring the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by First Peoples.
10. I acknowledge the historical and contemporary health system injustices experienced by First Peoples, including the high rates of hospitalisation compared to non–First Peoples. The updated classification of hospitals will broadly benefit the care received by First Peoples, through increased staffing levels of nurses and midwives.
11. In my opinion, the Bill does not in its terms deal with First Peoples, nor is it expected that any aspects of the Bill will, in practice, have a differential effect on First Peoples.

Conclusion

12. Accordingly, in my opinion, for the reasons stated above, the Bill is compatible with each of the objects in section 66(3)(d)(i)–(iii) of the Statewide Treaty Act.

The Hon. Melissa Horne MP
Minister for Health Infrastructure
Minister for Ports and Freight
Minister for Prevention of Family Violence

Second reading

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (11:25): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

This Bill delivers on the Government's previous commitment to undertake a review of hospital categories and further strengthens and protects nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios.

The nursing and midwifery workforce plays a crucial role in our healthcare system, providing safe, high-quality, person-centred care across hospitals to Victorians at all stages of life.

Since its introduction in 2015, the *Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015* (the Act) has established minimum staffing requirements and supported the delivery of safe, high-quality care in Victorian public hospitals.

Hospital categorisations reflected in the Act were first established over 25 years ago in the Nurses and Midwives (Victorian Public Sector) (Single Interest Employers) Enterprise Agreement 2000–2004, to mandate minimum nursing and midwifery staffing ratios, and have remained largely unchanged since then.

The Hospital Classification Review was conducted to develop a contemporary approach to assess a hospital's workload and determine appropriate staffing requirements.

The amended categorisation of hospitals into the Schedules, as proposed by the Bill, has been informed by way of algorithms using publicly available datasets common across Victorian public health services. Two algorithms apply to Schedule 1, one each for speciality and non-specialty hospitals, and a third algorithm applies to Schedule 3, for hospitals with emergency departments.

These algorithms are contained within the Hospital Classification Review algorithms document dated 26 June 2025, which is publicly available on the Department of Health's website. This Bill is the result of the inaugural review referred to in that document. The Allan Labor Government is committed to reviewing the categorisation of hospitals by the application of these algorithms on a biennial basis.

This Bill will update the hospital categories in accordance with the review findings. By aligning staffing levels with a hospital's capacity and complexity, this will improve patient safety and the overall quality of care. Furthermore, it will significantly improve workloads for nurses and midwives across the Victorian public health system.

This Bill will ensure that ratios keep pace with the times, by reflecting current patient workload and therefore staffing requirements to support safe workloads for our valued nurses and midwives and enable better conditions and service in our hospitals.

This amendment will update the list of hospitals in Schedule 1 and Schedule 3 of the Act and result in 26 hospitals being recategorised to a higher level. These services will be mandated via the Act to adhere to increased staffing ratios due to the complexity of current operations.

A phased approach to implementation will occur to enable health services to incrementally adjust to increased staffing requirements, while also enabling appropriate training for graduate nurses who can support the uplift needed.

The uplift will start with general medical or surgical wards in the 2027/28 financial year, emergency departments in the 2028/29 financial year and then intensive care units in the 2029/30 financial year.

In total this update will mandate an overall staffing uplift of over 260 additional full-time equivalent nurses in the public health system. It will support our hardworking nurses and midwives and give them more support on the ground with better conditions and ensure Victoria's public hospitals can continue to provide safe and high-quality care for all Victorians.

I commend the Bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:25): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 12 August.

Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2026

Statement of charter compatibility

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (11:27): Under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility:

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (**Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2026 (**Bill**).

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

Overview

The *Electoral Act 2002* (**Electoral Act**) provides the overarching legal framework for the electoral system in Victoria. Notably, the Electoral Act establishes the Victorian Electoral Commission (**VEC**) and its responsibilities, functions, and powers; sets out election procedures and enrolment processes; regulates political financing and state funding; and prescribes relevant offences and compliance and investigatory measures.

Recent electoral reforms were introduced to the Electoral Act via the *Electoral Amendment Act 2026* (**Amendment Act**) and the *Electoral Further Amendment Act 2026* (**Further Amendment Act**) to support the integrity of Victoria's democratic system by:

- implementing recommendations of various reports on Victoria's electoral system released since the last significant reform of the Electoral Act in 2018;
- introducing a new political donations, reporting, and state funding regime following the High Court's decision in *Hopper & Anor v. State of Victoria* [2026] HCA 11 (***Hopper***) which found the former Part 12 of the Electoral Act to be wholly invalid; and
- capitalising upon opportunities to improve and modernise the Electoral Act as identified by the Government and the VEC.

This Bill introduces further reforms to the Electoral Act to enhance transparency in Victoria's electoral processes and strengthen public trust in the democratic system. Key amendments to the Electoral Act under the Bill include:

- removing group voting tickets from Legislative Council elections and prescribing a new method for voting above the line to ensure election results better reflect voter preferences;
- requiring certain electoral information to be disclosed and published, including the Register of New Entrants and details related to repayment of funds received from nominated entities between 25 November 2018 and 14 April 2026;
- prescribing new timeframes for certain state funding payments and lodgements which were due before current Part 12 of the Electoral Act was introduced via the Further Amendment Act;
- enabling the VEC to make determinations about claimable administrative expenditure and require an auditor to apply any relevant determination of the VEC;
- clarifying that the anti-circumvention offence under the Electoral Act is an indictable offence, so as to make it triable summarily pursuant to subsection 28(1)(b)(iii) of the *Criminal Procedure Act 2009*.

Human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill

In my opinion, the human rights under the Charter engaged by the Bill are the:

- right to privacy (section 13(a) of the Charter);
- right to freedom of expression (section 15 of the Charter); and
- right to take part in public life (section 18 of the Charter).

Having considered all relevant factors, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter. To the extent that any rights are limited, the limitation is reasonable and able to be justified in a free and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

Right to Privacy (section 13)

Section 13(1) of the Charter states that a person has the right not to have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

Requirement to publish the Register of New Entrants

Clause 20 of the Bill requires the VEC to publish on its Internet site the Register of New Entrants containing details of each registered political party or independent candidate registered as a new entrant under the Electoral Act. The information to be published include the name of the new entrant and the date and period the new entrant is registered as a new entrant.

Requirement to provide and publish details of certain repayments to nominated entities

Clause 24 of the Bill inserts new section 277(2A) into the Electoral Act to require registered political parties to provide the VEC with certain information when returning to their nominated entities any money equivalent to the amount received from their nominated entities between 25 November 2018 and 14 April 2026 pursuant to section 277 of the Electoral Act.

The information to be disclosed includes:

- the name of the registered political party
- the name of the nominated entity
- the date on which the money was returned to the nominated entity
- the date in respect of which the money had been received from the nominated entity
- the monetary value returned.

New section 277(2C) requires that that VEC publish the disclosed information on its website within 7 days of its receipt.

These amendments engage the right to privacy as identifiable information must be provided to the VEC and for those names to be then published on the VEC's website.

While the requirement to provide and publish personal information engages the right to privacy, the interference is lawful as it is authorised under legislation. Further the interference is not arbitrary, as it is reasonable and proportionate to the legitimate objective of supporting transparency by enabling the VEC to conduct necessary investigations and encourage compliance with the scheme.

Freedom of expression and right to take part in public life (sections 15 & 18)

Section 15(1) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to hold an opinion without interference. Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, whether within or outside Victoria and includes information imparted orally or in writing.

Section 18(1) of the Charter provides that a person has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

Further, section 18(2) of the Charter provides that every eligible person has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination to (a) vote and be elected at periodic State and municipal elections that guarantee the free expression of the will of the electors; and (b) have access, on general terms of equality, to the Victorian public service and public office.

Removing group voting tickets from Legislative Council elections

Clause 7 of the Bill repeals section 69B of the Electoral Act to remove group voting ticket provisions from the Electoral Act. Clause 15 of the Bill substitutes section 93A(1), (2) and (3) of the Electoral Act with new

provisions that prescribe a new method for voting in Legislative Council elections requiring electors to number at least five parties or groups above the line, in order of preference.

These amendments promote freedom of expression and the right to take part in public life, as they reduce the risk and public perception of corruption and undue influence in the political process.

The new proposed method for voting also empowers electors to make informed and deliberate votes by ensuring that their vote is allocated in accordance with their listed preferences and is not subject to a preference deal between political parties. In this manner, the amendment promotes the right to freedom of expression by allowing for Victorian citizens to participate in the conduct of public affairs by freely expressing their political views with confidence that those views would be accurately reflected in electoral outcomes.

Conclusion

I consider that the Bill is compatible with the Charter because, to the extent that some of the provisions may limit human rights, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

The Hon Ben Carroll MP
Premier

Statement of treaty compatibility

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (11:27): Under the Statewide Treaty Act 2025, I table a statement of treaty compatibility:

In my opinion, the Bill is compatible with the matters set out in section 66(3)(d) of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025* (**Treaty Act**). I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

The Victorian Government recently introduced a range of electoral reforms via the *Electoral Amendment Act 2026* (**Amendment Act**) and the *Electoral Further Amendment Act 2026* (**Further Amendment Act**). The reforms introduced by the Amendment Act and the Further Amendment Act strengthen Victoria's democratic system by ensuring integrity, transparency, accountability, and fairness in Victoria's electoral processes.

In support of these underpinning principles, this Bill introduces further reforms to the *Electoral Act 2002* (**Electoral Act**). Key amendments to the Electoral Act under the Bill include:

- removing group voting ticket provisions from the Electoral Act;
- prescribing a new method for voting in Legislative Council elections requiring electors to number at least five groups above the line, in order of preference;
- specifying new timeframes for certain annual returns, payments, and applications for state funding which were due after old Part 12 of the Electoral Act was invalidated but before current Part 12 of the Electoral Act was introduced via the Further Amendment Act;
- requiring the Victorian Electoral Commission (**VEC**) to publish the Register of New Entrants on their Internet site; and
- requiring registered political parties to provide the VEC with prescribed information when repaying historical amounts received from their nominated entities between 25 November 2018 and 14 April 2026, and for the VEC to publish that information on its Internet site.

Consultation with the First Peoples' Assembly of Gellung Warl

The First Peoples' Assembly was not given an opportunity to advise on and did not make representations on the Bill, based on my understanding that it is unlikely to have a significant impact on First Peoples or Statewide Treaty.

Compatibility of the Bill with each of the objects in section 66(3)(d) of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025*

I have considered whether the Bill is compatible with the objects set out at section 66(3)(d) of the Treaty Act.

- advancing the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples (section 66(3)(d)(i));
- addressing the unacceptable disadvantage inflicted on First Peoples by the historic wrongs and ongoing injustices of colonisation (section 66(3)(d)(ii)); and
- ensuring the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by First Peoples (section 66(3)(d)(iii)).

Advancing the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples

The inherent rights of First Peoples, including the right to self-determination, are recognised by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The First Peoples' Assembly, as it existed prior to the commencement of the Treaty Act, identified that the right to self-determination for First Peoples includes political self-determination, which provides First Peoples with the right to self-government and the power to organise and direct their lives according to their own values, institutions and mechanisms within the framework of the state of which they are a part.

The Bill may indirectly limit the achievement of political determination for First Peoples by imposing obligations and limitations on voting, including votes made by First Peoples, or to political parties or candidates who represent First Peoples' interests. These limitations may arise from amendments under the Bill that will abolish group voting tickets and prescribe a new method of preferential voting in Victoria's Legislative Council elections.

Despite the indirect limitation on the right to political self-determination, the Bill is compatible with the object of advancing the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples as any limitation on the right to political self-determination is reasonably justifiable for serving the overall legitimate purpose of increasing transparency and integrity within Victoria's electoral system. The regulations on voting methods are also necessary measures to ensure electors can participate meaningfully and that their votes are represented fairly in election outcomes.

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

The Yoorrook Justice Commission's 'Truth be Told' report describes the effects of colonisation on First Peoples. It describes how the gap between outcomes for First Peoples and other Victorians in areas including life expectancy, education, and health is caused by the impacts of colonisation in the past, which continue today.

The Bill may indirectly compound the unacceptable disadvantage inflicted on First Peoples by imposing restrictions on voting methods as outlined above.

The Bill remains compatible with the object of addressing unacceptable disadvantage inflicted on First Peoples by the historic wrongs and ongoing injustices of colonisation as the proposed reforms apply equally to all Victorians, including First Peoples and non–First Peoples, as such, any impact on specific disadvantage by First Peoples is likely to be minor. The Bill serves the overall purpose of improving Victoria's electoral system, and the restrictions imposed are proportionate to this objective.

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

A Bill may affect the equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms by First Peoples where, in its express terms or practical effect, it has a differential effect on First Peoples as compared to non–First Peoples.

As the Bill does not in its terms deal with First Peoples and does not directly or indirectly in its practical effect engage the human rights or fundamental freedoms of First Peoples, the Bill is compatible with this object.

The Hon Ben Carrroll MP
Premier

Second reading

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (11:27): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The *Electoral Act 2002* (the Electoral Act) is a fundamental piece of legislation supporting our democracy by legislating for transparent and efficient elections in Victoria.

The Victorian Government recently introduced a range of electoral reforms via the *Electoral Amendment Act 2026* and the *Electoral Further Amendment Act 2026*. These reforms strengthened Victoria's democratic system by ensuring integrity, accountability, and fairness in Victoria's electoral processes.

In support of these underpinning principles, this Bill introduces further reforms to the Electoral Act. Notably, the Bill includes amendments to remove group voting tickets provisions from the Electoral Act for Legislative Council elections and makes other miscellaneous amendments to provide clarity in the law. These measures

will be in place ahead of the upcoming 2026 State election to ensure Victorian electors can trust in the fairness and integrity of this State's electoral system and law.

I will now turn to the details contained in the Bill.

Removing group voting tickets from Legislative Council elections

Group voting tickets (GVTs) first emerged in Australia in the 1983 with the Australian Senate under the *Commonwealth Electoral Legislation Amendment Act 1983* (Cth), for the purpose of simplifying the voting process and reducing previously high levels of informal voting. Initially, this produced positive outcomes as informal voting in the Senate declined.

In Victoria, GVTs were introduced as part of major reforms to the Victorian Legislative Council under the *Constitution (Parliamentary Reform) Act 2003*. Currently, section 69A of the Electoral Act allows Council candidates to be grouped on the ballot papers for Legislative Council elections by submitting a GVT to the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), setting out an order of preferences for all Council candidates on the ballot paper. Any above the line vote for a group on the Council ballot paper is interpreted into a below the line vote for all candidates in the order of preference submitted on the GVT.

GVTs have become controversial due to the election of candidates with very low primary votes and the involvement of the practice of 'preference whispering', whereby parties engage in preference deals to influence voting outcomes, often coordinated by a third party referred to as a 'preference whisperer'. This practice is widely perceived as unethical, is not transparent and leads to distrust in the electoral system.

In 2016, the Federal Government abolished GVTs and allowed voters to allocate a minimum of six preferences above the line or 12 or more below the line. All other jurisdictions, besides Victoria, have now legislated to abolish GVTs.

The Bill proposes amendments to the Electoral Act to eliminate GVTs from Legislative Council elections and introduce a new method of voting allowing electors to indicate multiple preferences above the line. These proposed amendments acquit recommendations arising from the Victorian Parliament's Electoral Matters Committee's (EMC) inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian State election (2022 State election inquiry) and inquiry into Victoria's Upper House electoral system (Upper House electoral inquiry).

Notably, the 2022 State election inquiry raised two major concerns related to GVT which were that voters do not understand how their votes will be distributed when they vote above the line, and the results do not reflect voters' preferences. For example, in 2018, two candidates were elected to the Legislative Council with less than 1% of the first-preference votes. GVTs give parties and candidate groups significant control over the distribution of voting preferences, producing results where candidates with very low numbers of primary votes win seats in the Council due to the distribution of preferences.

The Bill proposes to acquit the EMC's recommendations and bring Victoria's electoral system in line with other Australian jurisdictions by eliminating GVTs from the process of voting in Legislative Council elections and introducing a new method for voting above the line for Legislative Council elections. Under the Bill, voters will be required to number at least five groups in order of preference, which will be interpreted as a preference for all the candidates of that party or group in the order listed below the line.

The Bill will also include a savings provision to the effect that a Legislative Council ballot paper will not be treated as an informal vote if there are fewer than five boxes numbered or if there is non-consecutive numbering above the line.

These proposed amendments will ensure that the electoral processes and outcomes are not influenced by persons who can afford to pay for "preference whispering" services, and the parties and candidates that cannot afford to participate in preference whispering deals will no longer be unfairly disadvantaged.

The Bill will also safeguard election outcomes by enabling voters to make informed choices, resulting in outcomes which will no longer be determined by behind-the-scenes negotiations that are not transparent and ultimately do not reflect voters' preferences. Furthermore, candidates and parties winning seats in the Legislative Council that have secured numbers of primary votes that properly represent the electorate will justify their presence in the parliamentary chamber.

To make it clear, the Bill will not alter any provisions in the Electoral Act regulating the way votes are currently made below the line for Legislative Council elections, nor alter any provisions in the *Local Government Act 2020* in relation to voting in local government elections. Removing GVT from the voting process will also not make it impossible for smaller parties to be elected to the Legislative Council. It will however require candidates to convince electors to give their party voting preference rather than relying on the GVT practice. These are important measures, particularly in light of the upcoming State election, to ensure our democratic system is fair, transparent, and inclusive.

Supporting greater transparency and accountability in Victoria's political finance regime

To further enhance transparency and accountability in Victoria's political finance regulatory framework, the Bill requires certain information to be disclosed and published.

Specifically, the Bill includes amendments requiring the VEC to publish some information relating to new entrants from the Register of New Entrants on its Internet site.

The Bill will also require registered political parties to provide the VEC with prescribed information when repaying historical funds received from their nominated entities between 25 November 2018 and 14 April 2026, and for the VEC to publish that information on its Internet site. These proposed reforms promote greater transparency and strengthen oversight within Victoria's political finance system by requiring parties to not only return these funds, as currently mandated by the Electoral Act, but to also disclose relevant details as public information.

Further, the Bill includes minor, but necessary, amendments to the Electoral Act to clarify operational requirements. These include amendments:

- enabling the VEC to make determinations about claimable administrative expenditure and requiring an auditor to apply any relevant determination of the VEC;
- providing alternative timeframes for certain state funding payments and lodgements which were due before the current Part 12 of the Electoral Act was introduced;
- extending the requirement for registered political parties to return political donations accepted in excess of the general cap during the applicable period to apply to the aggregate of individual donations received;
- clarifying that the reduction of public funding payable in respect of any political donation received in contravention of the Electoral Act applies from 10 June 2026 (the day after the Further Amendment Act received the Royal Assent), in line with the commencement of the offence at section 275 of the Act for unknowingly making or accepting an unlawful political donation;
- repealing definitions that have been made redundant following reforms introduced by the Further Amendment Act, such as definitions of *'nominated entity', 'associated entity', 'disclosure return', 'donor', 'group',* and *'third party campaigner'* in section 83 of the Electoral Act.

These amendments will improve the operation of the Electoral Act and ensure that elections continue to be conducted with the greatest regard to transparency, accessibility, and efficiency.

Commencement

The amendments in the Bill will commence on the day after the Bill receives the Royal Assent.

Conclusion

Together, the proposed amendments to the Act under this Bill will complement recent electoral reforms to further strengthen public confidence in the integrity, transparency, and accountability of Victoria's democratic system and electoral processes.

I commend the Bill to the House.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:27): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Equal Opportunity Amendment (Work from Home) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Jacinta Allan:

That this bill be now read a second time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:28): I rise to speak on the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Work from Home) Bill 2026, and I say at the outset that the coalition, the Liberal and National parties, support the right to work from home. Let me say that very, very clearly: we support the right to work

from home, and because we support the right to work from home, we of course will not be opposing the bill.

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: How excited the government are, because this government have tried to use a change in law to play raw, brutal politics, and that reflects on them, doesn't it? I say again: we support the right to work from home, and therefore of course we will not be opposing this bill.

We will seek to make some amendments to ensure that some of the issues the government has overlooked, which the government has admitted to in the government bill briefings, are addressed, because the government, with the former Premier's office managing the bill briefing, admitted to matters in the bill which it had not either fully thought through or understood the practical implications of. Worse, the then Premier's office committed to providing information to the opposition – the Liberals and Nationals – in relation to questions that we had in that briefing and have not provided that information. The government have not provided the detailed information they committed to providing in that bill briefing, which I think says a lot about some of the implementation issues with the bill that were raised in the bill briefing.

As we know, this bill enables a right to work from home two days a week, pro rata for employees who work for less than 38 hours, where it is reasonable for them to do so. The bill commences on 1 September and also applies to employers with fewer than 15 employees. Simply put, this bill enables an employee to provide notice to an employer in which they seek to work from home two days a week, and the employer must respond within 21 days based on, effectively, a reasonableness test. In terms of cost, there is a cost burden placed upon the employer that is uncapped. An independent review is built into the legislation to commence on or after 1 July 2030. As we are today at almost the start of August, this bill is set for commencement in just over four weeks, going through both chambers and also receiving royal assent. We can presume that in under three weeks after royal assent, perhaps two weeks after royal assent, the entire Victorian economy – the entire Victorian business sector and all of its employees – will have this legislative framework placed over it. As we know, the Fair Work Act 2009 federally has its own provisions in this regard, and this legislative instrument will, the government would say, sit alongside the federal right. Others may say it conflicts with that right, and I will speak about the constitutionality and concerns that have been raised at a separate time.

As I mentioned earlier, under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to the bill and request that they be circulated. As I said earlier, the coalition supports the right to work from home and therefore does not oppose the bill. But as I also mentioned, in the government briefing on the bill the government confirmed to us in detailed conversation that they had not fully thought through certain implications of the bill. We have sought to address those concerns, to help the government with the mistakes they perhaps have made, by way of our amendments. I will take the house through the amendments that we are proposing, which I understand have been circulated.

Firstly, we accept that this bill will be implemented, if it is passed, on 1 September, and we in no way are seeking to change the date, 1 September, of that implementation. However, what we are proposing is that the government allow, as the government has allowed with other policies – for example, the machete ban – a small amount of time between the date of implementation and the first effective, to use simple terms, appeal date for a decision on 1 January. What that would mean is that, when you roll out a statewide, economywide measure, you give implementation opportunity to businesses and employees, in terms of understanding what this means, until 1 January before an appeal can be made to a decision of a business. In no way would we stop the rollout occurring, the commencement occurring, but we would allow a small window of time before an appeal could be made to a decision. You have to note that once an employee makes a request there is a three-week period of time before a response is required. If you think through the timelines, it is only reasonable to allow a small amount of time for businesses to roll this out and ensure that it is fully and fairly understood by both employers

and employees. That is why we have proposed a 1 January timeline before, effectively, appeals can occur, in the simplest terms.

Secondly, we propose a simple ban on a home office or a home being taken into account for any new land tax obligation. This is a very important one, and it will be very interesting to see what the government do on this amendment and to see whether or not they support a ban on new land taxes based on employees moving to work from home, because this debate has occurred for some time. The government and the former Premier especially debated me on this issue and said they had no secret plan to increase land tax collections because of this bill. Then very simply I would say to the government that through this amendment they have the capacity now to simply ensure that ban is in place in the bill. If the government keeps its word in that it is not seeking to increase land tax collection – and I do not believe that is true – it will agree to that amendment that we will not see an increase in land tax collection because of this bill. We believe it will. We believe that the government is looking for every opportunity to increase land tax collection. I take it as a matter of faith that that is what Labor does. This amendment is very simple and will allow the government to stand by what they have said publicly and not see land tax extended because of this new bill.

We are also proposing that if an eligible employee's primary place of employment is in Victoria their request must be for a place in Victoria unless there is agreement between an employee and an employer, for more than one reason. One, it is only fair and reasonable that a Victorian-based piece of legislation should apply in Victoria. But secondly, there are constitutional concerns, which I will get to, that then flow from that if it is not in Victoria. We believe that that is a simple and fair amendment.

We also are proposing two amendments, which I will speak to a little bit more, which the government – I do not want to put words in their mouth – in the briefing on this bill did seem very unsure about the full application thereof and the impacts. We have sought to help with our amendments, firstly, providing an exemption for company directors under occupational health and safety legislation for incidents while employees work from home, because currently we have a conflict. A director of a company has a director's duty, through duty-of-care provisions, to look after their employee at work, even when that is at home. Understandably, that employer does not go into a person's home, and I do not think anybody is seeking for that to be the case. Therefore we have a conflict in that directors are responsible for everybody's workplace at home when they cannot – and I do not think any of us would argue should – be going into people's private homes. It is unreasonable that the director has a liability in that way. We also – similar perhaps to the land tax prohibition – are proposing an amendment to provide an exemption to WorkCover increases for incidents that occur at home, because if a government is seeking to legislate in this way, of course you would expect them to, frankly, foot the bill. They should, frankly, foot the bill, and it is not reasonable for businesses to be paying for WorkCover increases in that way.

There are two more amendments that I draw the house's attention to. Firstly, in relation to the reasonable costs, we propose a reasonable cost of $1000. We think that reasonable costs are understandable, but what is a reasonable cost? I think you will find that whatever judge in whatever court you ask will have a different view on what is reasonable. Every single one of them will have a different view on what is reasonable. Because this is an economywide rollout, it is not unfair to put a guide or a cap on what that is, and we are proposing $1000.

For example, in the government's bill briefing, I proposed an instance where an employee is significantly injured, and that unfortunately may happen in an employee's lifetime. The government confirmed that there would be obligations on that employer to fit out the person's private property to make it fully accessible, which would include, potentially, ramps into the home, assistance with bars et cetera throughout the home – an entire infrastructure upgrade to the family home – and it was confirmed that that would be a reasonable cost. Further, an entire refit of the home office to make it ergonomic or to ensure that it assists that employee with their changed accessibility requirements would also be required. In that instance we are talking potentially about $10,000, $15,000 or $20,000. That is just in the example I have given. What would happen where an employee is renting? I am not

sure. What happens if the employee lives in a multilevel building where there is no lift? Who would know? But one thing we do know is there would be liability on the directors of that company for that employee.

We have proposed a $1000 cap in relation to that reasonable cost, which of course would cover something like a transition to a laptop. Where an employee has a desktop in the office and exercises their right to request to work from home, what we are proposing is that they would have a $1000 cap, which would allow them to move to a laptop. But also, as I said earlier, if they were to exercise the right to request straight away, soon after 1 September, the business would have until 1 January before there was any appeal. In no way are we seeking to amend the 1 September date but rather to give employees and employers time to understand the bill, make sure that their forms and processes are in place and make sure their staff are fully briefed and informed on what this legislation means.

I might say I asked for advice in relation to the Parliament and how the Parliament had viewed this proposed legislation, and they said they had not even considered it yet. The Parliament itself had not even thought through what this would mean. When you think about that, we are making the laws here. The Parliament itself had not even thought through the implications of this bill, so it is not unreasonable to assume that not every business in Victoria has fully thought through this proposed reform. As we have, as I said, between the date of royal assent and 1 September some two weeks, I would suspect, for an economywide rollout, we think that delay on appeal right is only reasonable.

Finally, I also mention that in the amendments that we are proposing union right of entry is prohibited. What we are very concerned about is that the government confirmed to the opposition, as I said, in the bill briefing that when it comes to both union right of entry and WorkCover right of entry there would be full right of entry into the private home. I do not think people fully understand that, and I do not think Victorians are aware of that. I do not think Victorians understand that this government's bill enables, through this legislation, full union entry into family homes. I have not seen that on the government's tiles. I have not seen the right-of-entry provisions advertised in any of the government's media releases or WorkCover advertised on the government's media releases. It has not been. But they confirmed in the briefing that provisions that currently exist, rolled across this new legislation, would enable that.

When you take into account the massive number of people who will be working from home because of this new legislation – and the government confirmed that they expect a significant increase; they also committed to giving the modelling on the number that would be and have not provided it – and that there will be a significant increase in the number of people working from home, this set of new provisions, when you lay across the current rights of entry and WorkCover entry, I think would be a concern to Victorians. We are proposing that unions do not have a right of entry into the family home. I do not think that is unreasonable at all. Other than union members, I do not think any Victorian would think that is reasonable. I think that any reasonable person would say, 'I don't think that if I'm signing up to work from home I should have a union right of entry.' I say again: it was confirmed by the department and the then Premier's office in our briefing on the bill that provisions that exist in law will apply to the new bill. I think the government will have an opportunity to set out their views on these amendments when they are considered. Because they are textual, we will not be voting on them in detail in this place, but we certainly will be in the other place.

I mentioned constitutionality earlier, and I am concerned about the constitutionality of this bill, because though this bill has been written to sit alongside the federal laws, there is clearly overlap. That I think is where we have concern. You look at people like the Australian Business Lawyers & Advisors, who say:

> … it would be surprising if the legislation did not attract close legal scrutiny and potentially constitutional challenge …

I think that is right. Because of the overlap, we are dealing with, effectively, a state government that is trying to use a bill that is not designed for workplace law to enable a new workplace right. The equal

opportunity amendment is not primarily a workplace relations bill – it is not – and Victoria has ceded its powers in relation to workplace law. There are significant conflicts when you set two laws next to each other and seek to use the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to impose a workplace law. What the government could have done is they could have tried to pull back their workplace powers – they could have done it that way – but instead they are happy to use a bill which is not designed for workplace law. I suspect we will have significant problems as a result.

Setting aside inconsistencies, because there will be inconsistencies in the application when you have federal laws which allow you a work-from-home right where certain provisions exist, this law allows you an automatic right. It is the opposite – an automatic right. So we will have two conflicting rights which look at this issue from opposing sides, and that is why we will see constitutional issues. But we will also see constitutional issues in relation to where disputes arise, because where disputes arise you will see certain matters, for example, go to VCAT. VCAT does not have jurisdiction over federal matters. You will see applications go through to VCAT, and VCAT does not have the jurisdictional power to hear that application, so when a matter is before it, you will see, after a delay – and I should actually have said that: all of the disputes that arise in this area, sadly, are currently facing massive, massive delays in our system. Our courts and our VCAT tribunal already have massive delays, and that does not include the Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, where already only 42 per cent of complaints are solved within six months. Only 42 per cent that are currently going through are resolved within six months. I do not have the number before me of the disputes before that commission, but I suspect that in an average week in the future we will probably have more disputes through working-at-home appeals than we will in the commission's entire year of complaints. I cannot imagine the commission is receiving thousands of complaints a day, but I suspect the number of issues to be addressed through this legislation will be significant. I would not be surprised if we see a doubling or trebling over the next year of the number of matters before it.

But as I said earlier on VCAT, there is a serious issue in VCAT's jurisdiction, and to push matters through to VCAT where they inherently might deal with a substantial element that falls within the Fair Work Act will immediately move that matter out of VCAT. I suspect we are going to have – and, frankly speaking, the legal sector are talking about this at length, and they believe it is – a fundamental flaw in the bill in terms of that jurisdictional issue. I am aware of course of the Magistrates' Court's capacity in relation to this legislation, but not all matters will appear before VCAT with there being a full understanding in the matter of all of the elements as they have first arisen. You will see, I think, a substantial number of cases appear before VCAT where the detail is not fully there. As it unfolds you will see elements of it clearly fall within the Fair Work Act, which will then cause issues in relation to VCAT even being able to hear it.

The Victorian Congress of Employer Associations have put forward a number of proposed amendments – they put forward nine proposed amendments. The coalition has looked at those and thanked them for the work they have done on behalf of a number of significant organisations who represent a vast body of Victorian businesses. We have picked up some of those amendments. We have in our amendments drafted others, but we thank them for the work they have done in that regard.

I also want to mention the Law Institute of Victoria, who always provide incredible advice on legislation before the house, and they have done so here. They have expressed concern in relation to the two powers, both the Victorian and Commonwealth powers. They are:

> … concerned that the proposal to guarantee a right to work from home may lead to duplication, confusion for both employers and employees …

They have expressed their concern in relation to that duplication. They have also expressed, as I just said – just to reinforce the point I raised earlier – the lack of capacity of our commissions, courts and tribunals in relation to the delays that already exist and the significant problems there.

May I finish where I started and say that the coalition supports the right for people to work from home. We support the right for people to work from home. Despite the politicking of the government, we

have always supported that right. We have always supported the right for employers and employees to make those arrangements. Therefore, as a result, we will not be opposing the bill. But what we have proposed is a series of reasonable amendments – banning land tax, stopping union right of entry, giving a better understanding of what a reasonable cost is – reasonable things for an economy-wide rollout of this legislation. When those amendments go to the other place, I hope that the government supports and works with the coalition on them.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Cost of Living, Minister for Renters, Minister for Men and Boys) (11:58): I rise to speak on the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Work from Home) Bill 2026. I speak to it as Minister for Cost of Living, because that is what this bill is really about. This bill is about the cost of getting to work. It is about the cost of being kept away from home. It is, in essence, a cost-of-living measure. A while ago we made a promise to Victorian families and Victorian workers. That promise was that if you can do your job from home, working from home would be a right that your boss could not take away. This bill keeps that promise. It amends the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to give Victorian workers a legal right to work from home two days a week. That is it. And yet, to listen to those opposite, you would think we were proposing to tear down the whole economy.

The fearmongering from those opposite is absolutely ridiculous. When we announced our plan, the member for Brighton immediately started running a scare campaign, saying that workers were going to be taxed for working from home. Rather than being honest with Victorians about how they oppose it – apparently they are supporting it now, though – they instead tried to scare people from working at home and having a home office. I will give you an example that we just heard from the member for Brighton. He was talking about a union right of entry to private homes.

It is that old saying: never ascribe malice to that which is adequately explained by incompetence. There are employers, there are health and safety representatives and there are authorised representatives as well, of registered employee organisations. I think that is what he is talking about, but I could not quite make it out, and I do not think anyone else in the chamber could. Employers do not have powers under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 that would permit entry into an employee's residential premises in circumstances where they are working from home. Health and safety reps have powers under the OH&S act – that is true – including the power to accompany an inspector during an inspection; however, these are about members of designated work groups and can be exercised in specific circumstances. They do not have power of entry under the OH&S act.

Finally, to clear it up for the member for Brighton, the shadow minister, authorised representatives of registered employee organisations, or ARREOs, also have certain powers to enter workplaces. An ARREO is a permanent employee or officer of a registered employee organisation who has satisfactorily completed a WorkSafe-approved course and holds an entry permit issued by the Magistrates' Court. An ARREO can only enter a workplace during working hours and when there is a reasonably suspect issue that a contravention of the OH&S act and/or the OH&S regulations has occurred or is occurring at the workplace and a suspected contravention relates or affects the work that is being carried out by one or more members of the relevant registered employee organisation or relates to or affects any of those members. An ARREO cannot – I repeat, cannot – enter any part of a workplace that is used for residential purposes unless they have the consent of the person who lives there. I will say that again for the member for Brighton: they cannot enter any part of a workplace that is used for residential purposes unless they have the consent of the person that lives there. Now we have put that to bed.

Let me put the cost-of-living case plainly, because the numbers do the arguing for me. For a household that can work from home for a couple of days a week, this is worth about $110 back in your pocket a week. Over a year that is more than $5300 staying in the family budget instead of going on petrol, on tolls, on bills and on child care, which we know is expensive. In the middle of a global cost-of-living squeeze, that is not loose change. It might be loose change if you have got 17 investment properties,

but it is not for the rest of us. That is the grocery shop; that is the school excursion; that is the gap between a tight fortnight and an impossible one where ends just do not meet.

Working from home also buys you something you cannot put a price on, and that is time. It hands Victorians back more than three hours a week of their time, which they would otherwise lose in traffic or standing on a platform, waiting for a bus or waiting for a train – 3 hours with your kids, 3 hours to get to an ageing parent who needs an appointment, 3 hours to coach the under-11s or run the canteen on a Saturday. That is not some fringe arrangement, and it is not something that is not considered by Victorians.

More than a third of Victorian workers already work from home. For professionals it is three in five. When we asked Victorians what they thought of working from home, nearly 37,000 of them answered. They answered en masse: 74 per cent said the right to work from home matters enormously to them; more than 28,000 said that they get more done at home, not less; and more than 3000 Victorians told us something that should trouble every member in this place, that they do not feel like they can even ask their boss for it, for fear it would be held against them. That power imbalance is exactly what this bill exists to fix.

The mechanics are fairly straightforward for those on this side of the house, who are willing to listen, willing to read and willing to not misconstrue the advice of the department. Employees who can perform their duties from home will have the right to do so two days a week. A refusal is possible, but it has to be reasonable, judged against the inherent requirements of the role and the impact on the employer as well – nothing else, though. The right covers regular casuals and part-timers. It covers small business, because a worker at a suburban firm deserves the same right as someone at a big bank. We have given smaller employers more time to get ready: for workplaces with 15 staff or less, the right begins on 1 July 2027. For everyone else it is 1 September this year – ample time. If a request is knocked back unfairly, there is actually a clear path through the Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and on to VCAT if it comes to that. It is measured, it is fair and it is exactly the practical side of help that this side of the house was elected to deliver.

On this side of the house we think that working from home should be a right. Those opposite, although we have heard they are going to support the bill with amendments, think it is a rort. Do not take my word for it, take theirs. The member for Brighton, when he was the very short-lived Shadow Treasurer, told the *Herald Sun* that he would force every single worker back to the office. He called working from home a 'sweetheart deal'. He complained about hundreds of thousands of dollars being wasted. His remedy was to march everyone back to the office five days a week, whether the job needed it or not. But it is not just him. His federal colleague the member for Goldstein, now the federal Shadow Treasurer, went further again. In the pages of the *Australian Financial Review* he called protecting people's rights to work from home 'professional apartheid'. Apart from the disgraceful nature of bringing that argument into this one – he actually did say 'apartheid' – he said it over letting a mum in Mulgrave work from home a couple of days a week. How dramatic, how inappropriate and how wrong. It is worth asking where the member for Goldstein learned to talk about workers like that. Maybe it came from seven years at the Institute of Public Affairs. It was the IPA who sneered at Victorians who deserve this right by calling them the 'laptop class'. It was the same IPA that he worked for seven years who told workers who dare to work from home that they should expect to be the first out the door when conditions turn, expect to be paid less and expect not to be surprised when their job is shifted offshore or handed to a machine. That is not economic advice; it is a pig-headed lecture about knowing your place and knowing your class, and those opposite are more than happy to take up that advice as their own.

We have seen where this ends before. Their federal counterparts took a policy to the last election to force public servants back to the office full-time. Does anyone remember how that turned out? Victorians looked at it, they recoiled in horror and the coalition dropped it so fast their own leader admitted that they had made a mistake. But they did not change their minds. They got caught, and that leader was voted out in fact. And the threat has not gone away. Those opposite have got a $40 billion

black hole, and where do they fill that from – cuts to the Victorian budget. You cannot rip $40 billion out of the economy without cutting services families rely on and without coming after the very jobs this bill protects.

Now is not the time for governments to step back. When the world is throwing cost-of-living challenges and shocks at working people, this is precisely the moment to step up. Without this law, working from home is only ever a favour granted today and taken away tomorrow. This bill turns that favour into a right. It will not hang on the goodwill of one employer or the mood of a manager, it will be protected in law. Only Labor has the new solutions to make life easier, safer and more affordable. This is one of them, and I commend this bill to the house.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:08): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Work from Home) Bill 2026 and respond to a couple of the things that the minister previously speaking said, in particular starting with an attack on the opposition about scare campaigns and then proceeding to fill the rest of his 9 minutes with entirely a scare campaign.

This legislation is a reflection of the changing circumstances we all find ourselves in, particularly since the start of the COVID pandemic in 2020. I think most of us had not considered or thought of work from home much before then, but with changing technology and with the circumstances we found ourselves in, in lockdown in the COVID era, it had a far greater take-up. I remember those early days, that first month or so, of lockdown. It was actually quite a pleasant experience initially, for me at least, being home with my family. I was certainly inundated, and my workload went up dramatically in terms of people seeking advice and information on the lockdown arrangements. But it being pleasant did not last very long, and we all could not wait to be able to get out again. But since then there certainly has been a growing trend of people seeking to work from home. I remember during the first few weeks of lockdown my colleague the member for Berwick actually talking about Zoom, and I had no idea what Zoom was. Now, sadly, we are all far too familiar with it, or with Teams or any of those. But these new technologies over the last decade or so have certainly allowed working from home to flourish for those who can do it.

I think probably the jury is out on whether it is better for productivity or not. I think you could probably go and find any evidence either way from economists and workplace relations specialists as to whether it is better for productivity or worse, and certainly it is a different view for different workers as well. Some people I speak to say, 'I get so much more done when I'm at home.' I get others who say, 'I just get distracted and I don't work that well.' But the reality is it has become a circumstance that many employers and employees are happy to accommodate.

This legislation amends the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to establish a statutory right for employees to work from home for up to two days a week or a pro-rata period for employees working fewer than 38 hours where it is reasonable for them to do so. There is a question mark as to the constitutional validity of this, and certainly many commentators, employer groups and others have raised whether it is constitutionally valid for the government to introduce this legislation or to enact this legislation. That will be a matter for the courts to decide.

The bill will commence on 1 September this year and will apply to employers with fewer than 15 employees from 1 July 2027. As the member for Brighton has foreshadowed, we have a number of amendments, and one of those is not to the commencement date but to the date at which employees will be able to make a claim. That simply pushes that date back to 1 January 2027, which will give employers time to understand the implications of the legislation, to put in place their policies and to work through with their employees how it will work. As the member for Brighton indicated, even the Parliament itself has not been able to consider the detail and how it will work. I am sure all of us are interested in whether this will apply prospectively or not to our electorate offices.

The legislation requires that an employee must give written notice identifying the proposed days and times, unless it is not practicable to do so, and any agreed location other than their private residence.

There is no minimum notice period prescribed in the legislation. However, the employer must respond in writing within 21 days. That I guess highlights one of the issues that many people have raised as a concern, that these arrangements really should be between an employer and an employee.

The employer must allow the proposed arrangements unless it is not reasonable. Whilst there are legal definitions of 'reasonable', that will certainly be open to interpretation. Where the proposal is not reasonable, the employer must allow an equivalent period on different days or at different times or any lesser period that is considered reasonable. Any alternative arrangement or refusal must include reasons, and an alternative arrangement must specify the permitted days and times. A complete refusal is available only when no period of home-based work is reasonable. There are circumstances where that is obvious, I am sure: whether you are a nurse, a teacher, a police officer, a barista in a cafe or a truck driver – all of those. There are so many positions of course where it will not be either practicable or reasonable for people to work from home.

Nonetheless the matters that may be considered reasonable in the bill are limited to the inherent requirements of the role, including the need for workplace attendance, equipment or in-person interaction; the impact on the employer, including a likely significant decrease in productivity or efficiency; an adverse safety impact; significant confidentiality or data protection issues; excessive financial costs; or impractical changes to working arrangements or hiring and other prescribed matters. Regard must also be had to legal requirements relating to safety, security, welfare and/or supervision.

The bill requires an employer to allow an employee to work from home and that they must pay any reasonable costs necessary to enable the arrangement. That expressly includes essential hardware and software and secure access to information systems. This is an issue where the opposition would like to tighten that arrangement and see the definition of 'reasonable employer cost' limited to $1000. We think that is fair. When I mention, for example, things like essential hardware and software and secure access to information systems in particular, those could be quite significant costs for an employer, depending on what the employee is actually doing, so we think it is reasonable also to ensure that employers are not up for significant costs in this.

In addition, we have indicated that our amendments, which we will move in the other place, would be to provide exemptions to company directors with respect to OH&S legislation, for instance, where employees are working from home, because quite simply the company directors will not have access to that person's home and will not have the opportunity to ensure it is a safe location, so we think that is only fair. Likewise, when it comes to WorkCover increases following any incident occurring whilst working at home, it is not fair, given the inability of an employer to impact the home arrangement, for them to then suffer the consequences if, unfortunately, an employee is injured whilst working from home.

We are also looking at amendments to limit the right of employees whose primary place of residence is in Victoria, with work-from-home locations limited to agreed premises in Victoria unless agreed by both parties. Of course there will be circumstances where that can be agreed. And, as the member for Brighton indicated, we have an amendment to prohibit land tax being applied to employees who utilise the bill to work from home. The government minister indicated that is not the intention. Well, we have seen instances where this has been less than clear that have been reported publicly already, so we think it is important to be able to clarify that.

This is a bill that addresses what has become a growing issue, that more and more people work from home. The Nationals and Liberals do not oppose the prospect of people working from home when it is reasonable for them to do so. Indeed we support it. We support that where it is an improvement to their working lives, an improvement to the productivity of the business and an improvement to many other external aspects like having less traffic on the roads and the potential for it to support more local businesses in the suburbs and country towns. So we will not be opposing this legislation, despite what those opposite say. They are seeking desperately to find that we have an alternative view. We are

certainly not opposing this legislation, but we will move amendments that we think make it far more reasonable.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (12:18): The member for Gippsland South I think was trying to bore us to death during his contribution, and I think this will be the approach of much of the opposition. It is good to see you nodded. We have got on well, in particular in our time on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. But he was attempting to bore us to death because they want to really hide away from this legislation. They want to hide as much and be as small as possible on this one, because they know how unpopular it has been to oppose it. When Liberal members called this apartheid, they knew it was deeply unpopular, and their constituents told them so. So they are going to wrap themselves up in a little ball on this one, and they are going to try and hide away and keep it low and say, 'We don't oppose it necessarily.' But they put a couple of big caveats in there. They put the big caveat of 'We just should delay it a little while'. 'Can we just delay this legislation till 1 January 2027?' is what the member for Brighton said. He said, 'We just want it delayed, just a little bit' – and there might be something that happens between now and then.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the standing orders require the member to be factual, and that is not what the member for Brighton said. There is no delay to the implementation of the legislation. Our amendment is only in relation to when action can be taken.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): I have heard the point of order, Leader of the Nationals. I believe the issue is a matter for debate.

Mathew HILAKARI: As he said, it is a matter of contention, and he would like to see that delayed till 1 January next year. There might be something that happens, an important event for democracy in Victoria before that time, and that is of course the election. They will go very small and very shy and not want to talk to this as an issue, but they have historically wanted to talk about this a lot. Their Liberal counterparts federally wanted to talk about it a lot. Then they got the results of the federal election, and they knew at that point in time that that was one of those key moments when people understood that the Liberal Party was not on their side. They knew that they are not on their side and the National Party was not on their side.

The Labor Party is committed to working from home. We understand the value of work from home. Our communities understand deeply the value of work from home, because time in the car is wasted time. Contributing to traffic is a waste for everybody across our community. They know how unpopular it is. They should have probably worked out that it is so unpopular some time ago, but I am glad they have come to the party in saying they will not oppose this bill. Sometimes the member for Brighton was putting in the caveat of course of when employers say yes. Well, that is certainly the case today. That is how it exists. It was not full-throated support of course. I am glad they have moved from this view of work from home as an apartheid regime – a miserable way to describe anything, I would have thought.

But they talk as if this is wholesale change. It is not. I will go through how there are large numbers of people who work from home already. Indeed the member for Gippsland South was a person who worked from home. Indeed I was a person who did work from home in my previous job. In fact, when I was offered it by my then new employer, my employer said to me, 'Mat, would you like an office in town? We'll deck it out and do all that.' That was going to be an expense to my employer, and I said, 'Actually, is it possible to work from home?' He said, 'Fantastic.' He saved on rent. He saved on all the facilities that are required for an office in town. It was good for my employer that I worked from home, and it was good for me. I had just recently had a child. It was wonderful. What a time to be working from home. It was a great time. I loved that point in time. It was good for me as well because my commute was several steps to my stand-up desk. I made the stand-up desk myself. I am happy to assist the member for Narracan in building one as well. If he never needs a little bit of trades assistance, I am happy to help him.

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: He will be okay. It was a couple of steps to get to my office each morning, and I was fresh and ready to go. I did a coffee downstairs on the espresso machine and got ready to go, and I was ready to go and be productive, because I was not in the car for an hour and a half each way, each day.

For the community that I represent, what does this mean? It means an extra couple of days of effective work every single week. That is why people in the community that I represent are dog tired. That is why it is a challenge to get involved in your local sporting team or to get your kids to swimming after school, and that is why it is a challenge to have that wonderful family time. There is so much time spent commuting across our community, and it is the least productive time. I thought those opposite, who talk about productivity regularly and often, would be super keen to talk about how this could improve productivity across our community. In fact, when we asked members of the community what they thought about their own efforts at work from home, 83 per cent said they were more productive working from home in terms of both hours worked and milestones achieved. Many employers have also clued into the benefits of work from home in getting the best employees. You know the best employees like to work from home because employers put it in their advertisements. They say it is a big benefit of the job. We also know many or most employers would not offer work from home if it was not good for the business and if people were not productive. That is why so many do. That is why so many people in our community do work from home.

The member for Brighton also raised issues and a scare campaign around tax obligations. It is something they have been running across the community for some time now, hoping to frighten people and hoping to frighten businesses. Really, they are trying to frighten families by saying that there will be a tax put on their family home. Well, this bill, be assured, does nothing to change tax obligations, which the federal government imposes, not this state Parliament. That has actually been through some case law recently. In fact it looked for a time that people would be better off under federal tax regimes by working from home than otherwise because of the claims for home offices. Now, the ATO has taken that to court and, I would say unfortunately, had a win. The tax obligations, by and large, are done at the federal parliamentary level. It is another scare campaign because they are shy on this one. They are shy on this one and want to delay it. They want to see it done later so they can avoid it ever being implemented. Well, we are not for that. This Labor government is for work from home. We know the benefits. Our community knows the benefits. We hear the benefits every day. When we do that doorknocking in the midafternoon in our communities, we hear it because people are actually home. So many people in the community that I represent, Point Cook, work from home, and they love it because it means a better family and community experience.

I do want to go to some of the specific arrangements in this bill. It goes to a legal right to work from home for two days per week. It will protect employees from unreasonable refusals of work-from-home requests. Certainly in the survey that we undertook recently – this was a massive survey, by the way; more than 36,000 people participated in it – those who had asked to work from home and were unable to do so because their employer had denied them felt that it was unreasonable. This was for 57 per cent of those people who had asked to work from home where it was possible for them to do work from home.

When I speak to people in the community that I represent around the work-from-home legislation, its proposal and coming forward, it is always characterised as 'if you can and if you want to'. That is the most important part of this legislation: if you can and if you want to. Not every single person wants to work from home, not every single person can work from home, but we all, as a community, benefit from working from home. For those that can work from home, they can have greater participation in their community and community life. For those who cannot – and there are many people in our community who cannot work from home, such as ambos, firefighters, childcare workers; so many cannot work from home – they benefit because there is less traffic on our roads.

I know from time to time it gets raised that work from home is going to be a real challenge for small businesses in Melbourne. Well, I can just let those opposite know that the 30 per cent vacancy rate in shopfronts in town dropped to 6.1 per cent in 2025 and it has dropped to 4.6 per cent this year. On La Trobe Street there is a zero per cent vacancy rate. So those cafes and restaurants – it is always a hard thing to run a small business like that, but they are filling up the shopfronts in town as well as in our suburbs. I commend this bill to the house. I look forward, later this year, to this commencing.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (12:28): I am pleased to rise to contribute on the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Work from Home) Bill 2026. Just in reference to the member for Point Cook, I do not know if I would work on the table or the desk that you built. Given your practical skill as a tradesperson, I think that would be an OH&S safety hazard right at the start. I would not trust it. For anyone else out there that is going to use it, do not. I do not think he is qualified.

I am happy to contribute to this today. Right from the outset, as we have said, we do not oppose this bill, but there are aspects of the bill that, as the member for Brighton has put forward in his amendments, probably need to be brought to the government's attention. This was pointed out in the bill briefing, and the government were going to get back to the opposition on these issues, but that was not forthcoming. Therefore the member for Brighton has put these amendments forward.

It is interesting. Quite rightly the member for Gippsland South pointed out that our working arrangements clearly changed when COVID hit Victoria in 2020. It was a time when Victorians had to work from home and figured out that they could work from home and be productive. Where it worked for an employer and their employee, this happened and it has continued to happen now for six years. But there are certain aspects of this bill that need to be taken into serious consideration, especially around the WorkCover implications of the bill. There is some feedback I have had from various stakeholders that they are concerned about the WorkCover ramifications of working from home or legislating working from home, and rightly so.

If you go to section 21(2)(e) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, it requires employers to monitor the health of their employees and conditions at the workplace so far as is reasonably practical. Generally, if a workplace incident happens a lot of businesses come under this section of the act: section 21(2)(e). That is what they will get prosecuted on. When we are legislating working from home, we have to consider what the implications are, because all of a sudden if it is legislation and people reasonably can work from home then that is, by extension, another workplace that that employer is possibly liable for. I think this is something that needs to be given serious consideration. Generally, as an employer you have a registered workplace, and that is the workplace you are responsible for. As a builder, unfortunately, my workplaces were obviously onsite, so I was always responsible for those onsite obligations in regard to OH&S. But when we are talking about people working from home, if there are 10 employees that can reasonably work from home, is the employer now responsible for those workplaces? This is a really, really important part of this and it needs to be given careful consideration, because all of a sudden, from a businessperson's point of view, they could now be responsible for an extra 10 workplaces. They did not construct those workplaces.

I will give you an example. Let us say there is a step going up into the workplace – into the home. Let us say that step is an illegal step – instead of being a maximum 185 mil, it is 210 mil. I have gone technical there, and everyone has got lost, but bear with me. If somebody trips up that step – Mary, John, whoever – and smashes their shoulder because that step is not legal, is that now the employer's responsibility? I think in all of this we have to be reasonable. That is the real part of the point I am trying to make on this: we have to be reasonable in the expectations and obligations about what employers and employees have to do. I do not think it is reasonable that at a workplace the employer did not construct he could become liable, so the government needs to work on this. It is a really, really important part of this bill and this legislation. There should be no grey area in this. It should be very black and white that if people are working from home, it being that the employer did not build that premises, the employer should not be liable for accidents that could occur.

The member for Brighton did put forward some amendments around the costs and capping the costs to the employer. That is important as well. It just cannot be a free-for-all. Businesses will not survive. All of a sudden, if a business has to spend $10,000 on 10 different workplaces, that is $100,000. Businesses are not doing well enough to spend that amount of money. This is where the government has to get this right, and this is the reason why the amendments are being put forward, which will obviously go through the other place. They need to be considered very, very carefully. It is very important.

The other area where I have a little bit of a concern is: is this legislation constitutionally right? We are putting it through the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, but is this in the federal sphere? I mean, we have seen this government put forward taxes through this place that got knocked out in the High Court. The one that comes to my mind is the electric vehicle tax, where it got thrown out in the High Court and the government had to repay the money. When we look at the description of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, it states that discrimination is unlawful when it is based on protected personal attributes such as a disability, age, sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy or parental status. By putting the provisions of this bill in this act, is that constitutional? I think that is a question that could possibly be raised. Has the government gone beyond its remit here? Is this a federal issue more so than a state-based issue? Now, as I said earlier, right at the start of my contribution, I do not have a problem with working from home. It can be practical for some people. For some people it cannot be. Tradies cannot work from home, ambos cannot, teachers cannot, police cannot. All those people cannot work from home – nurses, doctors, all the rest of it, right. Where it is reasonable, some people can. But have we overreached in the fact that we are putting it through the Equal Opportunity Act? Have we overreached and will this or will this not be challenged at some point in the future? I really do not know. I think this is where maybe the government is trying to get it through. Maybe it will get challenged. As I said, it has happened in the past with this government when they introduced the EV tax, which got thrown out.

My assumption is that the government has done its homework. My assumption is that the government possibly has this right, but I am not quite sure. I am not a constitutional lawyer, and I am not going to pretend to be one. But to me it just seems as though we are putting it through this act when there is no relevance in the act to workplaces. The Equal Opportunity Act is more about discrimination against people and, as it states, their personal attributes. So I do have concerns that this may or may not get challenged in the future, which is fair enough. If it has not been done right then the government has something to answer for because, realistically, you have probably got the hopes and expectations of Victorians up when it may not be constitutionally correct.

As I said at the start, the member for Brighton has put forward his amendments and for good reason, again. He did this because the government did not get back to us after the bill briefing on the questions that were raised. Because they have not got back, the member for Brighton has put through these amendments and they will be considered in the other place. When the bill gets to the other place, I am sure they will go through it and they will come to a determination on these reasonable amendments. But I would encourage the government to listen to these reasonable amendments and consider them, because they will probably make the bill a little bit fairer.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (12:38): I rise today in support of the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Work from Home) Bill 2026. It goes without saying that this is a piece of legislation that inspires engagement and debate almost unlike any other I have had the privilege of considering in my time as the member for Mulgrave, and I understand why. People are anxious about work, their job security and the rising cost of living, so any changes to workers rights are fertile ground for cheap scare tactics and misinformation. The result is that nothing gets the trolls more riled up than a reel spruiking the benefits of work from home, and I have seen this for myself with one of my own reels reaching about a million views just this year. So I think it is a popular piece of legislation, so popular that those opposite have changed their mind and are now supporting it.

Let us talk about working from home for what it actually is. It is sweeping reform, putting modern legislation in place to reflect a workforce stretched thin by commitments to their jobs, their families, and all the broader commitments that life in 2026 entails. Where technology allows, society and workplaces specifically adapt to improve efficiency, conditions and the wellbeing of those who actually generate the revenue that keeps our economy alive and growing faster than any other Australian jurisdiction. The naysayers joke that plumbers and sparkies will not be able to work from home, but they ignore that this benefits them as well. Less people headed into work means less people on the roads clogging our streets and shaving hours off the daily commute. It means fewer cars stuck on the Monash during peak hour. It means tradies get to their jobs faster, freight can move more efficiently and emergency services can respond more quickly when every minute counts.

The benefits of flexible work arrangements extend well beyond those who work behind a computer screen; they ripple right across our economy. That is the point that so often gets lost in this debate. Working from home is not about forcing people out of the office or about telling businesses how to operate, it is about recognising that where a job can reasonably be performed remotely employees should have a genuine right to request that flexibility and employers should engage with that request in good faith. There are so many employers that are currently doing that. There are many, many people working from home already. This just supports those who can being able to continue to do that.

For decades we accepted that the workplace was defined by physical location because, quite simply, that was where the work had to happen, but technology changed that reality. High-speed internet, secure cloud computing, video conferencing and collaborative software have transformed how millions of Australians do their jobs. The COVID pandemic accelerated that transition dramatically. What many employers once considered impossible became standard practice almost overnight. Businesses continued operating, government services continued functioning, universities kept teaching, financial institutions processed billions of dollars in transactions and professional services continued advising clients. Productivity in many sectors did not collapse, as some had predicted. Instead, Australians demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resilience. The lesson was not that every job should be done remotely forever, the lesson was that flexibility works.

Since then many businesses have embraced hybrid arrangements because they have seen the benefits firsthand. Staff retention has improved, recruitment has become easier and employees report greater job satisfaction, lower stress and improved work–life balance. Businesses have been able to recruit talent from regional Victoria rather than limiting themselves to applicants who live within commuting distance of Melbourne's CBD. That matters because talent exists everywhere. A young software developer in Ballarat should not have to uproot their family simply to access opportunities that technology now allows them to perform remotely. A marketing professional living in Mildura should not be excluded from metropolitan career pathways simply because geography places them hundreds of kilometres away. Flexible work helps decentralise opportunity while strengthening regional communities.

It also has significant implications for gender equality. Despite enormous progress, women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid caring responsibilities. Whether it is caring for young children, elderly parents or family members living with disability, those responsibilities remain unequally distributed across Australian households. Flexible work arrangements cannot solve that imbalance alone, but they can make workforce participation substantially easier. When parents can avoid spending 3 hours each day commuting, that is 3 hours that can instead be spent preparing children for school, attending medical appointments, helping with homework or simply being present during important family moments. That flexibility helps parents remain attached to the workforce instead of feeling forced to reduce their hours or leave employment altogether. It is not only parents who benefit. Workers with disabilities often face additional barriers associated with commuting – inaccessible transport or workplace environments that are not designed with their needs in mind. Working from home can remove many of those unnecessary obstacles while allowing employees to contribute fully to their organisations.

I regularly go out doorknocking and make phone calls to my constituents, and I have spoken to so many that answer the door on a Friday afternoon whilst they have got their headset on and are in the middle of a Teams meeting. They know that we are protecting their right to be able to do that at least two days a week, and they love that. They love that we are protecting it, because they are able to spend more time with their kids and with their family. They are able to have that work–life balance that is so important to wellbeing for many Victorians.

I spoke with a new mum not that long ago who was looking to return to work and looking to do a couple of days remotely – working from home – as part of her return to work and loved that we were protecting her right to do so. Her employer is a generous employer who already gives her that opportunity, and she understands that not every employer is like hers and so sees the benefit of legislating two days work from home for Victorians who can work from home. There are countless stories that I have heard from my constituents about the benefits that they are reaping because of this legislation. This is a cost-of-living measure – this measure takes cars off the road; this measure helps with families spending time together and with mental health as well. There are so many benefits to this legislation and being able to work from home. I can also add that Victorians who might be managing chronic illness can perform their duties more comfortably and effectively from home without sacrificing that productivity or requiring extended periods of leave. That is inclusion in practice.

This legislation recognises that flexibility is not a luxury reserved for executives or highly paid professionals. It is increasingly becoming an expectation of modern employment wherever operationally feasible. The economic benefits are equally compelling. Like I said before, every worker can save some money, whether it be on fuel, on parking or on public transport. They reduce the wear and tear on their vehicle. But equally, employers benefit from lower overheads, reduced office accommodation costs and access to broader labour markets. This is not a zero-sum equation where employees win and businesses lose. When implemented sensibly, flexibility benefits both.

Of course, working from home is not suitable for every workplace or every employee. Some people genuinely prefer the office environment. They enjoy the social interaction, the collaboration and the separation between work and home life, and that choice remains available for them. Others work in industries where physical presence is essential; nobody is suggesting otherwise. Instead, it simply says that where flexibility is possible, requests should be assessed fairly rather than dismissed automatically because of outdated management practices or misconceptions about productivity. Good managers already understand this, and they are already doing this.

Work should be measured by results, not by proximity to the manager's office. I think this legislation sends an important cultural message. For too long workplace flexibility often depended on who your manager happened to be. Some employers embraced it enthusiastically, while others refused to even consider it. Rights should not depend on luck. Workers deserve consistency. I commend this bill to the house.

Anthony MARSH (Nepean) (12:48): We recognise that flexible work is now an established feature in many Victorian workplaces. Where a role can be performed remotely, working from home can reduce travel time, assist employees with family responsibilities and help employers attract and retain staff. When I had my own business I worked from home, over a decade ago, and I had many employees over that time that worked from home as well, well before this became the norm during COVID. But this debate should not be reduced to a false binary choice between supporting flexibility and opposing it. The question is whether this bill establishes a workable, balanced and legally coherent framework to enable this to occur. In its present form the opposition believes it does not.

This bill creates a statutory right for eligible employees to work from home for up to two days each week or a proportionate period where employees working fewer than 38 hours in a given week can take a proportionate work-from-home period, where doing so is reasonable. That entitlement sits in addition to existing rights under state and Commonwealth laws, awards, enterprise agreements and

workplace determinations. An employee may nominate the days and times that they propose to work from home, and the employer must generally accept that arrangement unless they deem it not reasonable. Even where a particular proposal cannot be accommodated, the employer may still be required to offer an equivalent period on different days or at different times or a lesser period that is reasonable. A complete refusal is available only when no period of working from home is deemed to be reasonable. That moves beyond the right to request flexibility and creates a presumptive entitlement, with the employer carrying the burden of establishing why the arrangement should not proceed. It also places ordinary workplace decisions within the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, exposing employers to a new enforcement regime through the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and VCAT. Routine decisions about where, when and how work should be performed may therefore become subject to a formal dispute or litigation.

The opposition have proposed a series of practical and reasonable amendments to address the bill's deficiencies. First, we propose the delay of the operation of the liability and enforcement provisions until 1 January 2027 – not the commencement date. Employers should have adequate time to understand their obligations and amend workforce policies, assess risks and train managers before becoming exposed to any formal proceedings.

Second, we seek to impose a cap of $1000 on the reasonable costs that an employer might be required to meet. The bill requires employers to pay costs necessary to enable home-based work, including essential equipment, software and secure access to information systems, but it provides no clear outer limit, and we heard many examples of where that could be quite extreme earlier in this debate. The statutory entitlement should not create an open-ended financial liability, particularly for small businesses already facing rising wages, insurance costs, energy costs and compliance costs. Employers need to know the potential cost of this arrangement before it commences, rather than discovering the extent of their liability when it is already too late.

Third, our amendments address occupational health and safety and workplace compensation risks. A company director should not incur personal liability under the occupational health and safety legislation from an incident arising because an employee is working from home in a place the director does not control or using a desk they built themselves, for example. Nor should such an incident be taken into account when determining an employer's WorkCover contribution or insurance premium. Employers must take reasonable steps to support safe working arrangements, but they cannot inspect, supervise or eliminate every hazard within an employee's house. The law should not impose a liability as though the home were an ordinary workplace under the employer's direct management.

Fourth, where an employee's primary place of residence is in Victoria, we propose that a work-from-home location should also therefore be in Victoria unless the employee or employer otherwise agree. The bill should not create a unilateral entitlement to work interstate, with the tax, insurance, regulatory, data security and practical complications that may follow that decision. An interstate arrangement may be perfectly appropriate under the circumstances, but it should be by agreement rather than by assumption. We also propose to ensure that the right-of-entry regime under the Fair Work Act 2009 does not apply to a private residence merely because an employee is exercising this entitlement. A family home should not become a workplace entry point for permit-holders simply because paid work is being performed there. We heard the Minister for Cost of Living say earlier that that is not the case, but again, we can clarify that quite simply with these simple amendments.

Our amendments would also protect employees from unintended land tax consequences. Exercising a statutory right to work from home should not alter the land tax treatment of a person's home. Parliament should not create an employee entitlement that may expose a household to unforeseen and unrelated financial penalties.

These amendments are not intended to frustrate flexible work. As I said at the outset, I have supported it and done it myself with my own business. They are practical safeguards designed to define the boundaries of the entitlement and allocate cost, responsibility and risk more fairly. There is also the

broader question of equity. A lawyer, an accountant or an administrator may be able to work remotely quite easily, but a nurse, a tradesperson, a retail worker, a mechanic, a hospitality employer or a tourism operator cannot. That distinction is particularly apparent on the Mornington Peninsula and in Nepean. Our local economy depends heavily on hospitality, accommodation, tourism, construction, retail, health services and other businesses where working from home is simply not an option. A general statutory entitlement risks creating two classes of workers within the same workplace – those able to access this benefit and those that cannot. The bill also confines the matters an employer may consider, and in several areas requires significant adverse impact before operational concerns carry decisive weight. That threshold may be difficult for an employer to establish in advance, particularly where the effect is cumulative rather than immediate.

Productivity is not always measured only when an individual can complete the assigned tasks at home. It involves supervision, mentoring, teamwork and professional development, workplace culture, customer service and the transfer of knowledge between experienced and less experienced staff. That is something we have seen over the last few years, particularly with new people coming into workplaces. They are not getting that knowledge transfer with their superiors or more experienced staff within their office. Those considerations are real, but they can be difficult to quantify before the harm occurs. A business should not be required to wait until productivity training or customer service has significantly deteriorated before its concerns are treated as legitimate. Questions also remain about privacy, cybersecurity, confidentiality and responsibility for incidents beyond the employer's direct control. These matters determine who carries the risk, who pays the costs, and whether a business can confidently comply with the law.

The opposition has received constant adverse feedback from employers, business representatives and legal practitioners across many sectors. Their concern is not about the flexible work itself, but really their concern is about the cooperative workplace practice being converted into a rigid legal entitlement without adequate limits, protections or regard for the diversity of Victoria's workplace. Flexibility works best when it is practical, reciprocal and built on trust. It should support employees without making employers responsible for the risks that they cannot reasonably manage. It should recognise modern work without pretending that every job, every workplace or every industry is exactly the same. The government has chosen to legislate in a very complex area and now has an obligation to ensure it gets the detail right. I believe the opposition's amendments are constructive, proportionate, very reasonable and quite necessary, and they preserve genuine flexibility while providing clearer limits on costs, liability, location, privacy and implementation. Again, it is not a binary choice whether working from home should be allowable or not, or legislated as a right or not, but making sure we get the details right and we get a good position that makes it something that can be implemented for businesses without unforeseen costs and consequences.

John LISTER (Werribee) (12:57): In the short time I have before we break I would just like to foreshadow that some of my contribution will be around not just the mechanics of the work-from-home legislation that is before us but also the significance when it comes to our economy, as well as how it operates in the outer suburbs, particularly in the suburbs that I represent, like Wyndham Vale, Mambourin and Manor Lakes. Last time in this place when I spoke about working from home, I gave everyone a bit of a lesson about the history of the power loom and the disruption that it caused in England during the 1790s. It was a disruption to the way that we worked in Western society. It disrupted cottage industries where a lot of products were made at home, working from home, and took people instead away into factories and into industrialised settings where bosses could loom over the top of them – at the loom – and control their everyday business as they completed that work. I think a lot of the objections to working from home are really at their depths about control, and this idea of how much control a corporation or a business can have over the person completing that work for them. I do think that this legislation is particularly important from that justice point of view as well.

What I would also foreshadow that I will be speaking about is around the issue that work from home traditionally has only been available for people in mostly inner suburbs in professional workplaces.

However, we have seen increasingly so in outer suburban areas like mine more people able to access work from home, particularly pushed along because of the pandemic and the technology adoption that we had to have in order to still engage with our work at the time when we were not allowed to move and travel across the state. So I think it is particularly important to reflect that this is a big issue for my community. Some of the top responses to the government's engagement on the work-from-home legislation were from Wyndham, particularly Wyndham Vale and our neighbours Point Cook and Trug. They were some of the top responses in the survey that we did around working from home, and I think this goes to a point that many of my colleagues have made.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Suburban Rail Loop

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. Yesterday the Premier said his government would review the Suburban Rail Loop. Will the Premier admit that the cost of this project exceeds $34.5 billion?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier, Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:03): What I can say is we have delivered record investment in public transport and we will continue to deliver record investment.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals! Members will come to order. I barely heard what the Premier said in his very short time on his feet. A point of order, member for Brighton?

James Newbury: And yet, Speaker, it was not relevant.

The SPEAKER: I am glad that you heard it, member for Brighton, because I did not.

Anthony Carbines: On the point of order, I think you have pre-empted my response, Speaker, which is that after 9 seconds I think the Premier is entitled to give more information to the house.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has only been on his feet a short time. Premier, come back to the question.

Ben CARROLL: I make this very crystal clear to the Leader of the Opposition: the government I lead will treat every single dollar with the respect it deserves.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. Members will be removed from the chamber without warning, member for Wendouree.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): The Premier said this morning:

> I'm going to be a Premier that doesn't break contracts …

Will the Premier rule out cancelling the Suburban Rail Loop, which he signed up to as a minister and the Deputy Premier?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier, Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:05): I said very clearly that I will run a very strong team, and we will not be cancelling contracts. That era is over.

Ministers statements: workplace safety

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier, Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:05): It was a pleasure today to return to Kmart, where my working life started – out in the suburbs, serving and working and getting to know working people. One thing it taught me was the value of the dollar but also about respect, and one of the most important principles of any government is respecting workers. Today we announce that our government will introduce a workplace protection order scheme. We are going to make sure every worker on the front line knows that when they go to work they come home feeling pretty good about themselves. We know there is always a double-edged sword, when you go to work. It could be a great place, but sometimes you get intimidated, you get bullied, you get assaulted, and that will not be on. That is why we met with the Chief Commissioner of Police last night to say he will have every power and every resource he needs for support. We will introduce a new workplace protection order scheme that will hold anyone accountable that intimidates, bullies or threatens frontline workers in transport, in hospitality and right across our workforce. We stand with workers; we do not stand with One Nation.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual, and he voted against the scheme this morning at 9:30.

The SPEAKER: That is a point of debate, member for Brighton.

Construction industry

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:07): My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier look Victorians in the eye and admit that $15 billion was lost to corruption while he was Jacinta Allan's partner in crime?

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Nationals was referring to the member for Bendigo East. We call members by their correct titles.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier, Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:08): I said this yesterday. Whether it is in business or the union movement, integrity is not optional; it is fundamental. And that goes for government projects.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:08): Until recently the Premier has said that a royal commission was not required. He has now announced a royal commission. What has changed?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Monbulk is warned.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier, Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:08): I am not Daniel Andrews. I am not Jacinta Allan. My first action as Premier was to establish a royal commission and a special prosecutor to go alongside it that will shine a light and will get working straightaway.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Berwick withdrew from chamber.

Ministers statements: workplace safety

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small and Family Business, Minister for Employment, Minister for Tourism) (14:09): I rise to update the house on how we are supporting safety for retail and transport workers in Victoria. Yesterday the Premier said that Victoria's economy is a partnership between business, government and working people, and that is why today we have introduced nation-leading workplace protection orders. It is pretty simple: when workers and business owners go to work, they deserve to be safe. I speak to businesses every single

day, from cafes and restaurants to family businesses and of course stakeholders. They work hard, they appreciate their customers and they provide the goods and services our communities rely on. Much too often, staff are experiencing abuse, harassment or violence at work. This is unacceptable, and it must stop.

That is why today our government is introducing legislation which will protect business owners and frontline workers with strong new powers to crack down on this behaviour. Retail and transport workers keep Victoria running, and they are often young people starting out in their first jobs – like our Premier's first job at Kmart – and repeated abuse has real and lasting impacts. We know that the Australian Retail Council, business groups, workers and unions have all told us that these new protections will keep workers and workplaces safe. These reforms are the next step in Labor's crackdown on violence against hardworking Victorians. The message is simple: everybody deserves to be safe at work, and the Carroll Labor government is committed to community safety for every worker and every workplace.

Construction industry

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:11): My question is to the Premier. The Premier was sent multiple emails by Marda Dandhi alleging coercion and intimidation on the Big Build that was costing the Aboriginal business millions of dollars and threatening its survival. Why didn't the Premier ever respond?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier, Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:11): I thank the member for the question. What I can be absolutely crystal clear about is that under my government we will be establishing a royal commission with a special prosecutor.

David Hodgett interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Croydon, you may be sitting on your own again very shortly.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance –

Members interjecting.

James Newbury: You could not be finished; that was 3 seconds.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, through the Chair.

James Newbury: Through the Chair, Speaker, I appreciate that often you give a member time to elaborate –

Members interjecting.

James Newbury: Do you mind? I am being yelled at.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Laverton is warned. I cannot tell the Premier how to answer a question.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:12): Former Marda Dandhi employee Ben Nash was targeted and bullied by the CFMEU on a government rail project for wearing a company shirt. He later, tragically, took his own life. One email warned the Premier that 'no human deserves this treatment' and that CFMEU conduct 'should have never cost an 18-year-old his life'. Can the Premier look Ben Nash's family in the eye and admit he was too weak to stand up for Ben?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier, Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:13): For what happened to Ben Nash, I really sympathise with his family. Can I also say, though, I also sympathise with the families of the members of Women in

Construction, and that is why I have called a royal commission. That is why I have announced a special prosecutor to work alongside that royal commission. I am not waiting. I am getting on with the job to shine a light on this sector.

Ministers statements: corrections system

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Local Government, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Corrections) (14:14): Every Victorian deserves to feel safe and be safe, whether that is at home, at work or in the community, and that is why this year's budget has invested $1.7 billion to keep Victorians safe – new funding for our hardworking Victoria Police, new funding for emergency services and new funding for the justice system. 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, designed and built by and now operating under this Labor government. That is more than 1200 new beds added to our corrections and youth justice facilities, and we are making the best use of these facilities. Thanks to the changes we have already made, bail refusals and bail revocations are at record highs, meaning real consequences for breaching bail conditions. Adult time for violent crime means young offenders who commit serious violent offences now face tougher consequences, with more likely and longer sentences. And we are seeing results. The latest statistics show crime is down in Victoria.

We know there is more to do, and we are getting on with it. The Premier has been clear that Victoria Police will get the resources it needs, and we are delivering the resources the corrections and youth justice systems need to hold people to account, with serious consequences for serious offending. Make no mistake, we have been scaling up the corrections and youth justice systems. Over the last two budgets we have invested in more beds, more corrections officers, more youth justice workers and more programs and supports to stop reoffending. More than 1000 beds have been opened across the corrections and youth justice systems. These systems are designed to hold offenders to account while supporting people to find better pathways for their rehabilitation, because that is what makes Victorians safer now and into the future.

Construction industry

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:16): My question is to the Premier. I extend my congratulations and the congratulations of my constituents on your election to the leadership of Victorian Labor and as Premier of Victoria. I am delighted that you have announced a royal commission into corruption within Victoria's Big Build. What scope will the royal commission have to investigate allegations of corrupt conduct?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier, Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:16): I acknowledge the question from the member for Ringwood. As I have said, my first action is establishing the royal commission into the construction sector. Integrity is not optional; it is fundamental. It will have exhaustive terms of reference. I met with the head of the Department of Premier and Cabinet yesterday and commissioned him to get to work on it straightaway, and I will have more to say on this in the coming days and weeks.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:17): When does the Premier expect terms of reference to be settled?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier, Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:17): I thank the member for Ringwood. As soon as possible. What I can say is that they will be exhaustive terms of reference. This needs a light shone on it. I want to make sure that the government I lead does ensure every dollar spent and every person working in every workplace gets the fairness and the treatment it deserves.

Ministers statements: organised crime

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:17): I rise to update the house on the actions that the Carroll Labor government is taking to crack down on organised crime. It was a pleasure to meet the hardworking Victoria Police members down there at Melbourne West station last night with the Premier. We were there to listen, we were there to acknowledge the hard job that they do and we were there to thank them and tell them that we have their backs. This government, our government, has the backs of hardworking police members across this state. That is why the Carroll Labor government have called a royal commission into the construction sector, that is why we are immediately establishing a special prosecutor to support the commission and that is also why we will be strengthening IBAC by ensuring that they have follow-the-money powers this year.

$170 million has been allocated and announced just this week by our government to make sure that we have a dedicated organised crime command. The Chief Commissioner of Police will oversee this new command. He will make sure that there are 158 specialist staff to work day and night to break organised crime. That will include financial investigators, data analysts, surveillance specialists, cyber specialists and police working as one. Some of the best and brightest police from across the country will be working and laser focused on dismantling and disrupting organised crime in our state.

Can I say also that some $100 million in cash and assets has been seized by Victoria Police in the last financial year thanks to tough new powers introduced and put through this Parliament by Labor governments. I want to also acknowledge that Victoria Police, through the leadership of the chief commissioner, are making sure that police have every tool they need – the tools, the tech and the specialists – to crack down on and hold organised crime to account in this state.

What is at risk, though, of course is $40 billion in cuts, and Victorians cannot afford to have their safety put at risk by a wacky Liberal–One Nation coalition government. We will be here to make sure that does not happen. We will be here to invest and put our resources behind Victoria Police to disrupt and dismantle organised crime in this state.

Construction industry

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:19): My question is to the Premier. Has the Premier issued a direction to all current and former ministers and their offices, departments and agencies to stop documents relating to corruption, misconduct and criminality on the Big Build from being shredded or destroyed?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Nationals! Member for Caulfield! Member for Warrandyte! Members are entitled to raise points of order, as you know, member for Brighton.

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, I know that there is a little bit of feet stamping from the member for Brighton that the royal commission is being established by this Labor government, but he is seeking an opinion and a statement rather than asking a question.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

James Newbury: Further to the point of order, Speaker –

The SPEAKER: Further to the point of order as long as it is a point of order, because that was not. On a separate point of order?

James Newbury: No, further –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Emergency Services can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Minister for Emergency Services withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: I am simply putting that it is a question that is very simple and within the Premier's purview about whether or not the Premier is protecting the documents in relation to criminality and corruption from being shredded.

The SPEAKER: That it is not the correct way to raise a point of order. In fact it is not a point of order.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier, Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:21): The last time I remember a shredding machine was when Jeff Kennett was back in power, and we know who was powering it up.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Members will come to order. Member for Bulleen, welcome back. Would you like to leave again?

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this Premier claimed he had integrity. Why not answer the question?

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

Ben CARROLL: I think we know. As I said in my previous answer, I had a meeting with the head of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, and we have got on with the work. I will not accept that premise and that slur from the leader and from the opposition party.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:22): What safeguards has the Premier put in place to stop the shredding of documents –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: I ask the members of this Parliament to come to order. Member for Preston!

James NEWBURY: May I start again, Speaker?

The SPEAKER: Just continue on, thank you, member for Brighton.

James NEWBURY: What safeguards has the Premier put in place to stop the shredding of documents –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Narre Warren South can leave the chamber for half an hour. The member for Cranbourne can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Members for Narre Warren South and Cranborne withdrew from chamber.

Gabrielle Williams interjected.

The SPEAKER: The Deputy Premier can leave the chamber for half an hour. You do not speak when I am on my feet. It does not matter who you are in this chamber.

Deputy Premier withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER: The member for Brighton has a supplementary question, and I would like him to ask it in silence.

James NEWBURY: What safeguards has the Premier put in place to stop the shredding of documents and deletion of records taking place in the offices of the Premier, former Premier or outgoing ministers as we speak?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier, Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:24): If the member has an allegation to make, he should make it rather than slurring hardworking public servants.

Ministers statements: workplace safety

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (14:24): Every Victorian deserves to feel safe at work, but unfortunately in recent times we have seen more frontline workers across retail and transport being abused and subject to abuse, from teenagers working their first job at the check-out through to hardworking cafe and restaurant owners and bus, tram and train drivers, conductors and station staff who keep Victoria moving. This poor behaviour is unacceptable, and it demands stronger protections for workers and tougher consequences for offenders. That is why the Carroll Labor government is sending a clear message today by introducing new legislation to establish workplace protection orders to protect workers in retail, hospitality and transport settings from people who engage in unacceptable conduct. If you commit physical or sexual violence, abuse or conduct that causes a retail or transport worker to experience reasonable fear of harm, you will face a ban of up to 12 months from that workplace, with strict criminal penalties of up to two years in prison and a fine of $50,000 if you breach the ban.

This Labor government is serious about keeping communities safe, and it is why we have worked closely with Victoria Police, businesses and unions to design these new measures on top of the changes that we have made in partnership with Victoria Police to deploy more PSOs in higher crime train stations and roll out more CCTV. Compare that to the Liberals, who cut more than $100 million from Victoria Police and did not fund one additional police officer when they were last in government. Now they are proposing to cut services again, slashing funds from police, transport, education and health. While Jess Wilson's Liberals plot what else they are going to cut and close –

The SPEAKER: Order! Correct titles, Minister.

Melissa HORNE: While the Leader of the Opposition – *(Time expired)*

Constituency questions

Evelyn electorate

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:28): (1718) Victorian public schools are the lowest funded in Australia under the Labor government, and Labor has failed to invest in new buildings needed at schools in the Evelyn electorate. My question is to the Minister for Education: when will the government fund a new multipurpose gymnasium and assembly hall for Birmingham Primary School in Mount Evelyn? The Premier has said in Parliament that the government would invest in every school in every postcode, but his actions do not match his words. Labor has failed to provide any funding to build a new multipurpose hall with gymnasium, kitchen and change rooms at Birmingham Primary School. Currently the school has nearly 700 students and 70 staff and has no indoor space that can accommodate all the students and teachers in one location for assemblies, for school presentations or for indoor sport when the weather outside is hot or rainy. Birmingham Primary School is a wonderful school. Together we have long advocated for this new building, which would provide a significant benefit to the school: fit-for-purpose facilities that the school community deserves.

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (14:29): (1719) My question is for the Minister for Government Services in the other place. How many residents in the Lara electorate have applied for the Victorian government's rego rebate? Over the past couple of months my electorate office staff and I have been very busy

speaking to residents to ensure that they are aware of the program and assisting community members with their applications. I think we have helped hundreds of locals apply for their rego rebate, saving them 20 per cent off their car rego. Most residents in the Lara community have been able to claim a rebate of approximately $174 for each car they have registered, which means for families with two cars that is a massive saving of over $340. On this side of the house we are committed to helping ease the cost-of-living pressure for Victorians. I look forward to hearing from the minister about how many locals have applied for the rego rebate.

Mildura electorate

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:30): (1720) My question today is for the Minister for Health in the other place, and it is: what plans are there for phase 3 cardiac rehabilitation programs in Mildura? I have recently been made aware that Sunraysia Community Health Services, who do an incredible job delivering community health services for Sunraysia, have recently lost the ability to deliver this program, and it has left quite a gap in the already lacking cardiac services in Sunraysia. Unfortunately, this now means there are limited affordable options for individuals transitioning from Mildura Base Public Hospital, who offer phase 2 cardiac rehab and subacute cardiac rehabilitation services, back into the community. There is already a major service gap in the delivery of accessible, ongoing cardiac rehabilitation – in fact cardiac services altogether – in Mildura, and often we are told to go to Bendigo, which is 4½ hours away. So what is the solution?

Narre Warren South electorate

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:31): (1721) My constituency question is for the Attorney-General, and it concerns the state Labor government's recent announcement regarding new laws to protect kids online. Attorney-General, how will these reforms help families in my electorate of Narre Warren South to keep kids safe from online harm? We know social media and AI can be great tools, but technology is evolving rapidly, and keeping up with change is also a challenge. But that does not mean big tech can shirk their responsibility or have immunity when it comes to ensuring that these spaces are safe. As a parent, I was pleased to see the state Labor government's recent announcement of reforms to support victims of online harm and put some power back in the hands of families. I look forward to sharing the Attorney-General's response with my community.

Prahran electorate

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (14:32): (1722) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police. Minister, when will the government act to restore safety and confidence in the seat of Prahran? Residents across my seat tell me they no longer feel safe. They no longer feel safe in their streets, in their homes or at their businesses, and they describe cars being broken into regularly, homes being targeted, shops being robbed, aggressive behaviour on the street and around public transport hubs and repeat offenders returning with little apparent consequence. Traders are spending more money on security, as are families, and young people are changing their routines. People are telling me they do not even feel safe walking down Chapel Street during the day, let alone at night-time, and older residents are afraid to go out. These are the daily experiences of people in my electorate who feel abandoned by a government that has lost control of community safety. We have a clear plan to make Victoria safer.

Thomastown electorate

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (14:33): (1723) My question is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure, and the question I ask is: when will construction start on the new, bigger emergency department at the Northern Hospital? The Labor government has heavily invested in the Northern Hospital over the past 10 years. We have many big new hospital towers that have more beds, specialist clinics, more allied health services, the women's health clinic, a public health fertility clinic, more maternity wards and more wards for children. We also have the mental health hospital, which is also supporting our community. However, the emergency department, the busiest in Australia, really

needs to cater for more and more people who see the light and come to live in the northern suburbs. While the pressure can be alleviated by the virtual emergency department and the urgent care clinic at Epping Plaza Medical, we certainly still need a bigger emergency department.

Richmond electorate

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:34): (1724) My question is for the Minister for Planning. In 2024 the Greens secured reforms to crack down on short-stay accommodation. We won new laws that allow apartment owners to ban Airbnb in their building, a short-stay levy and a written commitment from this government to give local councils the power to regulate, impose conditions on and even prohibit short-stays in their communities from early 2025. It is now mid-2026 and time is running out to put in place strong regulations that will free up homes that are being hoarded for profit instead of for people to actually live in. Our communities are crying out for this reform, and the government promised it. Will you follow through on your commitment before the election, or is this yet another one of your government's broken promises?

The SPEAKER: Member for Richmond, your question is to the minister, not to me. I would ask you to refer to the minister.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: Will the minister follow through on their commitment before the election, or is this another one of this government's broken promises?

Kim Wells interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Rowville is warned.

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:35): (1725) My constituency question is for the Attorney-General. What is the Victorian government doing to protect women and girls across Victoria from men's violence? In Ballarat the She Matters mural stands as a powerful memorial for the women and girls whose lives have been taken by men's violence in Australia. Tragically, six more women and girls have recently joined the growing toll in recent weeks, including Layla Jeffery, a 13-year-old girl from Donald whose death shocked communities across regional Victoria. Their preventable deaths contribute to the national toll of women killed this year and leave family, friends and communities devastated. Women and men across my community and Victoria are angry and want more to be done to prevent men's violence before another woman is killed.

Shepparton electorate

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (14:36): (1726) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the information I seek is regarding the timeframe for the roadwork repairs. That includes the many potholes on the GV and Hume highways that are currently in the worst and most dangerous and appalling condition. Currently the response to address this is flashing warning signs saying 'Potholes for the next 20 kilometres' in two sections. Hundreds of drivers have hit these dangerous potholes, damaging their cars and being unable to continue to drive their vehicles. A young woman, Emily, who had hit a pothole on a dangerous bend on the Goulburn Valley Highway, contacted me. She was stranded in the dark and rain for 4 hours, fearing that a truck or passing vehicle would collide with her or her car. Her tyre was completely shredded and the alloy wheel badly damaged. She faces costs of over $2000. Freer's tow truck company towed 74 vehicles in just seven days. It is an absolute disgrace and is putting lives at risk.

The SPEAKER: Member for Shepparton, you need to ask a question.

Kim O'KEEFFE: My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Could the minister please provide a timeframe for the roadwork repairs?

Broadmeadows electorate

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (14:37): (1727) My constituency question is for the Minister for Cost of Living. How many people across my electorate have claimed Victorian Labor's 20 per cent off car rego? The 20 per cent off rego closes this Friday. That is up to 186 bucks back in your pocket, or 372 bucks if you have two cars, for rego you have paid since July last year. I know heaps of people have already taken advantage of this Labor government initiative, helping with the cost of living, but the price of fuel is on the rise again and I want to make sure everyone eligible applies before Friday. You just need to jump on the Service Vic app with your bank details, rego and licence numbers, or you can drop into my office at Broady shopping centre if you need a hand. My friendly staff have already helped hundreds of locals, and while you are on the Service Vic app, check out the Servo Saver feature to find the cheapest fuel and the savings finder to see other discounts and rebates. And do not forget, half-price public transport continues until the end of the year.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I have a number of questions that remain unanswered and are overdue by the ministers in this Labor government. They are question on notice to the Treasurer 2421, which is 14 months overdue, and also questions on notice to the Treasurer 3237, 3238, 3239, 3240, 3241, 3242, 3256 and 3340. Questions on notice to the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs 3408, 3412 and 3413 are overdue. Questions on notice to the Minister for Finance that are overdue are 3420, 3422, 3423, 3427, 3430, 3431, 3435, 3436, 3439, 3502, 3503, 3504 and 3505. Labor members might laugh, but my constituents would really appreciate an answer.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Evelyn, just read out your list, please.

Bridget Vallence: The Minister for Skills and TAFE is overdue for question on notice 3453. The Minister for Employment is overdue for questions on notice 3484, 3485, 3486, 3487, 3488, 3489 and 3510. The Minister for Education is overdue for question on notice 3210. The Minister for Health is overdue for question on notice 3317. The Minister for Planning is overdue for questions on notice 3282, 3283 and 3284. And the Premier is overdue for question on notice 3316. I would really appreciate responses for my constituents to these overdue questions, and I will pass the list to the clerks.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER (14:40): I have reviewed the constituency questions from yesterday. The member for South-West Coast asked the minister for advice and then asked the minister to give her information. Both of these requests were for an action from the minister, which is not permitted. I therefore rule the member's question out of order.

Bills

Equal Opportunity Amendment (Work from Home) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Sport and Major Events) (14:41): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Corrections Amendment Bill 2026

Override statement

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Local Government, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Corrections) (14:41): I now make a statement in accordance with section 31(5) of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006. The Corrections Amendment Bill 2026 will amend the Corrections Act 1986 to provide that a prisoner's right to be in the open air does not apply in circumstances where it is not reasonably practicable in light of operational considerations. The government accepts that sections limiting the right to be in open air may be incompatible with some charter rights. New section 47AAA therefore includes subsections providing that the charter does not apply to this provision and that those override declarations do not need to be re-enacted every five years as is ordinarily required under section 31(7) of the charter. The government does not take this step lightly. In this exceptional case the charter is being overridden and its application excluded to ensure access to open air in prison can continue to be managed safely alongside operational considerations. This is particularly important in the highly complex operating environment of prisons, which require careful management of multiple interests and people with varying needs.

Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:

That this bill be now read a second time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:43): I rise to speak on the Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2026. I do note the importance of the bill and the importance of fixing a problem in our electoral system with speed, and that is why I will make a few comments, not use the full time for comments. I know one of my colleagues intends to do the same, and I believe that a number of members on the other side will make a few brief comments as well and the bill will be dealt with later this day. That is important.

There is no doubt that the group voting system that has been in place in Victoria has been in place because, I suspect, the former former Premier Daniel Andrews supported the system because it gamed the system for the left, simply put. I do acknowledge that action is now being taken post his premiership to address that. It is something that the Liberals and Nationals support. We support the stopping of gaming the system. Simply put, we support the change that is being proposed in this bill because the system was being gamed, where a very small number of candidates were working together with a very small number of votes to game the system. We have seen terrible examples over time, both state and federally, where a number of candidates have worked together and with assistance from people – electoral experts, as they would say, who understand the system – to game the system. It was wrong.

Federally, action was taken. There has been a very longstanding push at a state level for action here too, and that action was delayed. As I said earlier, I think that there is probably some common recognition that that was because of the views of former former Premier Daniel Andrews. I think that he preferred an upper house where there were certain left-wing elected members – and when I say 'elected', I mean through a very, very small number of votes. He preferred working with an upper house that was, I suggest, perhaps in some cases the extreme left, because it suited his purpose to try and find and cobble together votes to pass his legislation and his legislative reforms through the upper house.

We support reform, and that is why I intend to make some comments and assist with the passage of this bill. I may say, though, we were first notified formally of this bill on, from memory, Friday. It may have been Thursday; if it was Thursday, excuse me, but I believe it was Friday. As soon as we were formally advised of the bill we were provided a briefing with the former Premier's office, on

Sunday, and I do acknowledge and appreciate the briefing on this bill on a Sunday. We were very keen to have it, and I do acknowledge that the former Premier's office was clearly doing a lot of things at the time. In that briefing we made it clear that when it comes to group voting reforms, we support group voting reform. There are other matters in the bill which I will briefly speak to, but we actually said, if it would assist, if the government proposed simply group voting reform, we could immediately support it without any delay at all.

There are a number of other matters which do not appear to be controversial, and we obviously, given the timeframe, have had to take the government at its word that a number of these amendments have been pushed, for want of a better word, by the Victorian Electoral Commission. We are taking the government at face value in relation to the other amendments. If I can break them into two parts, firstly there are a series of vote-saving measures which do align with the Commonwealth regime of vote saving. We support a vote-saving mechanism. For everybody – and I am sure many people in this chamber have stood and scrutineered – vote saving is important. We want to make sure that everybody's democratic vote is counted. There are circumstances where people make mistakes or misunderstand how to vote, and it is a real shame when you see those votes. Many times you understand what you believe the voter intended to say. The practice now is that those votes are set to the side and the district manager will review each of those votes manually and approve each of those votes manually. For example, if a box is not fully filled in or perhaps they have filled in a list of numbers but put a tick in one of those boxes, where it is clear what their preference is, there is a question about the validity of that vote. We want to save that vote. We want to make sure that their vote is counted. Most of the time now, through a system of practice per se more than anything else – it certainly is not through legislation – district managers are given effectively a practice note on votes to save where those measures are in place. What this legislation does in relation to vote saving is put that practice into law, and that is a good thing. As I said, it mirrors the Commonwealth legislation. It ensures that if there is a list of numbers and there is a break but a break that is obvious – or a tick or a cross where the intention is obvious – that vote is counted. We support that.

There are also a small number of amendments in relation to the part 12 electoral changes that were put through this place in March. They were very contentious. My understanding in relation to this bill is the changes in this bill are not contentious per se, in that a number of the March reforms enabled changes through regulation, and there has been a question from the Victorian Electoral Commission as to whether or not they should have been made through legislation, so this is formalising those changes – things like the reporting of overpayments by nominated entities. It does not effectively create a new power; what it does is it formalises it by way of legislation rather than regulation, which was proposed in the March legislation. It does not go into the more contentious parts of that bill. Noting that we are talking about part 12, it would be remiss of me not to say we have a very longstanding concern in relation to the way that the government has managed donation laws and of course have said that we do not support the way that the government amended the law in March, effectively putting caps on everything except unions. There is simply an uncapped donation river from the unions, which is enabled through those part 12 legislative reforms. It is shocking, I know, but that currently is the case. The coalition have said that we do not support it, and we certainly will not let it stand if we are honoured to be elected at the November election later this year. Those are the three things that this bill does: group voting, vote saving and clarifying legislative heads of power in relation to some of the part 12 changes that occurred in March.

I will finish where I began by saying that we support the measures in relation to group voting. We believe that this has been long needed, and I do acknowledge that we are not the only party not in government to have pushed that. We have believed for a very long time that votes should not be gamed. Victoria was out of step with the rest of the country. As I said before, I believe it was because of the former former Premier and his views on group voting and I guess his practical want in relation to numbers in the upper house. I guess there is no other way to say it. We have been out of step with the rest of the country. We have seen terrible examples, including at a federal level – I do not in any way say that it was just at a state level that we have seen abuse and gaming of the system – and at the

federal level they took action. I am glad that we are seeing action through this bill, which is why not only are we supporting its speedy passage but we will be ensuring and facilitating as best we can the bill going through the chamber today and going through, as I anticipate, for debate in the Council tomorrow.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (14:53): I rise to support this bill, and I am glad that the opposition has spoken in support of this bill as well. For a process that began by attempting to increase formality in the federal Senate, it has turned into, in my view, a deeply undemocratic process. I might agree with where the member for Brighton ended up, but I disagree with some of his commentary and how he got there. I had not thought that this was a process which has particularly improved any left votes in the upper house, and no less a luminary than Antony Green agrees with me on that – to a degree, at least. I hope I am not misquoting Antony Green. I am sure I will get an email in response if I do. But certainly, to quote from some of his work in this area – and that has been extensive and longstanding work in this area – he noted that in 2014 in the Western Metropolitan Region the Democratic Labour Party polled at 2.57 per cent and knocked out the third Labor candidate, who started on 10.65 per cent, which I reckon is a net one down for the Labor Party. In the Western Vic Region in the same year James Purcell of Vote 1 Local Jobs polled 1.28 per cent, and the Greens, who began the count on 9.19 per cent, ended up getting knocked out. In Eastern Metro Region in 2018 the Greens polled 15 times as much as Rod Barton from the Transport Matters Party, with 9 per cent, and yet they were not elected. In the South-East Metropolitan Region in 2018 the second Liberal – I will give a shout-out to the Liberals here – started on 12.3 per cent. 16.66 per cent is the quota for the upper house, and they were knocked over by Liberal Democrats David Limbrick on 0.84 per cent of the vote. I will go to the last election, most importantly, probably. In Northern Vic two members were elected at well below the quota of 16.66 per cent: One Nation on 3.68 per cent and the Animal Justice Party on 1.53 per cent. Those parties gained the same number of seats in the upper house as the Victorian Labor Party, who polled many times over that. So I would not say that this has been a particularly strong preference to left or right, at the end of the day.

It is process of voting which has been discredited, in my view – a process that does not lead to democratic outcomes and the outcomes that people would expect when they fill in their votes. As I said, it started in the Senate as a process of trying to save votes, to make sure we lifted formality by requiring just one vote above the line, but preference whispering has changed that over time. Parliaments have been getting rid of that process since 2000: New South Wales first, the Commonwealth in 2016, South Australia in 2017 and Western Australia in 2021. The Electoral Matters Committee since 2022 has provided two reports that have asked for this one to be removed. Victorians deserve to control where their preferences go – of course they should – and who gets elected. Under the current system parties can direct preferences and how they flow through group voting tickets, and it means upper house members win from deals, not necessarily with support on the ground.

This Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2026 was introduced into the Parliament yesterday, and we are moving through quickly because it is important. We have an election not far away. It will end preference whispering. It will require voters to put five numbers above the line in order of their preference – not political party preferences, not preference whisperer preferences. This change will bring us into line with those states that I have mentioned already, and nationally.

This bill will also require that the Victorian Electoral Commission publish information about new political parties, so people are informed about who they are. We should know this information, which should be publicly available. It will also build on the Labor government's political donation laws, which are stopping big money and overseas money. We had a little gap in our system earlier this year, but it will fortunately assist with that as well.

I finally want to talk about the important role that this bill will play in making sure that formality of voting is continued. The savings provisions in this bill include marking a '1', a tick or a cross only

above the line to save the vote and make sure that those preferences flow through a ticket if a ticket does exist below the line.

Fair elections, we know, are the absolute bedrock. The most important thing this Parliament can do for itself is to make sure there are free, fair and transparent elections and that Victorians are confident that their preferences flow through to the candidates that they would like to see elected. I am going to finish up and wrap up my speaking now to make sure this hastily gets through the house.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:58): I rise today to speak on the Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2026. This matter will eliminate group voting tickets. For me this is an enormously important piece of legislation to pass through this house. I do thank all who have been part of former committees and the Electoral Matters Committee in putting this recommendation forward and for there being a level of agreement amongst this Parliament's politicians that there needs to be significant reform in the way that group voting tickets are presented to voters. Most importantly, I think there are a vast number of people who agree that we cannot have a voting system where there may be deliberate misleading or vote whispering which would mislead voters about their vote going away from the sort of government or politician or parliamentarian that they were intending to elect.

This is a challenge that was investigated by the Electoral Matters Committee, and I refer to the inquiry report, which was published in July 2024, *The Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election: Volume 1 – Key Reforms*. Chapter 6 is dedicated to this issue, which is addressed within the legislation before us today, in relation to reforming the upper house voting system. The report is very good reading, and for anybody who has concerns about the removal of group voting tickets, I do recommend that they read this report. What has been identified, which the previous speaker referred to, is that there have been circumstances where the names of parties have been deliberately misleading in order to attract preferences and votes in a way that is not immediately transparent on the voting ticket. For those who recall the size of the upper house ballot paper at the 2022 election, it could not be unfurled within the ballot box. I think it was around a metre wide, if not larger. It certainly had so many different micro-parties that had been established, and people had no idea not just who they were voting for but where their preferences would end up because there simply was not sufficient time to make that investigation when you were in the booth seeking to cast your vote.

There are a number of matters that I would like to particularly highlight which I think can only be described as deceptive conduct in relation to the names of some of these parties and where the votes would end up. If you had voted 1 for the 'sack Dan Andrews' party in Western Victoria last election, your preferences went to Labor. Now, I do not think that anybody put who put a 1 in the 'sack Dan Andrews' party would ever expect that that preference would assist another Labor MP to be elected to Parliament. I am not utilising this simply as a political reason or rationale, and I am not suggesting that the Labor Party were behind that, but it certainly was an effect that the Labor Party benefited from, having a micro-party established very, very quickly before the election named the 'sack Dan Andrews' party. We do not want a democratic system whereby there can be such straightforward, blatant deception of voters trying to attract a vote which completely pushes it in the opposite direction from their intent.

As was described by a previous member, we also have had circumstances where candidates who received an exceptionally low number of primary votes have been elected to this Parliament, and they have been elected through the process of preference whispering, where deals are done behind closed doors without any scrutiny or public transparency over how those deals are made. There was certainly very concerning conduct that was identified as part of the inquiry report that I mentioned earlier through the Electoral Matters Committee which clearly demonstrated that conversations were being had with micro-parties. There were cash deals being made. There were deals indicated within those hearings that identified that there was an exchange of work by Glenn Druery to employ that person within the office of the party using electoral funds. That is nothing short of corrupt conduct. It is a recommendation within the minority report, which is put forward within the report that I mentioned

earlier, that this matter is also dealt with, and I would like to quote in relation to this minority report some aspects that were identified:

> One of the most concerning matters uncovered by the Inquiry is the use of Group Voting Tickets to deliver election outcomes that do not reflect the will of Victorian people. GVTs facilitate the election of candidates who lack genuine voter support, allowing political operatives like 'preference whisperer' Glenn Druery to game the system. This manipulation is not just a theoretical concern; it has real-world implications that erode public trust in our democratic institutions.

I stand by that comment. This reform is well overdue, and I know in previous parliaments the Electoral Matters Committee has made similar recommendations. Unfortunately, it is not legislation that has made it to this house. That is one of the reasons that I nominated to contribute my time to the Electoral Matters Committee, because I could see that this conduct was increasingly impacting on the electoral results in this state, and I believe it is nothing short of dishonest, and deliberately dishonest, conduct. I am very much supportive of the legislation before us today because I believe it will help to restore trust in our electoral system.

There is another aspect which was identified by the Electoral Matters Committee in relation to what system we go to next. It was my strong view that we should make sure that our electoral system is as simple as possible. We already have a system through the Senate federally whereby we have a level of understanding and knowledge of how our voting system operates. It has always been my view that the Victorian upper house system should replicate that of the Senate. If we can provide consistency between the Commonwealth and the Victorian systems, it will lead to Victorians being informed and able to cast a vote that reflects their intent. No matter who they are voting for, that is what we should always seek in a democratic system: we should respect the intent of the voter.

I understand that there is a matter that has not been addressed in this legislation, and there have been discussions around it, in relation to whether a tick or a cross should be deemed as a vote for or whether a cross should be deemed as a vote against. I do not believe that we should let lingering debate on this point delay the legislation that is before this house. Therefore I believe that we should continue those discussions. But it is my view that the reforms that are within the legislation before us today are the key reforms that we need to bring in before the next election to ensure that the system cannot be gamed.

We have had in the past representation by the Animal Justice Party in the seat of Western Victoria. The Animal Justice Party attracted just 1.7 per cent of the vote in Western Victoria. They leapfrogged above many other candidates who got a much, much higher amount of first preference votes. They achieved their election to the upper house simply because of preferences that were gamed and harvested through a system which should be made illegal.

Through this legislation we will ensure that when the people of western Victoria are voting, they are not inadvertently voting for someone who is seeking to shut down the agricultural industry and intensive stock industry in a region where that is our bread and butter and our economic powerhouse. We need to ensure at all times that Victorians are able to cast a vote to get the government that they want and the government they deserve. So I strongly support the legislation that is before us today, and I commend all of those who have helped make that happen through previous Electoral Matters Committee inquiries and through the current committee. I also congratulate all members and the supportive team who have made this happen. It is something that we can all leave this place and be very proud of – that we have an electoral system that actually improves democracy in our state, improves transparency, is consistent with the Senate electoral process and voting format and should result in an electoral result that reflects the intent of the voter.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (15:08): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise this afternoon and make a contribution in favour of the amendments to the Electoral Act 2002 which we are debating this afternoon, chief amongst them the abolition of group voting tickets, as well as some other consequential amendments, which I will touch on briefly. I will keep my remarks relatively brief as I

understand the urgency of this bill and the desire for the government, all things going well, to send this piece of legislation to the Legislative Council and to have it passed this week.

Some will say that this piece of legislation has been a long time coming. It is principally informed by two different reports from the Electoral Matters Committee – one being the 2022 electoral review, and also an inquiry into Victoria's upper house voting system which was undertaken last year, and I chaired that – both of which reports unequivocally recommend abolishing group voting tickets and the group voting ticket system in Victoria's upper house.

I was only present on the Electoral Matters Committee for one of those, which was the review into Victoria's upper house voting system. The evidence that we heard overwhelmingly recommended getting rid of this system in Victoria, the last jurisdiction that has been using it anywhere in Australia. As we sat there and listened to evidence, it became clear that if we were going to continue to use this system to elect upper house members here in Victoria then it would seriously call into question the integrity of our democracy and the integrity of our upper house elections. We heard countless amounts of evidence, and you do not need to hear evidence; you can just go to the election results of minor parties. Please do not get me wrong. The vast majority of upper house members from minor parties in the Legislative Council are fantastic people with good values. There are some that are a bit weird. There are some different ones.

Emma Kealy interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: I will not name names, because you and I may have a different position on that, member for Lowan. But to have members of that place elected on a fraction of a quota – let us keep in mind that a quota for a seat in the upper house of Parliament is 16.7 per cent of the vote. To have some members receiving less than 1 per cent or less than 2 per cent or less than 3 per cent and then able to take advantage of this preference-whispering or preference-harvesting system to gradually find themselves above a candidate that may be on 12 or 13 per cent of the primary vote I think is unsustainable and genuinely calls the integrity of our upper house system into question.

That report into Victoria's upper house voting system – the member for Lowan did touch on it – also talks about what is next. We are unable to legislate that at this point, but I have no doubt that that will be a topic and a point of contention in the next Parliament. I am not having a go here, member for Lowan, but, from what I understand, you just advocated for the same system as the Senate, which would be the same as the New South Wales upper house system, which is contrary to your party's submission to that inquiry. But I do agree.

Emma Kealy interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: Sorry, you were not talking about the structure of the upper house? All good. But the report, which has informed a fair bit of this legislation, does talk about a two-staged approach: get rid of group voting tickets and get rid of them now – we cannot wait, we do not have time to lose; all of the evidence said that – and then let us come back in the next term and have a conversation about what the structure of the upper house looks like, because as we know, that requires a referendum, and as we know, there is no time for a referendum between now and the state election.

I said that I would keep my remarks brief. The only other short remarks that I want to make are that in 2002 the Bracks government created this legislation and created this voting system, and they did so at the time with the best of intentions – no-one can question that. And for a period of time this system worked, there is no doubt about that. I had a quick look back at the 2006 results in the upper house from Western Victoria, and I think there were less than 10 parties on the ballot. There was a minute amount of parties on the ballot – parties, not candidates. It was not that long. If we go in now to vote in an upper house election, there is a ballot paper that stretches from here to the Acting Speaker. What that has unfortunately allowed is the gaming of these preferences for financial gain from some bloke in Western Australia, which we just could not allow to continue.

The other quick thing that I wanted to touch on, as the member for Point Cook did, is the saving provisions in this piece of legislation. The member for Point Cook and I know, as members that represent areas with significant multicultural representation, formality in our elections is incredibly important. A fundamental pillar of our democracy is making it as easy as possible for people to cast a formal vote. The saving provisions in this bill, to be able to enhance formality in our upper house elections anywhere that we can, are also incredibly important.

I will wrap up my remarks now. This is a piece of legislation that is urgent, and that is why we are trying to get it through the lower house and the upper house as quickly as we can. But it is also a piece of legislation that is fundamental to the integrity of our upper house elections and to our democracy. I commend the bill to the house.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (15:16): I rise to give enthusiastic support to this long-needed reform to our democracy. By my quick count this is the 16th time in two terms in Parliament that I have spoken about the need to abolish group voting tickets. In fact I spoke about it in my first speech back in February 2019, and I might indulge the vanity of quoting myself, where I said:

> … upper house seats were bought for as little as $50 000 by manipulation of group voting tickets. I am not sure what is more embarrassing – the manipulation of the preferences or the low price.

To think that for less than the price of a HiLux you could get yourself a four-year job on the red chairs. I thought that was just about as bad as the entirely legal but corrupt preference-trading cartel that was created to do this. In fact the 2018 election was a real embarrassment because at least 20 per cent of the seats were filled by virtue of this cash-for-preferences game. In my speech I concluded that:

> We must make it easier for voters to direct their preferences in the direction they actually prefer.

I am very glad that on 29 July, awfully close to the Victorian Electoral Commission's (VEC) August deadline, this embarrassment will soon be over. It should not have taken so many years of campaigning by democracy advocates and the Greens to get us here, but let us not examine the dentition of this particular gift horse. We are very happy that it is happening, and we commend the government for bringing this legislation.

The reality is that most Victorian voters still do not know what group voting tickets are or why they are bad for our democracy. In fact the only place they will be left will be the City of Melbourne, which I understand still uses group voting tickets. So that is a project. Let me just briefly explain. When you vote in the Legislative Council, you can vote above or below the line. Below the line you number your preferred candidates directly. Above the line in Victoria you write '1' next to your preferred party and leave the rest blank, and your preferences are then allocated according to the group voting ticket, which your party registers in advance with the VEC – basically a list of where the party directs your preferences. So Victorians, until this coming election, have not been allowed to allocate their own preferences when they vote above the line, as more than 90 per cent of voters do. That meant that most people had their preferences determined by a process they did not understand. In 2018 there was the extraordinary example of people voting for the Animal Justice Party having their preferences in at least one region wind up with the gun-loving then Liberal Democrats, now the Libertarians.

As the member for Tarneit said, and I agree, they were introduced for the right reason – to reduce informal voting – but they became increasingly controversial and were abolished from the Commonwealth, from New South Wales and more recently from WA as candidates with tiny primary votes started winning seats through preference deals. Everywhere in Australia has abolished them, and Victoria is now the only state that still has them. They produce unrepresentative results and distort voter intention, and they let parties with very few votes swap preferences among themselves to accumulate a quota. As Antony Green has observed, they can be manipulated to elect parties with just a tiny percentage of the vote. Another 2018 example is the Transport Matters Party's Rod Barton, which despite the name of the party was essentially a taxi advocate party, who won on a primary vote

of just 0.62 per cent, ahead of, as it happens, a Greens candidate who had the third-highest primary vote, of over 8 per cent.

Group voting tickets, when they were used, were published on the VEC website and displayed at polling places, but almost no-one looked at them and even fewer could make sense of the tangled preference deals behind them. In practice they are invisible and nearly impossible to evaluate before voting. Group voting tickets were also a honey pot for grifters. Ahead of the last two Victorian elections the so-called preference whisperer Glenn Druery – a chap who, as I understand it, lives on a yacht somewhere in New South Wales – organised micro-parties into preference-swapping cartels for a fee: $5000 up-front to join the network and up to $55,000 in success fees. Druery has openly said he does not care what his candidates do once elected as long as they do not touch his golden goose, the group voting tickets. Druery is an interesting character – a sort of clever, amoral person who seems to see democracy as a playground and a way to make money. The problem with this is it can be dangerous. It can leave large percentages of voters unrepresented. He has also got a talent for seeking attention, having once enrolled his cat in a swimming race for dogs in Pittwater.

The Victorian Electoral Matters Committee's 2025 final report, as the member for Tarneit explained, puts it very plainly. These tickets:

> … have led to votes being counted in ways that people do not know or understand and have undermined trust in the electoral system.

The only argument for keeping them is that they bring voices into Parliament that you would not otherwise see elected, even if those voices are wildly unrepresentative of what voters actually want, but you might as well use sortition or a lottery instead. Concerns about group voting tickets being a mechanism to keep One Nation out of Parliament have been debunked in recent blog posts by Kevin Bonham and Ben Raue, both of which were written in the last few months, and I recommend people read them. They point out the obscenely undemocratic nature of Victoria's upper house elections.

It has taken the government way too long to fix this, but hey, isn't it wonderful? Over my time as an MP I have worn floaties and a sailor hat, I have wheeled a big red chair with a $55,000 price tag in front of the media, I have called out fake parties trying to siphon votes to the far right, I have assisted in drafting a private members bill and I have campaigned in the media to the public and quietly behind closed doors to the government. The Greens have pulled every lever we can think of to try and get the government to fix a system that allows voter preferences and seats in Victoria's Parliament to be bought, and today that work is paying off. At the end of my time in Parliament I am reminded that when we stand together to fight against unjust systems, we can make change.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (15:24): It is my honour, frankly, to follow the contribution of the member for Brunswick. I know we will be hearing from him a little bit later today, but he has been a tireless advocate around this issue and a tireless advocate on a great many issues in this place. He has made a magnificent contribution to public life in Victoria. He is a man of great decency and great integrity. His contribution in this chamber will be sorely missed, and I, at a personal level, will very much miss his decency and his friendship. I thank him very much for everything he has done over the course of his contribution to public life in Victoria. He is genuinely a remarkable human being. Were the chamber comprised of more Tim Reads, I suspect there would be a lot less blueing in this joint and a lot more cooperation. So thank you, Tim.

I rise to make a couple of points around this. This is a reform that is long overdue, and I support it. And to be very clear, I think this is perhaps going to be a rare moment of absolute unanimity, at least in this chamber today. It is pretty rare to get political actors and professional politicians to agree on changes to an electoral system with such unanimity, because most changes tend to favour one group over another or whatever. But I do want to make the point that this will cruel the chances of some more minority voices in Victoria gaining a seat at the table, and we can talk about the relative merits of that.

The rough premise is that for as long as the upper house, the upper chamber, is divided into eight regions, basically the price of entry, if you like, or the threshold to get elected is going to be about 15 per cent of the primary vote in order to attract a seat in the upper house. The primary vote, I am talking about – I can see the member for Preston going, 'No, no, it's 16.67 per cent.' But yes, that is after the distribution of preferences. So we can argue the toss but, broadly speaking – call it 13, 14, 15 per cent – it is probably the primary you are going to need to –

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Will FOWLES: Sorry, six recurring. It is quite right that the member for Point Cook pulls me up. I am not going to quote it to 10 decimal places, although I might be tempted. So yes, the price of admission, if you like, to the other chamber changes as a result of this change.

This is a very good change because it gets rid of the Glenn Druery factor, the preference whispering. It is a good change because it is more accountable. It is a good change because it is more transparent. To be very clear, I support the changes, but I think we need to be abundantly clear that the better model for the other chamber, in my view, is that if you are going to have a proportionally represented house it ought to have the largest franchise that you can muster. And in my view, that ought to be a proportional representation house with a single electorate with 40 members. That would change the relevant threshold from circa 15 per cent to more like 2.5 per cent. The change in the composition, frankly, would not be that dramatic. Still it would be, after this election – I was going to say a four-party system. Still it would deliver the five-party result we will see after this election, namely Greens, Labor, Liberal, National and One Nation – God help us. But by having a multimember electorate and a single electorate, you would enfranchise some of those important voices that might only attract a primary vote of, say, 5 per cent or 6 per cent and even down to, sure, 3 or 2.5 per cent. But let us be very clear: that is still tens and tens of thousands of Victorians. If you can attract a primary vote of even 3 per cent, that is a large number of people in absolute terms. And it does not really threaten the hegemony of those five parties I have just outlined; it simply adds a bit of colour at the margins. And I think that colour has been helpful.

We can all debate the merits of whether the motoring enthusiasts in the federal Senate did much for the great democratic debate in Australia. We can debate whether the Transport Matters Party – although I quite like Rod – delivered a great deal. But I think if the threshold is lowered from 15 to 2.5 per cent, you do get more diversity. You will still have the democratic will of the people reflected. If it is a single member electorate, you will still have those five parties I have listed, all represented and likely in good numbers, subject to how much of the Nats vote gets cannibalised by One Nation. They will all be represented. But I think an unfortunate consequence, and not a necessary consequence, of this change is that you are removing the voices from future debates about the structure of that chamber. You are removing the very voices who would benefit from a change like that.

If you are only keeping the big five, if you like, in that chamber, which is an outcome of this bill, then it will be very, very hard for there to be much political momentum around having a single-member electorate in the other place. That would be my preference. That, frankly, has always been my preference. I have not been converted on the road to – what is that phrase?

A member interjected.

Will FOWLES: Damascus. Thank you. I was about to say Mecca, but that is not it. I have not been converted on the road to Damascus. I have always held the view that it ought to be as democratic as possible, and I think, notwithstanding that this is a good and democratic reform, it does have that somewhat anti-democratic outcome if you do not also reform the structure of the chamber. I appreciate time is agin us. That is a shame. I appreciate that this is still a good reform in isolation, but I would like the record to reflect that, notwithstanding the unanimity in this chamber, there is not necessarily unanimity about the ideal structure of the other place. I would like to make clear in my contribution that I think, and I am sure others do agree, either in this place or the other place, that the preferable

model is not being delivered up here. It is just a better model than what we have at the moment. Nonetheless, I commend this bill to the house.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport, Minister for Women and Girls) (15:31): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Paul Edbrooke:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:32): Acting Speaker O'Keeffe, it is lovely to have you in the chair. Whilst I have the pleasure of having 30 minutes to respond on this bill – I know it will be a challenge for me to speak for 30 minutes – I do want to congratulate you on your career and wish you well in your next endeavour.

Gabrielle Williams interjected.

Jade BENHAM: I note that the interjections from the Deputy Premier are only going to entertain me some more as I go through this bill. This is actually a very important bill. It is huge. I tell you what, given that I do have the 30 minutes, buckle up, because I love to tell a story. There are 178 clauses, 13 parts and amendments touching 11 principal acts, two of which touch on professions that are arguably – I said 'arguably', but perhaps it cannot be argued with. Real estate agents and used car salespeople are professions that are reportedly less trusted than politicians. However, they all are part of the economic circle of life, and of course this bill is about consumer protections. What should have been the first protection was consultation with the industries and the stakeholders instead of, again, as is habit with this Labor government regardless of who is the jockey at the time, the pattern of behaviour of consultelling stakeholders and those on the ground. But this is an enormous omnibus bill, like I said, with 178 clauses which reach into the purchase of a home for Victorians, the sale of a car, the rights of renters, the finances of owners corporations, the security of older Victorians, particularly those who live in residential land lease parks or part 4A parks, the regulation of conveyancers and estate agents and the never-ending fight against illicit tobacco.

There are parts to this bill which of course we support – of course we support consumer protections. But there is also evidence, as you read through this bill, that it is what I have called a Swiss cheese bill. It is full of holes everywhere. The size of the bill is not evidence of its strength; it is still full of holes. There are serious failures, and there would be serious unintended consequences if this bill was to go through as it is. I will say from the outset we will not oppose this bill in the Assembly, in this place, but there are some amendments that will need to take place in the upper house. I must say that working with the Minister for Consumer Affairs and his staff has been constructive to this point. However, I am still going to kick the government, because this bill is poorly written, poorly drafted and it is a Swiss cheese bill full of holes that will have unintended consequences for Victorians, some of which will make it longer and harder for people to purchase a home.

It will see the decimation of Victoria's auctions and the real estate market, particularly in Melbourne. The disintegration of auctions in this state started about 10 years ago. I will get to my first story time. I know the member for Point Cook loves my stories. I am not going to talk about more Swiss cheese because that would require wine at this point of the day. Maybe I am a bit strange, but the fact is when I was a much younger city dweller – I lived in the city for six years or so – it was kind of a sport for us as young women to go to the odd auction of a weekend. We would quite often spend Saturday

mornings going to auctions. Mind you, my best friend was and still is a conveyancer, so there was an interest there. But the amount of things that you learned about auctions and the property market was remarkable, and we made quite an event out of it. It was a bit of a sport, and we quite enjoyed it. That is something that is not unique to Victoria or to Melbourne. Other jurisdictions do not have as many. In WA, as an example, Perth might have one or two auctions a week. It used to be something that was part of the fabric of living in Melbourne, those weekend auctions. The amendments that are made in this bill could quite possibly kill that once and for all. It has certainly died off a lot since we used to consider it a sport 10 years ago.

I will get to it in more detail in a little while, but when we talk about consumer protections, we know there are bad actors within the real estate industry and within the motor industry. There are bad actors in every industry. I often say, rather than just keep bringing in regulations and more legislation, what about enforcing the rules that are already there? Because that certainly does not appear to be happening at the moment. That would be one way to weed out the bad actors. The unintended consequences in this bill could certainly empower bad actors within the real estate industry in particular.

In consumer law the layers should be strong consultation – absent here – and careful drafting. A lot of this, like I said, has holes in it. The drafting leaves a lot up to interpretation and is vague. It also should stand up to proper parliamentary scrutiny. There should be clear regulations, capable enforcement and a realistic understanding of how people on the ground and markets will respond. I have little faith that there is that understanding of how the market will respond. People will respond later, but the market will respond immediately, because this bill is being looked at by the industries that it affects very, very, very closely.

I have done the consultation. I have had six weeks to consult with stakeholders within industries that this bill affects. There have certainly been patterns and concerns that have formed a consistent view, particularly across the real estate industry, which includes conveyancers. I am not sure if you know this, but seldom do real estate agents and conveyancers see eye to eye, but they seem to on this, which is odd, which tells me that there is a big gap here.

It would be lovely if it was a utopian solution, but that is never going to happen. One hole within this bill might be manageable, two maybe repairable, but when there are so many, it is the home buyer, the renter, the older resident, the apartment owner who is part of an owners corporation, the person buying a family car – these are the people that are going to fall through those holes. Yesterday I observed that changing the face of a government does not change the problems that Victoria is facing, and the same principle applies here. You cannot change the label on a bill to consumer protection when it does not fill the holes in the design.

As I said, the Liberals and the Nationals certainly will not oppose this bill in the Assembly. There are important protections in it, and we will not stand in the way of that, but neither will we pretend that good intentions make defective legislation safe. We support the objective, but we challenge the architecture which this has been built on. So in the other place we will certainly be seeking to move some targeted amendments that will protect consumers but also close some of the holes that this government has left open and has a history of doing so and then having to go back and fix up its issues a little bit later on. As I often say, if we are going to do something, can we do it right the first time and make life easier in fact for Victorians instead of making it harder or choking industries with bureaucratic red tape and regulation?

I was going to say, 'I will start,' but I have been going 10 minutes. The Minister for Consumer Affairs has walked into the chamber now, so I can share my thoughts with him, although I have shared a fair amount already. Let me be clear: of course we support consumer protections. This is not an argument against that. We support stronger protections, obviously, for victim-survivors of family and personal violence, and this bill prohibits discrimination in access to rental accommodation. It strengthens the capacity of VCAT to assign liability to perpetrators and improves protections across residential rentals,

rooming houses and those part 4A parks, which I could go to in much more detail, but the remaining 20-odd minutes may not be enough if I go into that kind of detail.

There are all sorts of consumer protections in there that we do support, of course. We support stronger trust account oversights for conveyancers and estate agents, but we do not support the repeal of section 27. Section 27 offers benefits to particularly buyers to be able to buy a new house. I could go into a lot more detail here.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Okay, I will. Section 27, as I would hope the minister knows but I cannot be sure, allows for the early release of deposit funds. Those deposit funds could be used to put towards the deposit on a new property should the vendors of the property that was sold need to move instead of going to get bridging finance. It makes things much easier. It also allows for the early release of real estate or marketing fees and the real estate agent's commission if in fact the vendor agrees to all of those things. It allows for that, so it is beneficial. Conveyancers, yes, have many issues with it. But again, if there are bad actors using section 27 inappropriately, enforce the protections that are already there, and we will get to that with reserve price quoting as well. We support stronger trust account oversight for conveyancers and estate agents.

We obviously support modernising odometer offences so that they capture digital as well. However, there have been concerns raised with me, particularly from, again, another body, the Australian Automotive Dealer Association, who are very concerned. The unintended consequences of making used car sales difficult is that it will potentially move used car sales to unregulated spaces like Facebook Marketplace and Gumtree and all of those wonderfully entertaining spaces with no regulation, meanwhile making it so hard for licensed motor car traders in Victoria to do business. Business is already hard enough in this state. We understand that. We need to find a balance.

We also of course strongly support decisive action against illicit tobacco and the organised criminal networks behind it. We have long maintained that. I know those on the other side flip and flop about what they want to do about organised crime in this state – but we will wait and see. Victorians have seen firebombings. They have seen alleged extortion, intimidation and all sorts of violence linked to this illegal trade. A black market emerges by necessity a lot of the time. The excise on tobacco in this country – and it was a health solution, we understand that – has priced cigarettes out of the affordability really of the smoker. And to be fair, depending on which data you look at, has it worked? Yes, we would have thought early on it worked. It has now gone too far that way and has created and allowed space for a black market to emerge. There are solutions, but that is federal jurisdiction, so I am not going to spend too long on that. But in this bill police and Tobacco Licensing Victoria need practical powers to close unlawful premises and deal safely with seized stock, so there are some issues there that we will have to look at carefully in the other place as well. There are some sensible technical provisions dealing with seized unsafe goods and serious misconduct in debt collection, domestic building contract variations, retirement village entry payments and access to VCAT. Like I said, there are 178 clauses, so this was a doozy for my first bill to present as Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs.

I did say that the first productive layer of any bill should be consultation with stakeholders and with those who understand how these amendments will impact the market and how they will impact the people on the ground. It should be consultative of the people who work within these systems every single day and understand them intricately, because they do not have a veto over reform. In fact if you speak to these stakeholders – and I have spoken to many. The Real Estate Institute of Victoria have been very insightful. In fact your local real estate agents, whether they are a member of the REIV or not, whether they are large independent firms, whether they are part of a huge network like Ray White or whether they are sole operators, all have an understanding of how it works and how changes will impact the market. A lot of them want to see change and have things tidied up. For example, section 32 statements – in this bill we need to have a section 32 with the buyer for 14 days. The solution is

obviously to make the section 32 available before the campaign launches. That solves that problem; it cleans it up. This has come about from consultation with not only the REIV but, again, independent and sole operator real estate agents who are not members of the REIV. They agree it would be a much more streamlined process if that section 32 was available before campaign launch. It tidies the whole thing up. That is not what this bill does. It makes it much more convoluted and drags out the whole process for another two weeks.

I have spoken about section 27 already. I will speak about the reserve price. This is one of those things. I will die on this hill, Minister, because, as I said earlier, attending auctions used to be a sport. In fact it still is, but it is a lot harder to find auctions on a Saturday morning these days.

Paul Edbrooke: Why is that?

Jade BENHAM: Because the changes that have been made thus far have meant that a lot of properties, both metro and in the regions, are being sold off market or are being sold by expression of interest, which is what this will do here.

A price guide is already a requirement anyway, but the publication of a reserve price and the inability to change that reserve price within that seven days does not allow the vendor – and the vendor should be the owner of this auction process – to react to the market on any given day. Anyone that knows anything about real estate or auctions understands that on any given day the market can do anything. Sometimes that reserve price will be well under what the property actually sells for, because a property – or anything – is only worth what someone is willing to pay for it. So if the vendor cannot react to the market on any given day – for example, if it is very clear on auction day that that reserve will not be met – the vendor then cannot adjust their reserve price to a lower reserve price. They have to pass it in at auction, and most of the time you do not want to pass it in at auction; you want it to sell that day. But the vendor then cannot adjust their reserve price downward or upward, they have to go away for seven days and then come back. They are never going to go back to auction, and this is what I am talking about, empowering those bad actors within the industry to do things behind closed doors.

There are many benefits of an auction, and for the government to say that we do not want people attending an auction if they clearly cannot afford it – there is a price guide there, and you should know what your budget is. If you have done your due diligence, you should know what your budget is. So the price guide is already there. The benefit of an auction is that when you are there, you can see your competition. You can physically eyeball your competition. You understand how many competitors you might have, which is handy because some of those bad actors or real estate agents – who are less trusted than politicians – if they are not at an auction and if you make an offer on a property before or within that seven-day period, they can say, 'Oh, but hang on, I've got six other people who are going to offer 10 grand above that,' and how are you to know? Unless you have a remarkable BS filter like I do you are not to know, because you cannot see your competition.

What an auction allows is that you can physically see if there are any other registered bidders. You can physically see your competition and what their reaction is to the market on any given day. That is one of the –

Members interjecting.

Jade BENHAM: The member for Morwell is entirely convinced; I am convinced of that. But you have visibility over your competition and you can understand where things are at. Also, if it does not reach the reserve price or if it is passed in at auction, you can then go in and make a conditional offer, unlike an unconditional sale within an auction. But it gives you visibility.

What will happen here, I have no doubt, is that rather than going through the rigmarole that this bill will implement into legislation and having to publish that reserve price –

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Well, transparency comes with the price guide. What will happen here is a complete lack of transparency. What will happen is real estate agents will move behind closed doors, they will do all those negotiations and everything will move to an expression of interest sale. Auctions in Melbourne will end, and like I said, the auction industry has been dying in Melbourne for about 10 years now, so this will be the final nail in the coffin. I honestly think a better consumer protection is actual transparency, where you can see your competition at a sale, not moving it behind closed doors to boardroom auctions or to expressions of interest. And I will die on that hill. Anyone within the industry and anyone that has an interest in the property market can see this happening from a long, long way away.

I had better get to some other points as well, but this is just one of those things that I talk about, with unintended consequences of a big omnibus bill. And like I said, there are a lot of points in here – rental protections, protections of those going through family violence et cetera that we support, but there are a lot of holes that need to be filled. That is one of those. Section 27 is another one.

Section 32 is an easy fix. In fact I was talking about the part 4A parks today and land lease communities, gated communities. They could be parks. There is a bit of inconsistency within various parts of legislation. Planning is another one where there are inconsistencies, whether it is titled a park or a site, and this could ultimately increase the cost of affordable housing for particularly older Victorians who are living in some of these parks or who have their dwellings on the land. Let me explain what a land lease residential community is for you. The minister should be interested; it is his bill. Essentially the owner of the dwelling or the person living in the house owns that building, but they lease the land that it is on. I understand this, again, intricately because we have something in Mildura called college lease, which was set up by the Chaffey brothers when Mildura was settled. It was supposed to fund an ag college. We never got that – now SuniTAFE actually pay rent to the college lease. But it does help our schools in the region boost up some of that government funding that they do not get. A lot of people in Mildura are very thankful for college lease, but there are farms on college lease and there are houses, and in fact a lot of the health precinct in Mildura is built on college lease land. So you do not actually own the land or anything underneath it; you own everything on top of it. That is what a part 4A park or residence is. Did I get that pretty well right? The minister does not know. There you go. This is why we are in the situation that we are in and why I had a 15-page bill report on this bill.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Jade BENHAM: See – he does not understand. Do I need to make any more points? No. Do you want me to draw a picture? I even have pictures, Minister. I even drew little diagrams because I know – the member for Narracan is not here; the member for Morwell might appreciate this, though. There are different issues with that. There will be some technical amendments coming in the other place. There are all sorts of issues here, but the bill contains, like I said, a large majority of measures that we can support, so opposing here would not help anyone. It would not help any of those consumer protections, I appreciate that, and I can compromise, Minister. I am not above compromise.

But it also will make it longer and harder for Victorians to purchase a home should they want to, and then the consequence of that is that it will push rents up. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics and real estate data, after the last 10 years and the population growth and 150 residential tenancy reforms, rents have gone up 40 per cent. The population increase has then also meant that the vacancy rate in Victoria has plummeted. This is basic supply and demand. Because of the increased costs that have been put on property owners, lumped on one after the other after the other – and some we supported; everyone wants to see homes kept in good order, and there are some minimal standards of course that should be met – with land tax, increasing council rates and every other cost that goes on to a rental provider, that means that rents have increased. It is as simple as that. It is basic supply and demand. Then when the population is increasing, there are less rentals available. Obviously it means rents increase. The data from the last 10 years paints a very clear picture that rents have gone up, the population has gone up and the vacancy rate has gone down, so there are less rentals available. People

have taken them off the market because, particularly for mum-and-dad investors that might have one home that they rent out on the long-term rental market, it has got too hard for them.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Matters of public importance

Road maintenance

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (16:01): The Speaker has accepted a statement from the member for Gippsland South proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

> That this house notes the appalling state of Victorian roads and condemns the Labor government for more than a decade of cuts to road maintenance, neglect and waste.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:01): This is the issue du jour, particularly if you are in regional Victoria. It is the issue that is on everybody's lips. It has been, if you are a country MP, for a long time. But I have got to say as I travel around the state and as I talk to colleagues, possibly even some on the other side, they are all saying how much this is an issue for Victorians. Our roads are in an absolutely appalling state. It is absolutely appalling what they have got to, and the number of potholes is out of control.

I will preface my comments with this: we do use potholes somewhat as a proxy for the state of the road, because it is not just about potholes. It is about cracking, rutting, uneven surfaces and patching over patching over patching over patching. It is about broken shoulders. It is about the shoulders not being graded. It is about drains not being cleared out. It is about vegetation growing through the sides of the road, not just grass. Particularly in the situation where there are roadside barriers, there are often saplings and sometimes even small trees coming through the sides of the roads. It is graffiti, and it is graffiti not just on the roadsides but on the freeways in Melbourne that people are talking about constantly. The rubbish, the neglect – it is symbolic. It is symbolic of the state that Victoria has come to, and that is what people are saying back to us. That is what I am hearing. People are saying our roads have deteriorated just like our state has. And it is extraordinary that we have a government that is continuing to blame the state of the roads on the weather.

Two weeks ago I went up to Bendigo on a Sunday, and I drove up the Calder Highway. The Calder Highway had multiple sections where the entire left-hand lane was closed, in some cases for a couple of kilometres, because they were actually filling potholes or they had filled potholes. There were signs up that simply said, 'Potholes ahead next 20 km. Storm damage.'

Roma Britnell interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: Storm damage, member for South-West Coast. Who is thinking that the government is unable to build a road that will cope with a storm? I would actually challenge the government to explain what storm that was. No question, about a month ago in northern Victoria there was a fair bit of rain. There was actually quite a bit of rain, but I do not think it was storm damage. As the member for South-West Coast indicated, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia have cyclones and monsoons. We have got places in the Northern Hemisphere that have temperatures from minus 50 through to 30-plus degrees, and snow and ice, and their roads can cope with the weather. Indeed the Romans made roads 2000 years ago, some of which in Europe are still being used.

Nathan Lambert interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: Some people would say, member for Preston, 'What have the Romans ever done for us?' Well, they could build a road bloody better than the Victorian government does. That is what absolutely astounds me. Some of those Roman roads are still in use, and the Romans –

Jade Benham interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: They have not got potholes, and the Romans were not blaming the weather. That is what it has come to in this state. It is simply extraordinary that our roads have got so bad. I was coming down the Goulburn Valley Highway about three weeks ago on my way back from Shepparton, that wonderful city of Shepparton, and I saw some horrendous potholes. Again, it was just after that bit of rain that we had. When I say 'bit of rain', it was a maximum of 80 to 100 mils. It was not a monsoon, it was not a flood, it was just normal winter rain – a good drop, but normal winter rain. The potholes on the Goulburn Valley Highway, which is duplicated and almost freeway standard, were extraordinary. I stopped, got out, took some photos and did a little socials video – as we do these days, because it is the thing that goes so good on socials because everyone is sick of it. I went a bit further along, about another kilometre down the road, and there were some more potholes. I thought, 'Well, pull over. These are even better' – as in worse. I pulled over, and there was a car there. Young Tanisha, who was a P-plater, was on her way from Shepparton. She was actually going to a job interview. She had hit a pothole and just smashed her tyre to smithereens.

A member interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: A very common story indeed. As luck would have it, we saw her there and went over. She had her dad with her. She is actually originally from Singapore, and her dad was out visiting from Singapore. She was on the phone to the prospective employer she was going to see to say that she was going to be late because she had hit a pothole and blown a tyre. We fixed it up for her, changed her tyre and sent her on her way. But that is a story –

Jade Benham interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: I would not have done that for you, member for Mildura, because you are a competent woman and you would have done it yourself. But in the days around that, the Leader of the Opposition and I went to the seat of Euroa, and we drove from Mangalore to Creightons Creek. Only about 20 k's of that is on the Hume Freeway. In the time that I was there on a Sunday afternoon I saw five cars pulled over on the side of the road, changing tyres, in about 20 k's, including one that was being put on the back of a truck, so I suspect it had blown more than one tyre or the vehicle had been damaged so badly that it literally had to be towed. This is the story we are hearing repeatedly around the state everywhere we go.

Jade Benham: It is the start of a new tunnel.

Danny O'BRIEN: You are stealing my thunder, member for Mildura. But when I posted the pictures of the Goulburn Valley Highway, one of the best comments was from someone who stated that it was not a pothole, it was just the start of a new Labor government tunnel. I thought that was actually probably pretty prescient, because the potholes are that big you could almost drive a train through them. It is out of control.

The response from the government every year is to say, 'We've got this big road maintenance blitz.' I have outlined here in the chamber before and literally read out six or seven years in a row the 'Road maintenance blitz to fix our roads' that the government does. The government is claiming to be spending $1.04 billion on road maintenance in the 2026–27 year. What they do not point out – and we pointed this out through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, where the member for Mildura asked questions on my behalf in the hearings. She put in a few good ones of her own as well, because she is a very intelligent MP. The government might claim to be spending more, but it is actually doing less, and this is the thing that is so hard to comprehend. The government puts its headline figures out there and says, 'It was $964 million two years ago. It was $976 million this year. Now it is $1.04 billion' – record spending, they always say. But they are actually doing less. If the government are actually spending that money, what are they spending it on? Because the roads are actually going downhill; they are actually getting worse.

The budget papers reveal that the government has reduced targets for regional roads, and I say 'regional roads' because obviously as a Nationals MP that is my focus, but it is also some 75 per cent

of the road network – a road network, I might say, that at 23,000 kilometres is the state government's single biggest asset. For the last couple of years, in 2021–22 the government was resurfacing or rehabilitating 11.8 million square metres of road. I will say it again: resurfacing or rehabilitating 11.8 million square metres of road. The budget this year is just 2.9 million square metres of road. That is a reduction of 75 per cent.

This is where the government's excuses are catching up with themselves, because they said a couple of years ago, after the 2022 floods, that they had to stop doing a lot of the resealing and resheeting of our roads and focus on rehabilitation, on patching, so they introduced a new performance measure in the budget for patching. Now they are saying that they are going back to doing more of the resurfacing, but the figures have still gone backwards. Indeed, on the patching alone, in this year's budget the amount of road patching they will do is forecast to plunge from 556,000 square metres two years ago to just 76,000 square metres this year, an 86 per cent drop. Patching is going down, resurfacing is going down, resealing is going down and rehabilitation is going down, but the cost continues to go up. It is only a Labor government that could do less but still manage to spend more.

Jade Benham interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: It is Labor maths, member for Mildura. Over the 12 years of this government this has been a particular recurring theme. Instead of fixing the roads, the government's solution is to reduce the speed limit. We have seen it time and time again. In some cases you will actually see a permanent sign that says 'Rough road ahead, 80'. Instead of fixing it, they just put up a sign. We now have, according to the budget this year, 185 sections of road subject to a 'pavement in poor condition' management plan. In other words, they have not fixed the road. They have put up a sign and maybe some flashing lights and just left the road as it is.

This is an appalling state, and it is galling to Victorians and particularly to regional Victorians when you compare the state of our roads to the $15 billion of taxpayers money lost to corruption, stolen by crooks and bikies on the Big Build. Just think what that could have done for our roads. We would be able to dig up the Romans and get them back to do some with the amount of money we would have had if that money had not been wasted and we could put it towards roads. It is an outrage. That is just the corruption. We know for a fact from the budget papers that over $40 billion has been wasted in cost blowouts on the Big Build, whether it is the North East Link, the Metro Tunnel or the West Gate Tunnel. All of these have had multimillion dollar blowouts while we are driving around on goat tracks in the country, because this government could not be bothered to actually prioritise the basics. The single biggest asset the Victorian government owns is our road network, and we are not maintaining it.

There are a lot of general rules of thumb in road construction and maintenance. One of the general rules of thumb for bitumen roads is that you want to reseal them about every 10 to 15 years, so you want to be doing about 10 per cent of the network per year. You want to put that lot of bitumen down and another load of stones to keep a seal on the road. That seal is important. The bitumen is a waterproof seal; it stops the water getting in. When water gets in, that is what creates potholes. Vehicles go over it, particularly trucks, and that is why you spray seal. You also make sure that the water is not getting stuck on the side of the road. You grade the side of the road to allow water to get away. You make sure you have got a camber and you have got a roadside, the road shoulder, and gutters and drains, table drains, where the water can get away. That is not happening.

Jade Benham interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: One of the things that the member for Mildura points out is that when there are weeds or grass growing on the side of the road – and you can see it on thousands of kilometres of road across the state – it actually sits higher than the road. And what happens when it rains? That water then sits on the side of the road, eventually seeps in, subs under the road from the side, and that is when you get the surface breaking. Potholes form and you get a shocking road surface.

As I said, you should be doing about 10 per cent of the network a year. If you do that, you are resealing roughly every 10 or 15 years. Estimates are we are now down to 1.5 to 3 per cent of the network a year, and that is no surprise. Two years ago, in the 2023–24 summer season, the government did zero resealing. It did not do any. It was in a ministerial brief provided under freedom of information.

Jade Benham interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: The government's own numbers: it did zero. In the next year it did not much more, and in recent years it still is not doing anything. This is an issue that needs a solution, and the solution is a fresh start. The solution is a fair share for regional Victoria. We have announced our commitment to delivering $5 billion over four years to actually eliminate a million potholes – not just patch them so they come back again in three months time but actually eliminate them – and get back to doing that preventative maintenance that we need, get back to the resealing, get back to doing the roadside grading, cleaning out the drains and all of those issues. We will establish Better Roads Victoria to have technical and engineering expertise within the department to make sure that we are doing the roads properly.

This is important. It is not just about money; it is about doing the basics, and this government has failed to do the basics. We have spent our time in opposition learning and understanding and developing the policy, and we have a plan. We have a plan that will actually get our roads back under control. I warn Victorians: it is not going to happen overnight – indeed I think it will get worse before it gets better – but the Nationals and Liberals have got a plan to fix our roads, because they have been so badly neglected by this Labor government.

John LISTER (Werribee) (16:16): I note the previous speaker said that the opposition has spent quite a bit of time in opposition considering their plan or policy or whatever glossy brochure they decide to put out next to again promise something that they cannot deliver, because in the end all they can deliver are cuts, not only for metropolitan Melbourne but for regional Victoria. But I will get to that in just a moment, because in the tradition of the member for Essendon, I do just want to take us to a little bit of ancient history here – and no, I am not talking about the last time the Liberals were in government. The member for Gippsland South mentioned the Romans, but I would like to mention the Greeks and go to the etymology of the word 'asphalt'. It comes from the ancient Greek term 'asphaltos' which refers to a sticky, dark substance, because of course asphalt was something that was commonly occurring in nature and was accessible to those ancient civilisations. It is derived from two words put together, which is quite common in ancient Greek: the word 'a', which means 'not', and 'sphallein', which means 'to fall or slip' – that is, to make firm or secure, which is all this MPI is about for those opposite. To make firm or secure the threats that they are facing from One Nation out in the regions, they choose to chew up this good Parliament's time with an MPI like this.

As someone who represents a peri-urban community where we have some regional roads as well as metropolitan roads – in fact one of the busiest metropolitan roads in the Princes Freeway, running right through the middle of my electorate – I know a lot about roads. What we are doing on this side when it comes to our roads has been quite a common feature since I have been elected in this place. In fact Labor is spending more on roads than any government in Victoria's history – $1.04 billion this year alone, with 70 per cent of that funding going to regional Victoria. This MPI is a conservative amnesia when it comes to the cuts that they did when they were in government. 450 VicRoads staff were cut when they were in government. In only that short four years they were cut, so this is their amnesia dressed up as outrage.

When we are talking about this year's budget, we have invested over a billion dollars in fixing potholes and resurfacing roads. But I do just want to return to some of the technicalities of what resurfacing means. Of course, when we resurface, we have a few different options. Not too long ago I got to join some of the road crews down in Werribee South and in central Werribee, where, as part of our western roads upgrade program, they are doing resurfacing works on all our major arterial roads throughout Wyndham. I joined them, and I got to speak to the engineers there that night about the way they do it.

There are a few different choices of asphalt that they can use. First of all, there is hot mix asphalt, which of course is all about creating a top surface on that road that helps make it more impermeable to water. As the very learned member for Gippsland South observed, water and traffic are the two main factors behind the creation of potholes on our road.

The other particular form of asphalt that we use on our sites is warm mix asphalt. It is similar to hot mix, as you can presume, but it is slightly cooled down. It is put to that lower temperature because it means that we can add things to it to help create more of a base, and it makes it more workable during construction, which means that we can use it particularly to create the camber in the road, which is something the crews were showing me that night down at Duncans Road. Finally, the other form of asphalt that we use on these projects is cold mix asphalt. That means that throughout the whole process it is not heated up. This is particularly important as well because it can be transported easily and laid at a low temperature, particularly in some of those patching works that the member for Gippsland South observed are happening across the state.

When it comes to the maintenance of our roads this budget also invests $102.6 million in other road projects statewide. The vast majority of that funding is going to projects in regional Victoria, but some of that portion went to immediate works over the last few months in metropolitan Melbourne, including works on the Princes Freeway through Wyndham and the western suburbs, a very important stretch of road indeed. I observed over the break how the opposition spoke about how they have had, what is it now, 12 years to come up with a plan. They are still yet to come up with many plans for the west of Victoria, and particularly the western suburbs, but one of the plans they came up with was around raising the speed limit along the Princes Freeway to 110 kilometres an hour – an interesting proposition and certainly something that we see on our other freeways across Victoria. But in particular, the thing that I took note of in the opposition's announcement is that they wanted to start the 110 kilometres an hour along the freeway from Laverton North. Laverton North through the Point Cook bend and ultimately through the Maltby Bypass in Werribee is one of the most dangerous stretches of road in Victoria. For a saving of 4 minutes between Laverton North, Kororoit Creek Road and the turn-off at the ring-road in Geelong, you would increase the stopping distance that it takes, particularly in bad weather, by nearly 200 metres. This risk is unacceptable.

Richard Riordan interjected.

John LISTER: If the member for Polwarth expects road crash rescue crews at Werribee fire brigade to be responding to such a risk all because of some glossy brochure plan they come up with, shame on them, because we already respond to some of the most dangerous accidents as a result of speed.

Members interjecting.

John LISTER: Speed – substance abuse on our roads. The safety that comes on our roads comes from people doing the right things, but it also comes from the way that we set up and control our roads and manage them, and one of those key ways is through our speed limits. To put that risk forward to our community in Wyndham is absolutely deplorable, and it shows that they absolutely do not understand the risks on the Princes Freeway. It is shameful, and for the member for Polwarth to want to shave 4 minutes off his drive home – and I understand he really wants to get back to Colac; it is a lovely part of the world, with lots of families down there – at the risk of –

Richard Riordan interjected.

John LISTER: If the member for Polwarth wants to take that risk on behalf of Victorians to increase that speed through our stretch of freeway, going around the Point Cook bend at 110 kilometres an hour, goodness gracious me, there is something wrong with that side over there. They clearly do not understand our local roads, particularly out there in the western suburbs.

I am going to return to the issue of road maintenance, particularly in Wyndham – something that I take particularly to heart because my predecessor, the former member for Werribee, put together a plan for across Wyndham as well as into parts of Hobsons Bay. It is a project with Netflow, the western roads upgrade, in a $1.8 billion partnership to do a few different projects: 120 kilometres of new traffic lanes; 62 intersection upgrades; five new and eight upgraded bridges, including the one at Duncans Road; 188 kilometres of roads resurfaced under this program; 300 services and utilities relocated; and 60 kilometres of new cycling paths. Most of these capital works were completed in the first few years of the project.

But of course Netflow will continue to do that work as they maintain that network over the next 20 years. During the capital phase of the project 4000 equivalent full-time jobs were created, with around 2200 for local businesses supplying to that project, and local businesses still supply to Netflow with their road maintenance projects today. In fact across all our arterial roads in the Werribee electorate we have seen road resurfacing works just in the last 12 months, including significant stretches along Ballan Road and Synnot Street as well as Princes Highway past the police station. These are really important works to people out in Werribee because these are heavily used roads not only for commuters going to and from the Princes Freeway back up to Wyndham Vale but also for our truck companies. We have a lot of logistics movements through Werribee, including the quarries out the back at Manor using our roads like Ballan Road.

This Netflow project – again, I had the benefit of going to visit them. They have a lot of really innovative ways to engage with the community, to show them not only what their work is but also how they are constantly monitoring and maintaining the roads in real time. Every week they have crews that drive the entire length of their controlled network, the arterial road network, monitoring for issues, including things like potholes, soft edges and where the road surface has been reduced. What they do from that is put together a maintenance plan so that every month they have crews going through and making sure that they are fixed and sealed. The other thing that they do too is every couple of weeks they go through and fix the soft edges along roads like Ballan Road and Princes Highway.

The important thing about this is they also deal with the issue of rubbish dumping along our roads in Wyndham. One of the things that I have been able to do recently, particularly at the top of Ballan Road, where we have seen an increase in illegal rubbish dumping, most usually by private developers and companies on nearby housing estates, is work with Netflow and council to put together a plan to help monitor that rubbish and try and get rid of that rubbish quicker and sooner after it is dumped and to provide that information to council and EPA for prosecution, because this is what happens when you have Labor governments that invest in road maintenance, particularly in our western suburbs.

The other thing about the Netflow project is that they also provide real-time data to Transport Victoria, and that then gets integrated into the system. I had the pleasure of visiting them last year with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, just before the West Gate Tunnel opened actually, to see how that integrated system works with the data that they are getting from the crews as they drive along the roads and how that then feeds in with the road traffic camera network that we have set up through Transport Victoria.

There are a lot of really important things that this project has delivered for our community, not only local jobs and better arterial roads. It has also meant that we have been able to help Wyndham City Council to complete a lot of that work on council roads. I think this comes to one of the issues that those opposite often do their reels around, standing very close to traffic on the edge of the road as they do their reel and try and spark that outrage online again. When they go and do that, one of the issues that we see is a lot of those C roads that they go to are council-managed roads. I acknowledge that some councils are not necessarily flush, particularly some of those down in the south-west, but there are programs in place to help support councils with monitoring those roads and finding the right places where that work needs to be done.

Of course we are working too with the heavy vehicle register and police around whether or not people are overloading through those areas, because one of the key issues that we have had over the past few years is a significant increase in freight use along roads, particularly in regional communities. It is an unavoidable fact, particularly with harvest season, and as someone who lived and worked up in Dimboola for a few years, I totally understand that harvest season is usually when we see that real increase in traffic on our roads. Part of the maintenance program that we have is around making sure that those arterial roads but also those feeder roads that are managed by council are monitored and are repaired as needed.

It is really important to remember that on this side it is about projects and practical solutions when it comes to these sorts of things, not just rhetoric or bluster on social media. The last time those opposite had their chance in the City of Wyndham there was one road project delivered in four years. That one road project was a set of lights, and admittedly it was very, very needed, just down there at the top of Point Cook and the intersection with Werribee. It is a very important set of lights there. However, in that same four years they also approved nearly 30,000 dwellings in one block next to Ballan Road, with no plan to do anything about Ballan Road. Now this government here is doing the huge Ballan Road upgrade, which is underway at the moment. Thank you to everyone out there for their patience as we upgrade that road. The member for Melton knows it quite well, coming from down our way. The thing about that, though, is that recently I saw the Liberal candidate for Werribee saying, 'For whoever approved this estate right next to Ballan Road, why didn't they have plans to do anything about the road and upgrade it?' I was like, 'Very good question. You should ask the member for Bulleen, because he was the one who approved that subdivision in Ballan Road with zero plans for infrastructure.' Do we expect those opposite to care or to have any kind of plan? They are more than happy to fast-track housing in the outer-western suburbs, but they have no plan for infrastructure. They have no plan for any kind of infrastructure in the western suburbs. This is the hypocrisy of those opposite: faux outrage mixed with zero actual plans.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (16:31): Listening to the rather bizarre contribution from the member for Werribee, it must dishearten Victorians enormously to think that on the day we are having a debate about the appalling state of Victoria's roads a member of the government is proud of the fact that using slower and slower road speed signs is the solution to keeping Victorians safe. They are not investing in our roads but investing in signage, particularly variable signage, to make sure that people, particularly those in regional Victoria, can spend not just hours longer but so much extra time in the car. Right across the electorate of Polwarth there are whole sections of road that are down to 40 kilometres, then down to 60 kilometres and then up to 80. These are built as 100-kilometre-an-hour roads, yet this government is proud. We have got members of this government proud of the fact that slowing people down is a solution to road safety, because they cannot afford to maintain roads to an adequate level.

South-west Victoria, where Polwarth sits proudly, is considered the worst road network in the state. It is bad because we are lucky enough to have pretty good average rainfall down our way, and with rainfall comes the need for government to invest money in drainage and to invest money in roadside clearing and maintenance. It also requires the government to return to the good old days when Victorian road management was roughly on a 10-year replacement cycle for road surfaces. This government has failed that appallingly. Now on many of our important rural and regional roads we have blown out to a 30-year cycle, and in fact in years 2021–22 and 2022–23 there was almost no investment in regional roads at all. There was a massive 90 per cent cut to the amount of resurfacing and maintenance of our country roads. It is simply not good enough.

What is the legacy of allowing that wonderful 10-year cycle that ensured we had roads where you could drive at 100 kilometres an hour? The legacy of not having that means that we so often now see our roads lowered down to 80 kilometres, 60 kilometres or 40 kilometres. In fact the local police in the Polwarth electorate have made it really clear to me that on the dual-lane carriageway between Colac and Geelong they no longer enforce the road rule of keeping to the left unless overtaking,

because the left-hand lane is now so fundamentally dangerous. It is riddled with craters and potholes. In fact we famously had an accident about three months ago where a cheese truck overturned, spilling cheese all over the eastbound carriageway of the said Princes Highway, with the road closed for nearly 24 hours while they picked up all the wrapped-up cheese to put it on a truck heading in the opposite direction in the westbound lanes, only for it to come to grief on a pothole and spill the cheese all over the other side of the road. That is how bad road conditions and maintenance are in south-west Victoria.

The budget figures continue to tell the truth about why Victorians are continuing to feel that their roads in regional Victoria are totally and utterly neglected. The 2026–27 budget revealed Labor has reduced targets for regional road resurfacing and rehabilitation by more than 75 per cent. That comes off declines of nearly 90 per cent. This government continues to cut back the investment in keeping Victorian roads safe. Not only does that cutback contribute to potholes and not only does it contribute to the lack of edging; it also contributes to the lack of white lines and clear signage on our roads, which become very difficult at this time of year, with wet and cold and dark nights, when you simply cannot see the white lines on the edges or in the centre of the road.

But more concerning is just the general maintenance of our roads. With the proliferation of poorly kept wire rope barriers, which string most of our main highways across the state, there is now a mixture of wire rope barriers and pink safety signs stuck in where they are broken and continue to be broken. When the government rolled out its wire rope safety barrier program they made it very clear that the Monash University statistics and studies that they were using to justify that expenditure said in part that those wire rope barriers become less safe when they are damaged, and as a result there was a requirement for them to be repaired and maintained very quickly upon being broken or damaged. It is simply not happening. In fact it is common now to drive past the pink safety barriers, and they have actually faded and gone almost white because they have been sitting there so long.

As we all notice, those of us driving from western Victoria down the Princes Freeway into the west side of Melbourne, you can essentially furnish a house with the amount of rubbish that is now on either side of the Princes Highway and then the Princes Freeway. It is not uncommon to see beds, TVs, studio chairs, office desks, bookcases and whole car parts littered endlessly from one end of the journey into the city and back again. It is actually embarrassing, as a First World state, that that amount of litter and rubbish tangled up in long, overgrown grass and unkempt roadways has now become the standard and the norm here in Victoria. That is simply because this government no longer funds regular roadside maintenance. In fact, talking to roadside mowers recently, only a few years ago they were paid to do it two or three times a year at a minimum along our busy roadways and highways and byways. Today they are down to one cut, one run-through, on the sides of our roads a year, which is simply not enough, particularly in the parts of Victoria like mine, where you have higher rainfall and more grass growth. Not only is it about the unsightliness of the build-up of rubbish and refuse; it also speaks to the way this government drives around blindly unaware of the decay it is overseeing in our roads and our road maintenance across Victoria.

That is in the built-up, more urban areas that we drive through, but more generally across many of our minor Victorian state roads – I think in particular of the road from Birregurra through to Forrest and then on to Apollo Bay, Cobden-Stonyford Road and Cobden-Warrnambool Road, which connects up to my colleague the member for South-West Coast – these roadways are pretty heavily forested on either side, and the policy now is to just allow the trees to grow closer and closer to the roads. They do not allow proper removal of fallen trees. In fact when a tree falls today, the SES or someone comes to the immediate rescue, and large tree trunks and others are left perilously close to the edge of the road, creating a further hazard for drivers coming by. But even worse, the debris from a fallen tree is no longer allowed to be removed, and it is thrown onto the side of the road.

There are many of my roads, particularly the more heavily forested ones, where the fuel load now along the sides of the roads is very, very dangerous. It is dangerous for multiple reasons. Many of these roadways of course in the peak of summer will have a lot of tourist traffic that could have accidents. You have got lots of agricultural machinery and other things that may cause sparks or have hot

exhausts and other things. If they pull to the side of many of our roads, they are a bonfire ready to happen, and this government has done nothing in its road management to keep these corridors of business, these corridors of life, these corridors of connection, open and safe for the people in country Victoria. It is simply not good enough.

Finally, in the moments I have left, the other major concern that has been in proliferation in Polwarth in recent times, as we have had a bit of a wet winter, is road slips. The Great Ocean Road has been closed multiple times this year through road slips. Lavers Hill-Cobden Road has been closed this year and has remained closed for quite some time. We have bridges, and particularly the Carlisle River community, who had all those bushfires down there and literally hundreds of fire trucks, was reduced to a single-lane temporary bridge because we simply cannot afford to maintain these more costly elements of road maintenance and road upkeep. It is a blight on this state that such a potentially prosperous and wealthy state as the state of Victoria is now so destitute it simply cannot maintain the basic roads, the basic bridges, the basic infrastructure and the basic cleanliness of good, safe roads.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (16:41): It is a privilege to stand up and speak here today to condemn this matter, which I, very much like all of us on this side of the chamber, oppose, because contrary to what this matter claims and the drivel from the previous two speakers, the fact is that it is this Victorian Labor government that is continuing to invest in our transport infrastructure, in our road infrastructure and in our public transport and services infrastructure. Every single step of the way the Liberals and Nationals coalition have just continued to oppose and do everything they can to prevent us from investing in it, particularly in my community in the northern suburbs of my electorate of Pascoe Vale, the electorate of Broadmeadows and the electorate of Greenvale. Never once have we seen the Liberals take any interest when it comes to taking real action, supporting our investments and our commitment to improving our roadways and our transport infrastructure.

The fact is that the only road that the Liberals know is the highway to hell, which Acca Dacca sings about very loudly and proudly. God forbid they and One Nation should form a coalition at the next election. They will take us on that highway to hell of cuts, of public sell-offs and of privatisation. That will mean bad, bad things for our public transport and particularly for our roads as well, because the only road that they know of and that they have continued to be on is, as John Lennon and Paul McCartney have also previously told us all about, that long and winding road in opposition, which is still taking them only to the highway to hell. That is the only road that they have been on and will continue to be on as far as I am concerned, and we will be doing everything we can to keep them on that road. That is the road that we want them to stay on. We do not want to get an off-ramp onto any other road.

But as the Parliamentary Secretary for Community Safety I also say that obviously road safety is a very high priority for our government across the entire state, through investments we have been making, which I will touch on, and also as the member for Pascoe Vale in my community, and as the member for Frankston I am sure can also appreciate in his community in the south-east. Again contrary to the claims that have been made by the opposition – the fact is they can do a bit of homework for a change and open up the budget papers to see it – in this year's budget we have allocated and invested a record $1.04 billion. It is fact. They want to doubt this. They want to try and undermine this $1.04 billion investment specifically for roads and road maintenance, which is the highest in this state's history. Guess what, 70 per cent of that funding – the member for Melton will appreciate this as well – has been allocated to regional and rural communities. Regional and rural communities are receiving 70 per cent of that funding.

Just on the coalition's own paperwork, in their own figures their own commitment, which I will get to in a moment, should they form government, is that they will only commit 25 per cent of their roads funding to regional Victoria. They would be cutting funding. If they were to form government, they would cut funding to regional and rural communities to which the Victorian Labor government in this budget is allocating 70 per cent. It is shameful that the party that claims to stand up for regional and rural communities will cut the funding before they even get into office.

Again, they do not want to do their homework. The last two Victorian Labor budgets invest in the order of $1 billion per annum at least. Just over 2024–25, for example, 211,000 potholes were repaired as a result of that investment – 200,000 potholes. This year we are on track to fix 200,000-plus again, and already 187,000 have been fixed. I had the privilege to drive down to Warrnambool to have that parliamentary hearing. It is a wonderful community down in Warrnambool, and I saw many of the upgraded works on those roads on the way in and out, member for South-West Coast.

I really want to acknowledge our lead speaker on this matter as well, the member for Werribee, who gave a really thorough and in-depth contribution with respect to the history of roadways and road infrastructure, even going back as far as the ancient Romans. But just to shadow his remarks in this respect, the opposition do not even want to talk about the impact that severe weather events, severe flooding and substantial rainfall, which we have had over the last couple of years, have had on our roadways and the need for us to be doing more to repair our roadways, particularly in regional and rural Victoria. Now it is more important than ever that we invest more not less into regional and rural roads like the Liberal opposition are proposing to do.

Do not just take my word for it. When the Liberals made their announcement a few weeks ago, I think it was, or a couple of weeks ago, around their supposed road blitz, there was a lot of confusion from some of the stakeholders in terms of what exactly this commitment meant. Rural Councils Victoria itself said it is unclear how much of the promised $5 billion would be spent on country roads specifically. Even Rural Councils Victoria immediately criticised and undermined this supposed election commitment from the opposition, because even to their own supposed stakeholders in regional and rural communities they are not being very clear, this potential Liberal–National–One Nation coalition.

Again, you cannot make a commitment to supposedly investing more money into roads or into any policy area for that matter if, on the other hand, at the same time you are actually proposing – not you, Deputy Speaker, but the opposition – to cut $40 billion from the Victorian budget. Forty billion dollars they are proposing to take right out of the Victorian budget should they form government, part of which involves sacking one in seven public servants. One in seven public servants would be sacked, and they are kidding themselves if they think that is not going to have an impact on frontline services like education, teachers, police and nurses. But also, they are kidding themselves if they think that is not going to have an impact on the Department of Transport and Planning, which is responsible for helping maintain, upgrade, fix up and enhance our roadways and transport network.

They cannot be claiming to do more with $40 billion less across the entire state budget and forward estimates. They were last in government for any meaningful period during 2010 to 2014, and how can we forget those forgettable Baillieu and Napthine years, when they did absolutely nothing, and anything they did do harmed the interests of this state? When it came to roads – they do not want to talk about this – they sacked 450 workers from VicRoads. They cut 70 jobs from the TAC, the Transport Accident Commission, in Geelong. They cut $100 million from the VicRoads budget across every single region in Victoria. Every single region in Victoria felt that cumulative cut of $100 million. They also, most shamefully, cut compensation to the TAC and grieving families. They cut the compensation packages to those people who needed it most in their hour of need.

Again, this is a stark contrast. While they talk and cut on that side of the house, we are getting on with doing what matters when it comes to roads and infrastructure, whether it is the big infrastructure projects that are needed to support our state's growing population and communities through the Metro Tunnel, the West Gate Tunnel, North East Link and the M80 ring-road upgrades which support so many commuters across the north-western suburbs; the upgrades we delivered through the Tullamarine corridor, particularly with linking in and out of Melbourne Airport which is only continuing to grow in terms of visitation; or whether it is the Tullamarine Bulla Road and Bell Street on-and-off ramps, untangling that previous bottleneck to keep the traffic flow moving in and out and around Essendon Airport and Essendon Fields.

In my community as well we have continued to deliver record amounts of funding to improve our transport and road network, which the Liberals have never committed to and would never invest in, ever. We are talking about the level crossing removals through the Upfield line in Coburg. They never would have removed the level crossings at Moreland Road, Munro Street and Reynard Street, and they will never remove the eight level crossings through Brunswick, let alone upgrade the rest of the Upfield line, which we are making a business case towards progressing as we speak. The new pedestrian crossing on Gaffney Street near Cumberland Road to support Pascoe Vale Primary School families – they never would have delivered that. We are reducing the speed limit and a creating a new school speed zone on Murray Road and also an extended zone on Bell Street. They are committing to increasing speed limits, we have heard, along the Princes Freeway to Geelong when the parliamentary inquiry evidence has told us we need safer limits across the state. On that note, I oppose this matter and support our action.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (16:51): Our regional roads are appalling, and it is just galling to listen to the Labor members of Parliament sitting here trying to deny the facts that sit in front of every regional Victorian driver. Every journey on our roads has become an obstacle course of potholes, crumbling road edges and broken pavements. It forces motorists to have to swerve, often across double lines, and to go off edges that drop down inches. It is frightening. People are terrified now to drive at night if it is raining. In fact I recommend they do not. Across my electorate and across regional Victoria people stop me everywhere I go with the same story: another blown tyre, another smashed rim, another suspension repair costing hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars. One local tyre business owner contacted me not to complain about the lack of work, but to actually state that he is sick of being forced to tell people that they have another large bill and they are having to empty their wallets.

This is not bad luck. This is a direct consequence of a Labor government that has allowed Victoria's roads to deteriorate year after year. This is the worst condition I have ever seen roads in, and every year they get worse, while ministers insist they are spending more than ever. We have had five ministers over the last 10 years who have continued to starve the roads of funds. Victorians are no longer buying the spin because they are living the reality every single day they get behind the wheel. The truth is that the crisis has not happened overnight. It is the predictable result of a decade of neglect, and that decade has been the result of road maintenance not occurring under the Victorian Labor government, whose responsibility it is to fix the Victorian state roads. They are the majority of the roads that we are driving on every single day, full of potholes. It tells a story in itself of how this government has neglected regional Victoria in particular.

In the 2026–27 budget it was revealed that Labor has reduced targets for regional road resurfacing and rehabilitation by more than 75 per cent. That is down from 11.8 million square metres in 2021 to just 2.9 million square metres in 2026–27. The budget figures this year demonstrate road patching in regional Victoria is forecast to plunge from 556,000 square metres just two years ago to 76,000 square metres. That is an 86 per cent drop in two years. This is the patching that was the new measure that the government implemented, as though patching a number of potholes per year was something to celebrate. I was listening to the member for Pascoe Vale talking about the success it is to patch 220,000 potholes, but how many potholes are they patching over and over and over again? If you keep patching the same pothole, is that a measure of success? No, it is a measure of failure. Despite the government's claims of additional maintenance spending, the area of roads that will be patched, resurfaced or rehabilitated continues to go backwards. And we can see it. We see it when we are driving around. Rather than prioritising essential repairs and maintenance, speed limit reductions are being implemented as bandaids for deteriorating roads. That is not how you run the state.

As of May this year there were 185 sections of road subject to pavement in poor condition, and we knew this was the prediction of the Victorian Auditor-General in 2017. If we continued down that trajectory as a state, we would have more than 91 per cent of our roads in poor or very poor condition, and that is where we are today. The Victorian Auditor-General's Office report identified it, and we are

waiting for the next report – coming out in 2026, this year – which will tell a damning story, no doubt. Victorians are putting up with a pothole every 100 metres across the state. The new Premier was the minister responsible for roads and road safety when regional road surfacing fell by more than a third. Under his watch the department missed its own regional resurfacing target, and in 2023 they did not even set a target. That is right. My colleague at the table has just highlighted how the new Premier does not care about the regions, and there is your evidence there. That is exactly what he did: he cut the funding to roads when he was the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. That is why we are putting up with a pothole every 100 metres, because he cut the budget during his time by $240 million.

This is a government that does not do the recommended engineering standard of 10 per cent renewal of roads every year. That is what you do in any business: you make sure you repair 10 per cent so you always have a functioning plant. We did it on the farm: 10 per cent of your pastures renovated. But this has stopped under this government. In fact if you do 10 per cent, you never have a situation like we have at the moment where there is just a massive job in front of us to fix the roads. But this government has been doing about 1 to 3 per cent repairs instead of 10 per cent per annum. This is a government that has not been spray sealing, a technique that waterproofs our roads by putting the gravel in place and spray sealing it so that it waterproofs it. No, this is a government that has ignored that, so the cracks appear, the water infiltrates and the road falls apart. It is also a government that does not use graders on the sides of the roads. It lets the vegetation creep up to the side of the road. The water gets trapped and it undermines the roads.

These are all the reasons why, when Jess Wilson, the leader of the Liberals, came to visit my electorate on her 88-electorate visit over the winter recess, she said the roads are shocking everywhere, and they certainly were shocking in South-West Coast. But we announced a $5 billion investment in our roads, and this is to fix the roads properly. It is to actually return to resurfacing and fixing roads to eliminate potholes – not patch potholes so that with the next rainfall the patch pops out and you have to re-patch that pothole. Five billion dollars is 25 per cent more than the current government is investing, but the key to this is we will actually be fixing them properly. We will not be saying, 'We're patching potholes,' because that is not fixing a road. That is a temporary cover-up like painting rotten wood. It does not work. We will fix the potholes by repairing the road properly. We will re-establish a proper planned system of preventative maintenance, and we will establish Better Roads Victoria, a standalone division within the department. This government got rid of VicRoads, and they actually established Regional Roads Victoria with fanfare, saying they would be fixing the roads properly. But, guess what, three years ago, what did they do? They quietly got rid of it – no announcement about that. We will be making sure we return engineers to the role, the experts who know how to fix roads, not the economists who just want to keep cutting. We will be boosting roadside maintenance, including grass slashing, drain clearing and grading.

We will review the contract standards. The construction standards are really important, because currently what goes on, contractors tell me, is they say to the government, 'This contract won't build a road fit for purpose; it'll start crumbling within months.' And the government says, 'Go ahead.' That is what the local contractors are telling us: 'Just go ahead. We don't care. Just fix the road; we know it won't work.' So instead of digging, say, 18 inches to build the road, they are going down 8 inches. We are seeing this everywhere we drive, even new roads crumbling within months. It is disgraceful.

Under Labor we are receiving 12 per cent of the infrastructure funding budget, but under the Liberals we have committed to a 25 per cent investment in infrastructure, because 25 per cent of the people in Victoria live in the regions. And, do you know what, with 25 per cent of people living in the regions, the most disgraceful statistic is that 60 per cent of road deaths are occurring on regional roads. We only have 25 per cent of the population, but we have 60 per cent of the road deaths. That is a disgrace.

A family who came into my office just this last week with two children were going on a little holiday for the weekend in my electorate with a caravan and their four-wheel drive. They hit a pothole and smashed up into a tree; the caravan took off the other way. They are so lucky to be alive, and it was definitely a pothole. They have got photos to prove it. A police report, they told me, had written in it

that it was caused by potholes, so the government cannot continue to deny our roads are causing the damage that they are. They are responsible, and they cannot keep denying it. I have mentioned roads in the last decade in this place 2691 times, because they are important in our electorate.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (17:01): What an extraordinary MPI we have been offered up this afternoon by the member for Gippsland South: that this house notes the state of Victorian roads. Well, I will tell you, the road to nowhere is over that side, a One Nation–Liberal coalition, because we know about the false start tour around the state – going all over the place, not taking media sometimes, not taking the press pack out to have a chat, no policy announcements out there, just sort of running into a cafe, going into your local Coles, going to the servo and no new announcements, because the reality is there are no new announcements under the Liberal–One Nation coalition opposition because they do not have any coin. They have committed to $40 billion in cuts. They have announced their cash surplus. And to the credit of the member for Kew and Leader of the Opposition, the member for Kew does not deny that there is going to be a $40 billion black hole.

Let us go through this MPI. Let us go through; it is very short. It is very quick, isn't it, this one? You know when opposition offices are a bit light on and they are a bit distracted? They have got all of about 18 words in this one. Remember when they used to write *War and Peace* about how bad the government was? They have dropped off a bit. So to those across the road on Spring Street: at least give us a bit more colour and flavour when you want to give us a smack; at least give us a little more in this.

The notion that we have not invested in road maintenance does not stack up in the budget when you read through it – the more than $1 billion allocation that was made in the Victorian budget, the hundreds of thousands of potholes that will be filled, the workers that are out there each and every day. It might shock you, it might come as a surprise, that I used to paint lines on roads back in the day. I was not an asphalter, but I would get the smell. You would go, 'Hello, there's something going on here. We're filling roads. It won't be long before the line markers are out and about.' And so for years, when the asphalt went down or there was resurfacing, I would be deployed out there. There are a few wobbly ones out there still with my name on them. But there are tons and tons of asphalt going down now that are backed in by workers and their contractors that are funded by the work that we are doing on that. That is what Labor governments do. They invest in infrastructure; they invest in our roads and our rail. And we see this across each and every part of our state.

I know it is hard arithmetic over that side. Remember, the then shadow finance minister and now Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Treasurer said the quiet bit out loud when she acknowledged that substantial cuts would be made to Victoria and our services, in health and education, across the state. She said that to Steve Price on Sky News, that great Labor bastion of a network – you know Sky News, the only thing we have in common. They are now News 24; they have rebranded. I saw that the other day; News 24 they now are. But we saw that the Leader of the Opposition committed to substantial cuts to education and health. Well, now we see that it just does not stack up that they would put any money – a 25 per cent increase, they say – on the road maintenance funding. Tell me how you can take billions out of revenue. From revenue you will not take any more. You cut the public service and you take funds out, and then you commit to a cash surplus that means you cannot do any infrastructure. Show me on a spreadsheet, those opposite. Show me how it stacks up that you have got any coin to invest in anything.

This false start tour, this false promise that was put forward by those opposite, does not stack up at all. Once again we see that there is literally no policy narrative or engine room. The member for Kew has had over a year now since tearing down the then very popular member for Berwick and has seen the primary vote cascade down to the 24 to 25 per cent region. That is what we see now. Angus Taylor in federal Parliament is far worse, with around 17 or 18 per cent. They have been captured by One Nation. In trying to be populist and in trying to see the next headline in the *Herald Sun*, they have lost that policy engine room and have lost that edge, and so we now see policy made on the run. It is not a substantive policy, this roads funding commitment they have put forward. They clearly did not see

how substantial the government's funded and allocated portfolio is on road maintenance. It is not really a headturner; it is a few hundred million over four years. It is literally topping up a little bit of the forward estimates. It is not a big gravitas piece that you would put forward.

Then they had the audacity to commit to the reheated microwave policy of the member for Bulleen from when he was opposition leader – you know, the one with the 25 per cent regional guarantee. That is his brainchild that one. They got that out. They said, 'Oh, let's get the microwave dinner out. Let's run that one again because we do not have anything new to put forward to our party conference.' So they reheated that one. In about five or six key policy areas, including road maintenance, you actually see a cut in those commitments. The 25 per cent ceiling of funding that they would put into regional areas, particularly in education and health, is a real cut in those areas. Before they came up with their false start tour, their false promises tour, this was also a cut to that aspiration in the funding that has been put forward. This is again reheating some of the key lines that have been put forward by those opposite.

The coalition is in utter chaos at the moment. We see now some of the polling saying that the only pathway to government is via Queensland Senator Pauline Hanson and One Nation. It is a terrifying prospect. I said it in a grievance debate if you tuned in a little while ago. I said to them that they had to stand up to it, even though Tony Abbott was pleading with the Liberals to do a deal with One Nation. There is an absence of that. It is a Nationals member of Parliament, the Leader of the Nationals, who has raised this matter of public importance. You do not see Tony Abbott asking for a coalition with the Nationals and One Nation. You do not see that at all. They have already written them off. One Nation has written off the Nationals into the future. So if the Liberals have a coalition with One Nation, who is going to be advocating for the regions? Well, it will not be One Nation. They will be absolutely in chaos going forward. Who is going to front up for road maintenance? It is going to have to be, again, our Labor government supporting the regions. We have more regional MPs in this Parliament than those opposite. This is the kind of thing that we need to consider going forward.

An MPI like this is a joke. When you see their legacy of the past, the cutting back of road project funding in the Baillieu–Napthine era, you see underinvestment consistently. We see, if anything, that the Leader of the Opposition has endorsed the funding that has been put forward – you know, the 25 per cent difference; she actually endorses that.

You can see some of the investments that we have made in roads in my region in my community. Those opposite completely opposed the Mordialloc Freeway. Then when they thought that it might be a good thing, they were going to run it halfway up the alignment and stop it at Lower Dandenong Road. That was talked about. It was actually on a map from the Hamer government of plans from long ago, and it was meant to run all the way through to Moorabbin and beyond. It was a Labor government that invested in that project. There was great opposition to it from some of those opposite, who talked down that program. It was going to be the Mordialloc bypass but was delivered as the Mordialloc Freeway, and that was a substantial investment in our community. We have seen the resurfacing and paving at Station Street and the Nepean Highway in my community. We are building Mordialloc for the future and our constituents. There has been huge resurfacing through there as we have removed level crossings, upgraded our local roads and improved intersection connections.

This MPI does not stack up, and it is just some of the tired, lazy effort that we have become used to, unfortunately. When I saw it, I will tell you, I was a bit excited. I thought, 'Is it our MPI this week? Is it the government's MPI?' It was not ours. I thought, 'Who's coming up with it? Let's see some of the effort that's been put forward.' And I was just terribly disappointed. I have fond affection for the Leader of the Nationals, the member for Gippsland South. I am going to say that he might not have written this one, because I think there would have been a little more depth – just a little more colour and movement and a little more flavour – than just to condemn the government in the absence of reality or of the fact that there is $1 billion allocated each year, hundreds of thousands of potholes filled, a significant amount of work going in and thousands of workers across our state on road projects that are upgrading and maintaining our roads into the future.

Is there more to do? Of course. We have had challenges in cost escalation across road projects that have seen $1 billion not go as far as it could a few years ago. That is the environment that we are in. That is why we are putting more funding in and more support into the future. That is why we need the workforce to meet the requirements of that investment. But the notion that there has been neglect or waste does not stack up in reality. Time and time again this government's investment has been shown in the contribution that has been made and in the impacts on those communities. And once again – maybe it is the member for Bulleen who is next or the member for Lowan – tell us how a cash surplus and cuts of $40 billion add up to the ability, with a revenue base deteriorating, to invest more. If any of those opposite can explain those economics to any of us – those economic wizards over there – just let us know how that stacks up, and we will give you a listen.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (17:11): It is always a great pleasure to be able to raise again and correct the history on what Labor have done to our roads, because while we might have heard Labor members speaking to this matter of public importance and saying what a great job they are doing on our road network, I would invite any of them to step outside the tram network of Melbourne and go out and actually see firsthand the dilapidated state of our rural and regional roads. It is not just one or two potholes. It is not just one or two crumbling edges. It is not one or two instances of rutting or of cracks or of areas where there is no roadside maintenance or maintenance of the water run-off through that area. It is actually now throughout my entire electorate of Lowan and across the entirety of the road network in rural and regional Victoria. This is a problem that is of Labor's own doing, because if you cut funding to road asset maintenance in the budget, as I have seen in each and every budget since I was first elected 12 years ago, then, guess what, your roads end up in worse condition.

In my electorate of Lowan it is a running joke that you do not drive on the left side of the road, you drive on what is left of the road. For many of my roads you can walk down there – because it is too dangerous to drive there – and pick up where some of the issues are. People are driving on both sides of the road because it is simply so dangerous now. You look at it, and it is like a patchwork quilt. We are not seeing roads rebuilt from the base up. The infrastructure underneath the road top is completely broken and falling apart, and this is why we have this endless cycle of more and more potholes filled. I note the member for Mordialloc said that they were filling potholes. This is the problem. It is consistent filling of potholes, but they get broken up almost immediately because there is no test or scrutiny around the quality of the workmanship that is going into those pothole fills. We are not seeing the investment to do the job once and do it right to rebuild our roads from the base up. This is what we see time and time again. In fact I have seen it with my own eyes in Penshurst. I could not believe it. One day I pulled up for a mobile office session, sat down and a ute pulled up. They got a shovel out, shovelled some hot mix out of the back, put it into the pothole, one stomp of the boot and off they went back out in their ute to find the next one. It literally was not even compacted fully. About 1 minute later a log truck came through that exact section of road and blew it all out completely. That is how long road asset maintenance works under Labor, and the truth is it just is not working. It is actually costing the people of Lowan an enormous amount of money.

For example, I talked to Judy of Lake Bolac recently. She is currently doing a regular commute to Melbourne for cancer treatment, and we know that that is a heavy burden for anybody – it is not just the physical impact, it is the mental impact as well. But what makes it even harder is when you have the additional expense of your tyres blowing out or damage to your rims, and this is exactly what has happened to Judy. In fact Judy has blown seven tyres during her cancer treatment, and she has damaged four rims on her car. While you are not working, while you are already going through the pressures of getting cancer treatment, this is the last thing that anybody would ever want. This is not an isolated incident that is just on the roads that Judy uses from Lake Bolac to Melbourne. I have heard this recently as well from people who use the Western Highway. I have heard it from people in Horsham and even in Rainbow, where tyres and rims are being damaged because they cannot access the health care that they need close to home in the Wimmera region. They have to travel to either Ballarat or Melbourne to get those services that they used to be able to access in their local community or in Horsham. They have to drive much further, but then people are blowing out tyres on the way,

and so the cost to delayed health care is then on top of the added expense of having to repair their vehicle, because they have to travel much, much further to access health care.

We have so many instances right across my electorate. Donald of Mumbannar is so deeply concerned about the state of the Princes Highway near Dartmoor that he contacted my office with significant concerns because vehicles, including trucks and loaded logging trucks, were always driving on the wrong side of the road, putting everybody at risk of a head-on accident because they are simply trying to avoid potholes. But for those drivers there is less risk in crossing onto the wrong side of the road and risking a head-on collision than there is driving through the deep potholes through the area that riddle the left side of the road. Daniel of Rainbow has contacted me, concerned about the serious safety risks of the Birchip-Rainbow Road, where gravel shoulders have a 12-inch drop in places. This is a road that is regularly used by trucks filled with grain. For anybody who has ever been in a truck or understands how a loaded grain truck moves with any ripple, if you go off the edge in a loaded grain truck, it will shift your load. When you have a shifting load, it is basically like the whole centre of gravity is moving across your truck, and you are at extreme risk of a rollover or losing control of your vehicle to go on the opposite side of the road if you overcorrect. It is an incredibly dangerous situation.

I have seen firsthand some of these roads. I have travelled in a truck with Ryan Milgate, who is now the Victorian Farmers Federation president, to look at some of these exact roads, and being in that truck, you can feel how dangerous it is. You have to get into the white-knuckle position to hold onto that steering wheel because you have got such a narrow section of road left because of the crumbling edges, and when you have a truck coming in the other direction, you just have to hope and pray that you are not going to have an accident. These are also roads that are used by our school bus network. These are not roads that are optional for our people to travel on; these are roads that we use each and every day. We use them to get to work, we use them to take our kids to school, we use them to get to football and netball training and we also use them to get our produce to market. They are not optional for us. They are an essential part of how we connect to business, how we connect to education and how we connect to our community, our friends and our family. Yet under Labor we are just seeing extreme neglect. It has gone too far and is putting lives at risk, and too many lives have been lost.

One of the worst roads in my electorate, and even further on from my electorate, is the Western Highway, a highway that should have been duplicated over 10 years ago but still remains undone, although all of a sudden, in the lead-up to the election, we have seen a redirection of planning money for bypasses around Ararat and Beaufort to be redirected to finally have a section of road duplicated, which should have been done a long time ago. By now the Western Highway should have been duplicated to the South Australian border. We are hundreds of kilometres away from that being achieved.

Greg of Edenhope has contacted me concerned about the Coleraine-Edenhope Road and its deep structural crevices on that big dipper section just out of Coleraine. I know that stretch. Penrose has also been a big advocate around getting this fixed, and he has recently organised a large number of community members to actually take a stand and say, 'This isn't good enough, Labor.' We need to make sure our roads are fit for purpose. You need to make sure that your car is roadworthy; we need to ensure that our roads are carworthy. Wendy of Jeparit is concerned about the already perilous state of the Jeparit-Warracknabeal Road, which will only deteriorate further when nearby renewables developments are up and running because this road will be used to get materials to the project.

There are so many examples that I could go through, but it just reflects what happens to roads under a Labor government that simply does not care about rural and regional Victoria. I am so proud that a Wilson–O'Brien Nationals and Liberals government will deliver $5 billion to fix our crumbling road network. This is important not only to ensure that local people have access to a safe road network but also to make sure we can get our goods to market safely. This is something that we should see as not just an election commitment; it is something that should be embedded to make sure that every government understands that rural and regional people count. It is time for a fresh start in Victoria. It is time to say that we have had enough of Labor wrecking this state and particularly underselling

regional Victoria. We are sick of not getting our fair share of infrastructure funding – getting only 12 per cent of the infrastructure budget when we represent 25 per cent of the state's population. I look forward to the November election because the Nationals have got a clear plan to make sure we get our fair share of investment in country Victoria. After November we will see, finally, a Liberals and Nationals government that will deliver for rural and regional people to make sure that our communities are supported, our people are supported and our key businesses are supported and that we can get on with rebuilding Victoria from the disastrous effects of a Labor government that is tired and old.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:21): I certainly welcome a discussion about roads. No question, they are extraordinarily important for cars and bikes and buses and trucks et cetera – the whole spectrum of vehicles. Whether it is erring on active transport or whether it is your heavy trucks et cetera, it is really important that roads are well maintained. So I am very happy to discuss that but also to get down to the facts on this issue, because I think when we are talking about fellow Victorians, it is important for them to know exactly what is being invested and compare and contrast with history – that is, of the opposition claims versus reality. I think that is really important. This is a good opportunity to really nut that through, and I welcome that.

Firstly, it should be noted that Labor is spending more on roads than any government in Victoria's history: $1.04 billion this year alone, and, just to allay the concerns of the member who just spoke, with 70 per cent going to regional Victoria. We were talking about proportionality, and I think it is very fair to raise that. I appreciate the sheer distances that people in regional Victoria have to travel to get to and from some of the basic things that they need, as opposed to someone like me who lives in Southbank and can walk over the road to the supermarket. I am very respectful of that and the distances that people travel, hence the emphasis on this very important issue. But just to reiterate, 70 per cent is going to regional Victoria, and so mathematically we can see that that is a significant proportion that is being allocated to regional parts of our state. I think we should all note also that when the Liberals were last in it was all about cuts to jobs, to maintenance crews and to the regional roads workforce. I think it is important when we are having this discussion that we look at reality rather than creating a different perspective on the past that does not actually reflect what transpired.

Drilling down to exactly what the Victorian government is investing in roads – and I will also discuss last year and not only this year, because there were comments about how it is only because of the election, but I think, again, it is important to look at the record as it stands – we have doubled the road maintenance budget from what the Liberals and Nationals last invested to more than $1.04 billion in this year's budget. If we look back at the past – and I will go into this further – the Liberals and Nationals slashed funding and sacked 450 VicRoads staff.

I know there are some tired old tropes that get repeated around this chamber from those opposite who make the inference that public servants just shuffle papers; they do not really have much of a role to fulfil. We heard some sharp criticism about the way in which the road maintenance crews are repairing the roads as well. Certainly I am not someone who would have a clue about how to repair roads, so I am not here in any way to enunciate, dictate or clarify that in the chamber, because it will serve no purpose. However, I think that one should be a little cautious about how we reflect on those who are doing the hard yards, those hardworking road crews who are out there actually filling and repairing the potholes and resurfacing and doing all the hard work that enables us to use our vehicles or our bikes et cetera, our buses on the roads, getting to and from where we need to every day.

The 2026–27 budget invests over a billion dollars. This is including an additional $560 million approved in this budget and following nearly a billion dollars in each of the past two budgets. Just to rebut that inference that somehow it is all 2 minutes before midnight with an election in November, we can see nearly a billion dollars in each of the last two budgets. I think it is just important to reflect on the facts as they stand. This follows the $976 million better roads blitz this past year, with 70 per cent of all funding directed to regional roads. So again we can see, if we are looking at proportionality, the maths is quite stark there. It is quite apparent.

Under the 2024–25 program alone crews repaired more than 211,000 potholes, including major rehabilitation, resurfacing and pothole repairs; mowed and slashed over 50,000 kilometres of grass; replaced almost 41,000 signs; cleaned more than 20,727 square metres of graffiti from the network; inspected more than 8000 structures; and repaired more than 3000 safety barriers on major highways. This year's program is on track to remove a further 200,000 potholes, with 187,000 already fixed. The budget also invests $102.6 million in vital road projects statewide, $29.2 million in metro Melbourne and $73.4 million in regional Victoria. Again, the proportionality issue is very important, so I am just going to repeat that: $29.2 million in metro Melbourne and $73.4 million in regional Victoria. On the most basic maths we can see the apparent proportionality there on top of maintenance funding, fixing bad intersections and more.

When the Liberals were last in government – I think this is why we are all a little curious about this particular MPI, because they talk a big game and it sounds really, really good, to be honest. The Liberals are promising $5 billion over four years, a 25 per cent increase – oh, but hang on a minute – while simultaneously promising to find $40 billion in cuts elsewhere in the budget to fund their other pledges. I am not sure – giving, taking, giving, taking – how does the math pan out there? Again, it is quite perplexing. We know that the Leader of the Opposition is going to cut $40 billion and one in seven public servants, including from the very Department of Transport and Planning that would have to deliver this promise. So how are they going to deliver it with those kinds of savage cuts? Again, if we are talking about reality and how this will pan out, it is really important to drill down to the facts: the opposition leader cannot do this without cutting essential services. So really, when you look at the maths, this is not a plan to repair roads; it is all about cuts.

Looking at history, I did say it is important to look at history. I welcome these debates. As I say, in this way we can actually compare and contrast, and this is important for the broader community. I am not sure how many of the community are watching us here and now – you never know, there might be a couple – but at least we will be on the record in *Hansard*. In this state whilst in office they cut 450 jobs from VicRoads, they cut 70 TAC jobs in Geelong and they cut maintenance funding for roads across every single VicRoads region – a $100 million cut.

They also cut compensation for grieving families of road accident victims and to emergency services workers suffering post-traumatic stress disorder. They scrapped the safe driver discount rewards scheme for drivers over the age of 26. They scrapped Labor's truck action plan, which would have delivered a new truck link from the West Gate Freeway to the Port of Melbourne, taking trucks off residential streets.

If we are thinking about what it is they are promising versus what they will actually do, the best way to assess current behaviour is to look at past behaviour, and we can see from their record it was about cuts. In fact it is our Labor government who is delivering significantly more, as I said from the outset, when it comes to road maintenance literally as we speak, with a significantly higher proportion – and that is appropriate, I should say – going to regional Victoria. So contrast and compare reality versus promises and past behaviour with present behaviour. You can see why on this side of the house we really do not believe that they will fulfil the promises here: one, because they have already forecast $40 billion worth of cuts so the maths simply does not add up, and secondly, because they have form in this space in terms of not delivering and cutting.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (17:31): I am pleased to rise today on the matter of public importance put forward by the member for Gippsland South. It is quite short, and rightly so:

> That this house notes the appalling state of Victorian roads and condemns the Labor government for more than a decade of cuts to road maintenance, neglect and waste.

I will note that the member for Mordialloc, when he got up to speak, said this is very short, that it is normally a *War and Peace* version of things. Well, it does not need to be long when the evidence is so obvious, and that is the point. The member for Mordialloc – I did not know this about him – let us know that he used to paint roads. Well, I am not making any imputations on the member for

Mordialloc, but I think a few of the fumes might have affected his judgement in his contribution. That is not an imputation; that is a concern. It is just concern about your health and safety.

It is interesting. Today we are up talking about roads. Again, I am going to reference the member for Mordialloc because he gives me a fair bit of ammunition. The member for Mordialloc got up and stated that the Labor Party have more regional MPs than this side of the chamber, and that might be the case. It is probably an accurate description, but what is interesting at the moment is the speakers from that side of the chamber have all been city speakers. We have had Werribee, Pascoe Vale, Mordialloc and Albert Park preaching to regional MPs about roads. Why do not you get the regional MPs up on that side of the chamber to talk about roads? You want to know why they are not doing that? It is because those MPs could not put that on their socials, because their communities would say that is not quite accurate. That is why all the speakers so far have been city speakers, not regional speakers. I may be surprised; one may get pulled out of the woodwork for the last contribution of the day, but I doubt it. I doubt it because the regional MPs have probably said, 'No, this MPI is right. Drive through my electorate.'

The member for Werribee gave us a lecture about what 'asphalt' means and Greek and whatever, and he went into the –

A member interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: No, I tend not to listen to the member for Werribee, because he bores me after a while. It is boring. But he talked about how roads are built and everything else. He went into great detail. He went down there – it is probably the only time in his life he has seen a road crew – and said, 'What is that stuff down there?' And they said, 'Well, that is class 3 crushed rock, and you have got 40 mil of that, and then class 2 with 20 mil to create the road surfaces.'

John Lister interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: That is education for you, member for Werribee. I just said I will enlighten you on that. It has been interesting, the contributions from those opposite today, because they have not touched the real purpose of this MPI and the reason why we have brought this MPI forward: because the condition of our roads is very, very poor – extremely poor. When you get out of the city and you get into the regions, that is when you see the real effects of it. The member for Polwarth got up earlier, as did the member for South-West Coast. I was on a committee inquiry into housing in regional Victoria. I had to drive through their electorates, and I will put this on the record: they have the worst roads in the state. Those road networks down the south-west coast are absolutely terrible, right up through to Colac. They are horrendous, absolutely horrendous. When you drive on them you are dodging potholes, and you cannot go any faster than 80 kilometres an hour. They are bad.

A constituent of mine rang me. When you get a damaged tyre or a damaged rim, you can claim compensation from the government. I am happy to be corrected on the number, but I think it is about $1200 or something, or $1400, and then you pay everything after that. That is fine. But this constituent of mine is a pensioner, and a responsible pensioner has his car insured. He hit one pothole one day, and he had to pay $500 excess on the insurance. Then a little while later he was towing his boat and he hit another pothole, which caused about $4000 or $5000 damage to his boat, and he had to pay the excess on the insurance for that, which was about $700. This poor pensioner, who is not on a great wage, has just forked out $1200 in excess for his insurance but cannot get that compensated. I think that is a little bit rough. If he did not have the insurance, he could have claimed right up to the threshold, but he did. This poor fellow in my electorate was out of pocket $1200, through no fault of his own, through the condition of the roads, and this is the problem. The government is spruiking a big game on roads but delivering very little, and this is the issue.

The 2026–27 budget revealed Labor has reduced the targets for regional road resurfacing and rehabilitation by more than 75 per cent. That is a massive reduction. So you cannot sit there and say, 'We're investing in roads, we're doing this, we're doing that,' when you are cutting the delivery by

75 per cent. You cannot make this up. Well, that side does make it up, and that is the problem. The budget figures this year demonstrate road patching in regional Victoria is forecast to plunge from 556,000 square metres two years ago to 76,000 square metres, an 86 per cent drop in road maintenance. So you cannot stand on that side of the chamber and say, 'We're doing a great job of roads in regional Victoria, or in Victoria as a whole.'

In my area, when you get to Pakenham East, to the Bunyip River, you drive along that 15-kilometre stretch and you have seven different speed zones on a major highway in this state. Why – because of the dangerous condition of the road, because of the potholes that have not been fixed. We had last year a pothole at Nar Nar Goon – and the Minister for Ports and Freight at the table will acknowledge this because I spoke to her about it – where 30-something cars hit that pothole and were on the side of the road trying to fix it. Then a member in the other place, Ms Terpstra, said, 'No, it wasn't there. I went down to get some chickens, and I didn't see it.' I think she might have had bird flu that day, because when you have got 30-odd cars lined up on the side of the road changing their tyres in the rain, there is a problem with the condition of the roads. Just last week another person at Bunyip hit a pothole on the side of the road and was fixing their tyre again. This is not unusual in regional Victoria. This is common.

The problem is that when you have got a pothole and it is in winter, if you do not fix it and fix it properly and you leave that pothole unattended through the wetter months of the year, that pothole becomes greater and greater. The moisture gets into the subsurface of the road and starts to dissipate that subsurface. If anyone in this chamber has ever built roads – I have built roads; I have built car parks – then they know the right process to do it. You can fix potholes in winter; you have just got to do it right. But this is the problem with the government: they do not do it right. They leave things way too long. The maintenance program on our roads and our road verges in this state has been neglected for a very long time, and unfortunately regional Victorians are paying the price, not just on their travel away from home or trying to get home in a reasonable timeframe but in the back pocket when they have to fix their tyres constantly and with the frustration of trying to get home and being unable to get home safely.

This government has failed when it comes to roads and road maintenance and road resurfacing. They have failed dismally. That is why under a Wilson-led Liberal–National government we have announced that we will be investing $5 billion in the roads, a 25 per cent increase on the current forward estimates, and we have to do that. I got asked by the local media: why such a big investment? And it was quite simple: the roads are stuffed and someone has to fix them. That is why we have that $5 billion commitment on roads, and we need to do that. Yes, 25 per cent of that will go to regional Victoria. We have a 25 per cent regional infrastructure guarantee into regional Victoria because it is required. I tell you what, come 28 November, if people in this state want better roads, they should vote for Liberal–Nationals.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (17:42): I rise in response to this matter of public importance raised by the member for Gippsland South, and I think I am the last speaker from this side of the house. This matter asks the house to condemn a government that has invested more in Victorian roads than any other government in our state's history. It certainly asks Victorians to believe that the opposition suddenly has all the answers on roads. We can hear it in all the expert advice over there on building roads. I thought he was a builder; I did not think he was a road builder. But of course we had someone that painted lines on roads, so that was pretty important too.

Of course this debate comes down to one simple question, and that is: who do Victorians trust to deliver us the roads that they need? I am certain that they trust our government over the opposition. We have invested $1.04 billion this year alone out of the budget on maintaining our roads, rebuilding the highways, repairing potholes and making roads safer. Again, I know how important it is, with my background as a paramedic, to have safe roads. I know that we have also invested money in safer roads and given money to councils. I think it is on average about $2 million to all 79 councils to make roads safer – safety that prevents risk to drivers on the road, which is really important.

Those opposite are saying that they are going to make a major investment in roads, but while they are saying that they are also stating that they will have $40 billion cut from the state budget, which does not seem to add up – $5 billion in roads maintenance and then cutting $40 billion from their budget. At some point those promises collide with reality, and the reality is that when governments make cuts at that scale, infrastructure suffers, maintenance suffers and communities miss out. We have seen it all before. We have seen the history of what they have done. Our government has taken a completely different approach. This year's budget invested, as I said earlier, $1.04 billion in road maintenance. It is the highest investment Victoria has ever made. That follows a billion dollars each year in the previous two budgets, and it also includes another $560 million announced this year to continue repairing, resurfacing and rebuilding roads across the state.

I drive the Western Freeway through to Ballarat most days, and I have got to say, while there might be some potholes – and generally it is due to rain and the massive trucks that are on the road, damaging our roads – the travel is pretty good and very safe. I have never had an issue with potholes on the Western Freeway all the way through to Ballarat. If it is past Ballarat that is the issue, then that may be the case, but I have never seen it.

Our government has made real investments in improving our roads. With the opposition the facts tell a different story. We have shown that crews have repaired more than 211,000 potholes, and they have resurfaced roads across the state. They have replaced thousands of road signs and they have repaired safety barriers, and we know the importance of those safety barriers. They have saved lives. When safety barriers have been knocked down that obviously has occurred because cars have run into them, but that has saved lives. It has been proven that they save lives. I know that motorcycle riders are against them, but again, they are life savers. And yes, they have to be repaired, constantly repaired, and that is not an easy task to do. We have done 50,000 kilometres of roadside vegetation to improve safety for our motorists, and this year we are on track to repair another 200,000 potholes. It is not an exciting task. Road maintenance is not very exciting. I do not know what line marking is like, but road maintenance is not very exciting, and it certainly does not generate headlines. But there is always more to be done, and we will continue to do it as a government that is delivering on road maintenance and road repairs. It takes time, and it is a massive network to try and maintain. In having good roads, with people driving to work, taking their kids to school, running businesses and doing courier deliveries and those sorts of things, it is important for all of us to have good road maintenance and good road safety. Our government will continue to invest year after year in preventative maintenance, and it will save taxpayers money in the long run. It delivers safer roads and reduces injury and death on our roads.

Let us compare the opposition's record. They would rather talk about today than talk about their history and what happened in the past and the last coalition –

Cindy McLeish interjected.

Steve McGHIE: When you were in government you did not do anything in four years. That is why you have been in opposition for such a long time. The last time the coalition was in government – it was a long time ago, thank God – they cut around 450 VicRoads jobs. They also cut $100 million from road maintenance. They slashed resurfacing targets across regional Victoria. That is just not rhetoric. They are the facts; that is the record. Maybe they do not remember that. I know it is hard to remember when you have not been in government for a long time, and you do not like to hear those facts, of course. If you cut budgets on roads then they will deteriorate, and we saw that during their time. When you lose those experienced staff that were road maintenance workers – as I say, the 450 positions – then that is going to take its toll also in maintenance of roads. The opposition has announced a multibillion-dollar roads promise. Again, it sounds impressive until you start questioning, trying to seek some answers about it. Where is the money coming from? How do you fund billions in additional road spending while cutting $40 billion from the state budget? Which projects get defunded? Which communities miss out? None of those questions have been answered, and there have been no explanations in regard to how they are going to deliver their road maintenance program while they have massive budget cuts. Even rural councils in Victoria have questioned that and tried to get

answers in regard to the opposition's announcement, and they have not got the answers. We hear the preaching in this house by the opposition about how they are going to support regional areas, but we cannot get any accurate details in regard to what their plans are.

I have got to talk about a couple of things in my electorate in regard to roads and things like that. It is important where some links come together. We have just opened up and removed the 92nd level crossing, at Ferris Road in Cobblebank. I know a couple of weeks earlier the Hopkins Road level crossing was opened, and that was the 91st. We have got another two in Melton happening, one at Exford Road and one at Coburns Road, and of course the new Melton railway station is opening up in September. They will all be open by the end of September. The road network there improves traffic flow and safety in Melton alone.

We have done a couple of big intersections in Melton in regard to upgrading the Coburns Road and High Street intersection from a massive roundabout. The busiest intersection in Melton has been improved by having a lighted intersection. It is really important to have those sorts of upgrades. Norton Drive and High Street is another important upgrade, and we continue to do that. There is constant work on our roads around Melton. I know there was some reference from the member for Narracan saying that it is only metropolitan speakers that have got up on our side of the house, and we would not have a clue about regional roads. Well, that is not quite true. I have some regional roads in my electorate within the Moorabool shire at Bacchus Marsh, Hopetoun Park, Parwan and those types of areas – Exford, Eynesbury and down towards Ballan Road. The member for Werribee spoke earlier, our lead speaker, and he has some regional and rural roads. So we do have that experience of not only metropolitan roads. We do have that experience of those other roads, not just metropolitan roads. This MPI, as I say, was put up by the member for Gippsland South, and I reject it.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (17:52): The reason this matter of public importance has been put forward is because the roads are in an appalling state in Victoria. I think most people do know that, but a lot of people are happy to have their head in the sand. The member for Melton was talking about facts and saying that people are scared to put facts on the table. Well, let me give you a couple. The 2026–27 budget revealed Labor has reduced targets for regional road resurfacing and rehabilitation by more than 75 per cent, from 11.8 million square metres in 2021–22 to just 2.9 million square metres in 2026–27. There is a fact. Budget figures this year demonstrate road patching in regional Victoria is forecast to plunge from 556,000 square metres two years ago to just 76,000 square metres – an 86 per cent drop over two years. There are a couple of facts, and I will give you a third. The new Premier was the minister responsible for roads and road safety when regional road surfacing fell by more than a third. Under his watch the department missed its own regional resurfacing target and in 2023 did not set a target at all. I am happy to table the documents that show that.

Roads, and bad roads, are something that I am all too familiar with. I hear this constantly from constituents who ring me, who email me and who stop me in the street. They are not only constituents, actually. People travelling through will stop and duck into the public toilet near my office and come in and tell me about the bad roads as well. Other MPs tell me, my friends tell me constantly, my family tell me constantly, and I know firsthand because I travel these roads extensively. It was only maybe one or two months ago that I had three punctures in the space of one month. One of them involved a tow truck having to travel on a Saturday afternoon. I was lucky to get that repaired. Then I was introduced to that magic spray you can shove in your tyres to get you to Fast Freddies in Healesville, who do a remarkable job.

But it does not matter what it is about our roads; there are so many elements that are appalling. We have got the centre rope barriers near me and between Yea and Molesworth. They are damaged. I have counted up to 50 dings in there. There are too many to count, really. Multiple barriers are down. Some of them have no guards at all; they are just the wire. Some of them we have got orange plastic things. We have trees growing in between them. The trees are at least 1.5 metres high and 1.5 metres wide. That must undermine the road surface. There are trees that have fallen that stay just on the edge of the road and do not get removed. Dumped rubbish litters our roadways.

We have got no line markings in a certain spot in Kinglake, which is a dreadful area for fog. The line markings in some areas are so faded you cannot see them. The cat's eyes are damaged and broken, and in an area that is windy, that is dangerous across the top of the mountain, this is something that should be attended to immediately. The sidelines on the Black Spur are difficult. It is a tricky road to navigate, and it would be very easy to pop off the sides if you could not see the roadside lines or the cat's eyes, and they are covered in debris as well.

We have got all of these issues. We have got cracked, crumbling surfaces and crumbling shoulders. We are losing some seals. We have blocked drains. There was a blocked drain on the Healesville-Yarra Glen Road for way too long. Every time it rained, it flooded and you would have to veer onto the other side of the road. We have got landslips in spots that really concern me at Castella and at Cottons Pinch at Killingworth. The potholes themselves are extraordinary. There are some that I saw in Kinglake the other day that are a tiny series, but it will not take long before they are a very large series of potholes. There are some at Castella on the Melba Highway that are so large that you need to veer onto the other side of the road. The problem and the real danger with that is that you are on double lines coming around a bend and you cannot easily see oncoming traffic. If it is dusk, if there are shadows on the road, sometimes people cannot even see the potholes. When it is wet, that is even worse.

In the Nillumbik shire the Eltham-Yarra Glen Road needs works. Diamond Creek Road got fixed not so long ago, but it was in a dreadful state. In Hurstbridge the traffic speeds through the town. They need to have road safety treatments there to make it safer for road users and pedestrians. In the Murrindindi shire at Cathkin there are huge potholes. Some were just recently filled, but many are still there. Between Yea and Molesworth and on to Yarck, the potholes are incredible. I have mentioned across the Slide at Kinglake. At Devlins Bridge a farmer who owns a property there, a local councillor, mentioned to me the other day that the day before he saw three people pulled over because they had hit potholes. The Maroondah Highway in Maindample has been shocking for so long. The Mount Buller Road at Sawmill Settlement and up the mountain – the last time I went up to Mount Buller was in probably March, February, and it was a disgrace. The Midland Highway, all the way from Mansfield to Benalla, the Midland Link Highway, is a shocking piece of road.

In Whittlesea, on the Wallan-Whittlesea Road and the Donnybrook Road there is litter dumped everywhere. There are rubbish, potholes, lousy surfaces and constant road blockages and jams, and it needs to be duplicated. The Epping-Kilmore Road at Wandong, the Plenty Road–Donnybrook Road intersection at Arthurs Creek – I could go on and on with the issues. In the Yarra Ranges there are issues with the Warburton Highway. They are changing speed limits constantly. We need a dedicated right-hand turn outside Launch Fresh, that particularly great business, so that traffic can turn safely without having traffic bump into them from behind onto the Gembrook Road. The Don Road has had a big patchwork between the Home Hotel and Don Valley. The Healesville-Koo-Wee Rup Road has had all sorts of issues. It is patchwork, and it is particularly bad. On the Melba Highway from Coldstream towards Yarra Glen there are a series of potholes that need roadworks as well.

What we do not need is the constant speed reductions because the government are not fixing the roads. Signs are staying up for way too long. Speeds are being reduced. Between Coldstream and Yarra Glen: 100 kilometres an hour, down to 80, now down to 70. It is the same between Merrijig and Sawmill on the Mount Buller Road. The speed limits are being lowered all the time because the roads are not being addressed. I have listened to some of the contributions from members, and particularly the city members. I was listening carefully to the comments of the member for Mordialloc, and I urge him to get out of the city, get out into the regions, go and visit his grandmother in Woori Yallock and ask her. She will tell you. Lorraine knows. Ask Nan, and wish Nan happy birthday for me for tomorrow. But she will tell you how appalling the roads are.

There is so much that needs to be done all across my electorate. My electorate is some 10,000-plus square kilometres, and I can think of every township that has potholes through all sorts of parts that need addressing. It is just not good enough that we have had to put up with this. We are now putting

up with a pothole every 100 metres across the state's road network, and as of May 2026, for the 2025–26 financial year, 592 motorists lodged a claim for compensation due to damage caused by the poor condition of the road, but only 13, or 2 per cent, were successful. I have heard so many people come to me talking about the damage to their cars, to their tyres.

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

Cindy McLEISH: How many, you would like to know? Probably about 500 people have come and spoken to me over the last few years about the popped tyres, cracked rims and dented surfaces of their cars. I urge those opposite to get out from the tram tracks and have a look at the state of Victorian roads, because you will not be able to deny how bad these roads are.

Business interrupted under resolution of house today.

Members

Member for Brunswick

Valedictory statement

Tim READ (Brunswick) (18:02): I took my place here almost eight years ago, after it took a week of counting to learn that after 100 years of Labor a slender majority of Brunswick residents had opted to turn the seat Green. I came in and sat here and studied the room: the gold pulled from the earth, the building built with wealth extracted from a newly conquered land, the First People pushed aside to make way for tree felling, for sheep. Some of my ancestors were involved in colonisation. I acknowledge First Peoples today and I offer my respect to their elders, and I would like to think that we do things differently now, but I am not sure I can be confident.

I quit my job as a doctor and my postdoctoral research in sexually transmitted infections, and I became a daily witness to question time. Question time often begins with the introduction of a visiting overseas delegation, and then we proceed to embarrass ourselves with riotous behaviour. Questions are often thinly veiled condemnation, and answers are irrelevant and punctuated by frequent points of order. Choreographed roars of disapproval drown out criticism. New or useful information is uncommon. The overseas visitors often depart early, and I wonder what they think. For years I felt embarrassed that we could not have conducted ourselves a little better, but reflecting on democracies and nations that style themselves as democratic, I am having a rethink. We should be wary of orderly, polite parliaments. A chamber where elected representatives call out the government's failings and where members can yell at each other – that does not mean they always should – is more likely free and representative than less democratic parts of the world, where there are serious consequences for stepping out of line. We should still improve question time, but carefully. Also, when I first sat here, I was horrified at how mean MPs seemed to be here in the chamber, shouting hostile comments while others speak, often verballing them. Then I was puzzled by how nice the same people seemed to be as soon as they stepped outside. It troubled me for years. It helps to think of this place as a stage where the players overact outrageously and then wipe their make-up off as they wander out for a coffee.

Despite the theatrics, most of us are here for the right reasons. We all want good outcomes for Victorians, and we disagree on a lot, but few are here for mercenary reasons. Politicians are unfairly maligned, and for me, politics is the work you do to improve people's circumstances, not just now but in the future. Politics is hope in motion. We politicians might want our opponents to lose their seats, but we cannot help but feel some warmth towards those we work with.

It is a weird juggling act. Not that proof was needed, but when I made a public spectacle of my cancer diagnosis earlier this year, the genuine concern from so many members was a great support, and I thank you all. I had a blood transfusion yesterday, and a big thanks to the anonymous donors who helped me get here. I wonder how they would feel knowing they donated to a politician and a Green one at that. And a heartfelt thankyou to the staff at Peter Mac. I feel so well looked after there. Now that my illness has progressed and I have run out of treatment options I am starting to see life and

politics from a new perspective. My bucket list is no longer important to me. I would love to see Mexico, but I am fine with watching an actor on SBS eat her way around that exotic country. And I can always send the member for Rowville if I want to know more.

It is more important to me now to see smiles on the faces of those I love, so I want to talk now briefly about how we can put smiles on those faces, not just now but in the future. The first thing that comes to mind over the eight years in which I have sat here is the way inequality has grown in this country. Nowhere is it more obvious than in housing, and many Australians under 40 no longer expect to afford a home. They will rent for life. Renters have long been neglected, partly because renting was seen as a brief phase that people went through while they saved to buy a home, except that now many see that they never will. A young staff member in my office a couple of years ago had her rent go up by 30 per cent. The mouldy room she was renting did not get 30 per cent better all of a sudden; the rent just went up by an exorbitant amount. She had to move to find a place she could afford, and a lot of renters have to move once a year now to find a place that they can afford. It is something of an annual migration. Surely this is a wonderful example of something the next Parliament can fix to put smiles on the faces of young Victorians. A limit on rent increases similar to the ACT would be a great start.

As public trust in governments and institutions declines – and I am sure question time might have something to do with it – and more politicians are tempted by the anti-politician rhetoric from One Nation, we have an opportunity to reverse this trend by strengthening the institutions that safeguard our democracy. Giving our anti-corruption commission similar powers to its equivalent in New South Wales is where I hope this or the next Parliament will start. The single most important step I want to emphasise is to implement recommendation 1 of the Integrity and Oversight Committee's recent report into IBAC's powers. Parliament simply has to remove a few words from the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, which limits IBAC currently to only investigating a relevant offence. Removing those words would enable IBAC to expose and deter the maladministration and dodgy behaviour that is not strictly illegal but which undermines public trust in our political system. A couple of additional powers to follow outsourced public money and to hold public hearings and you have got yourself a standing royal commission at half the price. That would put some smiles on some young faces. And I must take this opportunity now to thank my colleagues on the IOC for their work and the IOC secretariat for their research and hard work over the past four years.

There are many more ways we could improve integrity and should improve integrity in this state – too many to list – but I am delighted that today in this chamber we are in the process of bringing an end to the undemocratic manipulation of the election of members of the Legislative Council. I am referring here to group voting, which was responsible for electing at least 20 per cent of that chamber in 2018 after an outrageous but entirely legal cash-for-preferences deal.

Over in this building near the Knight Kerr Room there are some antique chairs upholstered in red velvet. They reminded me of the padded red seats in the Legislative Council, and I wanted to wheel one out in front of the daily press conference a few months ago by the car park door just to make a point about group voting. It seemed a lot of effort, and I was not sure security would let me walk out with a precious parliamentary antique. But my staff are braver than I am, and two of them wheeled one of these chairs into a meeting room near the car park door, so I was committed. The next morning I approached security and asked if they would help me carry a heavy chair out to a press conference. They agreed, being very polite. I sat with the chair outside security waiting for our turn in front of the cameras just as the Minister for Police walked past remarking, 'Nice chair, Tim.' When my moment arrived I rolled the chair in front of the cameras, affixed a $55,000 price tag to it, and spoke about Victoria's group ticket voting system, which enables people to effectively buy a seat in the upper house.

My best press conference stunt resulted in zero coverage of the red chair, but today we are debating and about to pass a bill that will ensure upper house members are answerable to voters and not to a paid preference whisperer. I congratulate the government for this and also not so long ago for opening ministerial diaries to the public. I acknowledge the work of many in the community, including the Greens, who have pushed hard for these integrity reforms. Integrity puts smiles on faces. I have

mentioned the growing public disenchantment with politicians that seems to be pushing many Victorians toward Pauline Hanson, and it would be complete for me also to comment that these must be voters who are either attracted to or willing to overlook her scapegoating of immigrant communities. In the United States that scapegoating has turned into overt persecution, and armed immigration and customs enforcement gangs are snatching immigrants off the streets. Look, it is hard to imagine this happening in Victoria, but we must fight the scapegoating and the race-baiting if we do not want to find out. We want more people of colour in the next Parliament with smiles on their faces.

Marketing tells us we want a big car and a big TV and a big house, but for me it is important that Victoria has farms that can still produce food as our world heats up, that we have forests to admire and oceans with sea life instead of slime. Despite the increase in renewable energy here, Victoria is still pushing up CO_2 by burning over 100,000 tonnes of coal every day, not to mention the gas, petrol, diesel and jet fuel we burn. When I first sat here in 2018, CO_2 made up 409 parts per million of the atmosphere, and that has grown to 432 parts now. While the fight to decarbonise and tackle global heating has been pushed out of the limelight by more pressing cost-of-living concerns, it remains the most consequential struggle of our time, and economic and environmental concerns are closely connected. Just in January last year in the Los Angeles winter, fires there destroyed 11,000 mostly very expensive homes collectively worth around US$30 billion, which through the global reinsurance market has pushed up insurance premiums around the world, including in Australia. People are paying for climate change, whether they think about it or not.

I say this not to make us uncomfortable but to remind us of this opportunity to make our children proud if they could truly say their own state was a leader in the battle against global heating. That would require us to deal with some current threats to our decarbonisation: the rise of energy-guzzling data centres and the political opposition to renewable energy, to wind farms and to transmission lines. I guess any of those wanting to delay the switch to renewables has to balance electoral convenience against the future of our children. At least President Trump is doing all he can to help boost the sales of electric vehicles. The fuel crisis is another opportunity for Parliament to put smiles on the faces of people who want to leave their cars at home by building bike lanes and pedestrian crossings so they can walk, ride or scooter to work or to the train station.

I gave my first speech here in February 2019, and I said:

> Obesity, type 2 diabetes and an increasing risk of heart attack and stroke all go together, fuelled by a lack of exertion and the processed food and sugary drinks that are so cheaply and widely available and so heavily advertised.

I warned that Victoria's excellent health care is at risk of being overwhelmed. In fact Victorian governments had a good record here, leading the nation in the 1980s in banning cigarette advertising and setting up the world's first health promotion foundation, VicHealth. Think of the many illnesses, hospitalisations and deaths that VicHealth has prevented over the ensuing four decades. Soon, however, that work will wind up, as the present government seems intent on dissolving VicHealth into the Department of Health – unless, of course, the next Parliament decides that maybe Victoria needs an independent, funded health promotion foundation to lead the fight against the preventable chronic diseases that threaten to overwhelm our excellent but expensive healthcare system. Now, that would put some smiles on some young faces.

I will close by thanking all my MP colleagues for your warmth and friendliness over the years. Thanks to the Greens MP party room, who have become family, to the clerks and Parliament staff who make this remarkable institution work – especially to security by the back door – and to our dedicated and underpaid electorate officers and to the Greens staff. I thank my family for their support: Judy, Peter, Ange, Urs, Martin and Louisa, and above all my partner Ange, for everything. I thank the many people I have met in Brunswick over the years – supporters, critics, members of the Greens and other parties – for engaging in the honourable pursuit of politics.

Members applauded.

Bills

Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (18:20): In my 2 minutes, which I will use, given that I was afforded 30 minutes to speak on this, I will wrap up by recapping the 178 clauses that are in this omnibus bill, which I have titled now a Swiss cheese model bill because of the amount of holes in it. But it does teach us a simple lesson, and that is that safety does not come from pretending that every layer is perfect or that it is well and good or that there are not holes in it. It comes from identifying those holes, adding some safeguards and preventing the weaknesses that come with it or at least acknowledging those first. As I have said before, this bill has worthwhile layers – it has consumer protections – but it also has lots of holes. It has lots of areas that will have unintended consequences, which I have outlined. It had a consultation process as well that did not adequately test the detail. And in some cases not only did they not test the detail but they did not consult with certain stakeholders before presenting the bill to said stakeholders and informing them that this was how it was going to be. There is drafting that can often obstruct willing transactions – that vagueness that I was talking about. It has deposit reform that relocates the risk rather than removing it and makes it messy. There are residential park charges without sufficient statutory guardrails that will lead to higher cost housing in what is ultimately affordable housing for senior Victorians. There are licensing consequences that can confuse civil disagreement with misconduct, compliance duties – that is it. That was quick.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (18:22): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 1, page 3, lines 8 and 9, omit "statute law revision amendment" and insert "technical amendment in relation to the publication of information".
2. Clause 31, line 3, omit "**Statute law revision**" and insert "**Publication of information**".
3. Clause 31, line 6, before "that subsection" insert "subsection (5) of".
4. Clause 31, line 7, omit '"that section";' and insert '"subsections (5) and (6) of that section".'.
5. Clause 31, lines 8 and 9, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
6. Long title, omit "statute law revision amendment" and insert "technical amendment in relation to the publication of information".

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (18:22): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

In summary, these are short and straightforward technical amendments that ensure that the early childhood education and care provisions in the original bill can be operationalised effectively. Last year, on a bipartisan basis, we passed significant child safety changes to the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010. This included Victoria-specific provisions that modified the national law as it applies in Victoria. This was because we wanted to ensure that the early childhood regulator, the Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority, had the strong powers it needs to support

children's safety, including the publishing of information. The amendment before us ensures that the provisions regarding the ability for VECRA to publish information can be operationalised effectively, as has always been the intent of both sides of this chamber. This technical amendment is consistent with our commitment to make the safety, rights and best interests of our children paramount and to give the early childhood regulator strong powers to support children's safety. I commend these amendments to the house.

Motion agreed to.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Paul Edbrooke:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (18:24): I am extremely happy to speak in support of the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026. This bill arrives at a critical time for our state. Across Victoria every day, households are feeling the increased pressure of rising living costs. Whether it is keeping a roof over their heads, buying a reliable car, paying apartment fees or navigating everyday retail purchases, Victorian consumers are demanding and deserve fairer rules, total transparency and protection from unfair practices. This bill delivers on that need. It introduces a comprehensive package of reforms across housing, renting, property sales, motor trading, debt collection and public safety. Importantly, it also equips our law enforcement agencies with strong new powers to disrupt the organised crime networks running the illicit tobacco trade.

For many older Victorians, residential parks offer an accessible, community-focused housing choice. However, as the commissioner for residential tenancies highlighted in the 2025 *Life in Residential Parks* report, overly complex fee structures and opaque financial terms have left too many vulnerable residents facing unexpected costs. This legislation addresses those issues directly by enacting the report's key recommendations. First, we are fixing deferred management charges or exit fees. Previously these fees were calculated based on the future sale price of the home, an amount no tenant could reasonably predict when moving in. Under this bill exit fees will be tied directly to the initial purchase price paid by the tenant. Combined with the length of their stay, residents will finally have total clarity on what they will owe when they leave. Second, we are putting an end to unpredictable market-based rent hikes. Rent increases in residential parks will be capped at the higher of the consumer price index or a fixed rate set by regulation. Any increase above that cap will require the explicit written support of at least 75 per cent of affected tenants or approval by VCAT. And third, we are guaranteeing security of tenure by abolishing no-cause evictions at the end of fixed-term agreements, protecting both current and future residents. Finally, Consumer Affairs Victoria will establish a public register of residential park operators alongside a mandatory code of practice to ensure consistent operating, maintenance and dispute resolution standards across the sector.

Renting should provide safe, stable and dignified housing. This bill modernises Victoria's rental framework by closing unfair loopholes and supporting tenants when circumstances change. We are establishing clear tiered statutory caps on break-lease compensation for fixed-term leases under five years. If a renter needs to end a lease early, the maximum amount they can be charged for lost rent will be capped, based strictly on how much time remains on their agreement. The last thing we should be doing is kicking people when they are down. Very rarely do people break leases by choice. Rather, it is forced upon them due to ill health, job loss or other uncontrollable personal matters. We are also protecting basic access rights. It will now be an explicit offence for rental providers or agents to disable access keys or fobs, a tactic previously used by some to punish tenants for late rent or minor rule

breaches. Additionally, requests for extra keys cannot be unreasonably refused, and agents will only be permitted to charge the actual cost of procuring and activating the key.

Crucially, this bill expands protections for victim-survivors of family and personal violence. VCAT will now have clear authority to hold perpetrator co-renters solely responsible for unpaid rent or property damage. Furthermore, the bill explicitly outlaws discrimination against victim-survivors during the rental application process across private rentals, rooming houses and caravan parks, backed by VCAT compensation orders for breaches.

Buying a home is the largest purchase most Victorians will make in their lifetime, yet for too long prospective buyers have faced frustration from underquoting, hidden costs and high-risk deposit releases. This bill amends the Estate Agents Act 1980 and the Sale of Land Act 1962 to bring genuine transparency back to real estate. Real estate agents will now be required to publish the property seller's reserve price at least seven days prior to an auction or fixed-date sale. Buyers will no longer waste thousands of dollars on building inspections and legal checks for homes they never stood a chance of affording. Agents will be required to publish a property's final sold price once a sale becomes unconditional and submit key property data directly to Consumer Affairs Victoria. CAV will publish this data centrally, giving buyers and sellers an accurate view of local market values. Vendor section 32 statements must now be made available at least 14 days before an auction, fixed date sale or contract signing.

We are also repealing section 27 of the Sale of Land Act 1962, which allowed early release of deposits prior to settlement, a practice that exposed buyers to severe financial risk if a sale collapsed. Agents will also be strictly barred from taking their sales commission from any early-release deposit. To back up these standards, the Business Licensing Authority will gain powers to suspend the licences of agents and conveyancers who fail to comply with strict trust account audit requirements. But wait, there is more.

A member interjected.

Eden FOSTER: There is a lot. Apartment owner-occupiers are feeling the crunch of rising owners corporation fees. When financial distress hits, aggressive legal action and debt recovery costs can quickly drive households towards severe hardship. This bill introduces statutory payment plans for owners corporations. When an owner-occupier requests a payment plan to spread their fee payments over time, the request will be accepted by default. An owners corporation can only decline if the owner fails to provide hardship evidence or if the building's financial solvency is generally at risk. Crucially, as long as an owner is complying with an agreed payment plan, they will be legally protected from debt recovery action. We are also simplifying administrative pathways at VCAT, allowing owners corporations to pursue non-monetary rule enforcement using a simple majority vote rather than a special resolution. These are commonsense changes that give owners similar flexibility to other ongoing expenses, such as utilities and council rates.

A vehicle is an essential asset for work, school runs and daily independence. Buyers deserve confidence that the car they are paying for is safe, reliable and accurately represented. This bill modernises the Motor Car Traders Act 1986 by abolishing the outdated Motor Car Traders Claims Committee and shifting its functions directly into Consumer Affairs Victoria. This streamlines the process for consumers seeking payouts from the guarantee fund when a trader breaks the law. We are taking direct action against odometer tampering. The bill establishes a clear legal definition of 'odometer fraud' and requires licensed traders to take reasonable steps to verify mileage history before selling a used vehicle. Where doubts exist, written disclosure to the buyer is mandatory. To shut down unlicensed backyard car trading, auction houses will now be required to keep detailed records and notify CAV whenever an individual or business buys or sells four or more vehicles in a single year. Furthermore, online car listing platforms will be required to comply with document production requests from CAV inspectors.

There is so much more, and I have got less than a minute. The Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 is a practical, direct response to the cost-of-living challenges Victorians face today. By rebalancing power in the housing market, eliminating deceptive real estate practices, fixing auto trading rules, shielding apartment owners from debt spirals and closing down illegal tobacco shops, the Carroll Labor government will deliver fairness and security across our state. Many in our communities will benefit from this legislation, and I thank the relevant minister for this legislation because it is going to improve lives across our state. I commend the bill to the house.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (18:34): It is a pleasure to rise and speak on the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026. I want to commend the member for Mildura, who has just taken up the portfolio of Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs. It is a big bill. Lots of work has been put into this, and the member has done a great job of putting stuff together from our side. I know there are a number of amendments which we will be taking to the upper house to ensure we try and improve this particular bill.

I have got to say from the outset that we all support and stand right beside consumers. We want to make sure consumers are protected at every level. Whether it is in retail, purchasing a home, buying a car, in the property market or more generally, we certainly must ensure that we have proper laws to protect consumers. But I have got to say of this government that the one thing they do well, overly well, is regulation and red tape. I have never seen anybody produce as much regulation and red tape as the Andrews, Allan and now Carroll Labor governments. We have just seen, with Premier after Premier, more and more red tape.

In my particular portfolio of housing we have seen an absolute reduction in housing stock in the market, which is being shrunk because builders just cannot build because of the costs, the regulation and the red tape. We have seen it with changes to the building code. We have seen it with recent reform that we have put through. The government had a big target of 80,000 homes per year each and every year, and they are already 50,000 short of those homes in two years, because people just cannot make the numbers stack up. What has that done to the rental market, along with the regulation and red tape that this government has pushed down consumers' throats for over a decade?

What it has meant is we have seen a 40 per cent increase in renters, and when you have got a smaller supply of housing in the market and an increase in renters, then you find that there is less stock and less availability. We currently have a 1.3 to 1.5 per cent vacancy rate in Victoria. A healthy vacancy rate would be 3 per cent. At 1.2, 1.3 per cent, that is well underdone. What that means is people just cannot get into a rental because there is not enough supply, and more regulation and more red tape continue to push up prices. People do not build. If you do not build homes, you do not have homes. People cannot buy them. People cannot rent them. That is why we have a housing crisis in Victoria. It is simple economics – supply and demand. So you have got to change things.

What this government is doing with this particular bill will make it even harder because of the real estate changes. One of the things that was really good in Victoria was our auction system, because you could stare someone in the eye and see what they were going to pay. It was a competitive bidding system, and that is what we would do. The regulation changes here mean that if people want to change their price in terms of their reserve, they have to notify of that change within seven days. Now, I do not know what kind of planet the government is sitting on at the moment, but the situation right now in the property game is that many people will set a reserve and find that there is no-one coming through for open inspections, and they will have to not increase the reserve but decrease it. They are actually having to decrease it. If that happens within seven days, what that means is they cannot just decrease it and have the auction a couple of days later if the market is telling them that there are not the buyers. What they have got to do is either delay the auction for another week or cancel the auction altogether and go to a private bidding market, and that is what is going to happen. Auctions will literally disappear under this government under the legislation that is being proposed. That is what the REIV is saying, that is certainly what the industry is saying and that is what a lot of smaller people in the real estate game are saying as well, that real estate games –

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: The minister says the REIV want transparency. Absolutely they do. But they do not want these particular changes holus-bolus. They wanted to work with and suggested a whole lot of changes to the government, which the government pretty much ignored, and not only ignored – when the REIV wanted to be consulted about this, the ministers and the department were not even returning their calls. It is so difficult for the peak body of the real estate industry to get into the government to actually propose changes that they have almost given up. They really have. And it does not surprise me or anybody, because this government does not listen to anybody, completely ignores people and –

Martha Haylett interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Well, we know that that is the case in many of these instances. We know it is the same with the Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce when it comes to the motor vehicle stuff. They have also had similar issues with this government not listening. The Australian Automotive Dealer Association also have had issues with this government. So it might be easy for members of Parliament here to say 'Oh, we listen, we consult'; it is not true.

What we have at the moment is that Victoria has recorded just 54,842 new home completions in the year to March, the worst result in a decade. We have also seen Melbourne's rents rise 3.5 per cent in the June quarter, the highest increase of any capital city in the nation. This has all happened in a week, by the way. In a week we had a 3.5 per cent rise in rents. We also had Victoria recording the 54,000 new home completions, the worst March result in a decade. We also had the situation with auction clearance rates at only 52 per cent. Things are not working when it comes to the housing market. We have got a broken housing market. I have not even touched on public and social housing in terms of the lack of building there and the lack of attention there.

But in terms of consumers, you cannot protect consumers when it comes to housing if they cannot get into a home in the first place, and the only way to get into a home is to build them. The only way to build them is to ensure we have a market that works. Under this Labor government we have a broken system. Forty-three per cent of building a home is taxes, regulation and red tape. What we are doing today is producing more taxes, regulation and red tape by this government. It is a failure.

It is not getting easier for people. We will see auctions disappear. We will also see vehicle prices rise because of poor policy from the government. We will also see issues in terms of the lack of getting more competition in the market, because nothing beats an auction, nothing beats competition. We want to encourage more auctions. We want to ensure that it is easy and transparent. A section 32 has to be given 14 days ahead to a potential buyer. Now, what happens if somebody comes in a few days before the sale? What happens there in terms of giving them 14 days to go through a section 32? Again, this has not been thought through at all. The REIV, as I said, has a whole lot of proposed changes. We will propose them in the upper house. The government needs to start to listen.

The one thing that I will say that is certainly a positive step forward is the tobacco laws that are changing to be able to close these illegal, shonky tobacco stores. This is too little, too late in terms of this happening. We called for this to happen over 12 months ago. We actually brought a bill before the house 12 months ago with which this could have been done. I do not know why the government has been sitting on their hands for so long. The firebombings that we have seen in the streets of these illegal tobacco stores would have ceased or certainly reduced if the government had acted sooner. And every day's delay is a day where we see consumers, Victorians, put at risk, and we cannot have that. That is why I am happy that we are finally seeing some legislation that is able to shut down these shonky, illegal, dodgy tobacco stores. It should have been done sooner.

I hope that we have got the enforcement and the police to go with it. I doubt that, because that is the other part of the equation. You cannot shut down the illegal, dodgy tobacco stores unless you have the

officers to go in there and find out that they are dodgy in the first place. That is why we will introduce 3000 more police, to ensure we shut down illegal tobacco stores and provide safety for all Victorians.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (18:44): I am so very pleased to rise on these important consumer reforms making life easier, safer and more affordable for Victorians. I will just zone in firstly on the new closure powers. The bill gives Tobacco Licensing Victoria and Victoria Police strong new powers to shut down premises involved in the illicit tobacco trade. These are incremental reforms that we have steadily built. We have backed the commitment with a $59 million investment, a dedicated regulator and a comprehensive licensing scheme. These are really important because Tobacco Licensing Victoria and Victoria Police will be able to issue short-term closure notices for up to 90 days. They will also be able to apply to the Magistrates' Court for long-term closure orders where the offending warrants stronger action. These powers are designed to immediately disrupt illegal trade and prevent illegal operators from simply continuing business as usual. They will give Victoria, make no mistake, one of the strongest operational responses to illicit tobacco in the country. So I hope that allays some of the concerns that have been put forward by the member for Caulfield. These reforms are consistent with leading approaches adopted across Australia while delivering a framework tailored to Victoria's enforcement model.

I know that there have been a couple of these disturbing incidents in my electorate and in other electorates – not only in Victoria but interstate as well. I am really pleased that we are moving forward with this next really important step and also cracking down on those who are knowingly enabling criminal activity in this space. These reforms recognise that organised crime relies on more than just illegal retailers. Commercial landlords will be able to terminate a lease where a long-term closure order is in place, so that is empowering them as well. This will help return those premises to legitimate businesses as quickly as possible. We can see that these are strengthening enforcement but also providing a really pragmatic and expedient turnaround in terms of then being able to use those premises for appropriate purposes. The bill also introduces tough new penalties for landlords who knowingly allow illicit tobacco to be sold from their premises. These reforms send a clear message that there will be consequences for landlords who facilitate the illicit tobacco trade. You can see we are really cracking down hard on all aspects here to really take these protections forward for Victorians.

Now I want to toggle to some other issues. There are many issues indeed that are being transacted here – all for the betterment of Victorians, I am very happy to say. I will speak personally. I rented I think for over 20 years. I moved a number of times. I have seen the good and the bad. I had good landlords and I had landlords who were perhaps a little less thoughtful. I would like to think in the main that most would have best interests at heart, but there are those who do not and those who are miserly and try to cut corners and really make the lives of renters not so enjoyable, to say the least. We have been looking out for them – that is, our fellow Victorians. More than 150 rental reforms have been delivered under this government, and I am sorry to say that those opposite did not necessarily support all of those. They probably supported the minority of those reforms, which is really hard to understand. On the one hand they were saying, 'Oh, we've got all the solutions and we're going to really look out for renters,' but when push came to shove and these important rental reforms were put forward, where were they? They were missing in action.

Thankfully on this side of the house we are looking out for our fellow Victorians who are renting, including with things like the ban on rental bidding, the end to no-fault evictions, the minimum standards that must be met before a property is advertised and the 90-day notice periods. Also the portable bond scheme went live on 1 July 2026. This is huge. Renters moving house can transfer their bond rather than trying to find thousands of dollars for a second one. I remember vividly every time I would move thinking, 'Oh, now I've got to get the forward rent and get the bond,' and it was onerous and stressful amassing those funds. I would like to think that I had a reasonable wage. I was not a member of Parliament at the time, but nevertheless I could feel the stress and the pain of it, let alone all the fuss and the challenges of moving per se. When I saw that we were bringing through this reform, I was just so relieved because I put myself back in that space and I thought of the families and so many

single Victorians and others who are relying on us to look out for them. I am really glad that these reforms have been brought through and we are backing them all the way, because it really does make a difference when you are talking about cost of living and being able not only to get by but to live a rich and rewarding life in our great state of Victoria.

Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria is operating, giving renters a free way to sort out bonds, repairs and rent disputes without a VCAT hearing. We know VCAT provide an incredibly important service to the community, but nevertheless we are not necessarily wanting to hurtle into VCAT if we can avoid it. Hence this cheaper – well, it is cheaper because it is free – service has been put in place.

I will say I did not actually have to take the action of going to VCAT, but I do remember a particular landlord. When I moved into a particular property I could smell gas, and the landlord, when I rang them, was pushing back and saying I was imagining it. Anyway, eventually I managed to convince the landlord to send a plumber, and the minute the plumber got in he said, 'There's gas; it's a problem.' He had to immediately repair it. Why would I make it up? I remember at the time thinking, 'Yeah, I'm going to lie about smelling gas.' Renters, I have to say, in the main – and speaking for myself – loathe having to raise any issues and repairs. It is the last thing you want to have to do in your life. You just want to live your life. Your house, or your apartment et cetera, is there to support the life you live. You want to sleep, eat, have your friends over, your family. You do not really want to be having to focus on nagging the landlord to get basic repairs done. That is why it has been so important to bring about these 150 rental reforms, so that people are not having to be burdened by things. At the end of the day it is just about fair, reasonable and practical changes. I am not meaning to malign the overwhelming majority of landlords when I speak to some of the challenges that I had, but I think, at the same time, it is important to say that Victorians are not embellishing in this space. There are some legitimate concerns with the way some renters have been treated, and this is why we have had to clamp down on some of those rather unpalatable behaviours that we have seen.

I do remember another landlord. They meant well. They came in and they were going to attach a flyscreen, but the only thing is they left about this much space for all the flies to get in because they did not quite measure it up when they went to Bunnings. They put it together and they whacked it on. They did not get a professional to do it. They thought, 'I'm doing Nina a favour. We'll keep the flies out.' But the only thing was that there was this gaping hole because – I do not know – maybe they forgot the tape measure. I am not sure what happened. They looked at me, and they said, 'See, we've delivered this for you.' I did not quite know what to say, but I did not want to create a fuss. Also, there was a window I remember that would not stay open if you tried to hold it up. I mentioned this to the landlord, and the landlord said, 'Just put a stick in there and hold it up that way.' I remember again thinking, 'Is that really fair? Is that reasonable?' This is the kind of stuff I am talking about. I remember thinking it was demeaning, and that was probably not the worst. I know there are renters who have probably suffered much worse than that. But I remember it was at that point that I felt it was time to move, because I was thinking, 'If they think I need to put a stick in there to be able to hold the window open, then something is drastically wrong here with the relationship, the level of respect and the rapport.' When you think about repairing that window, it should not have cost too much anyway. As I said, I am not here to malign the landlords. It is just to present the case that there are always two sides to an issue and that it is important that we do have at least minimum standards for renters among the other 150 reforms that we have brought into play so that people can just live their lives and they are not having to feel like they are living in substandard conditions.

On that note, I am really thrilled that we are bringing in this omnibus bill for all the right reasons, making life easier, safer and more affordable for Victorians. I have only touched the sides, I must say, in the 10 minutes that I have. But I am glad that so many have beautifully transacted this bill today in the chamber, pointing out that fairness matters for fellow Victorians.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (18:54): I rise today to contribute to the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026. Before I start I really want to echo the comments made earlier by the member for Caulfield, who made the really obvious point that this government's first response to anything that

goes wrong in this state is to continue to add to regulation. Regulation and cost is their first thing. And it is interesting, of all the things going wrong in the consumer market at the moment, that this government has turned up today, in a week where they cannot even quite figure out how they are going to have a leader run the party, and guess what they have done? They have pulled the oldest trick in the book. I think they got Dennis Denuto from *The Castle* to do their work for them. They have gone and picked on second-hand car dealers and real estate agents. How impactful is that – that that is the best they can do to protect consumers. Thousands and thousands – in fact some 40,000 Victorians a year – have crimes committed against them when they go into a retail shop. We are not talking 40,000 real estate agents and second-hand car dealers running rampant in the streets of Victoria; we are talking about criminal gangs, thugs and mercenaries that even the Iraqi government is better at locking up and putting in jail than this government is. They have put –

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, you would think he is going quite well, but he is going badly. The point of order is relevance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think the member was trying to make a contrast and will be coming back to the bill, I am sure.

Richard RIORDAN: I am comparing government actions. But quite simply, this government is all talk – it is so often the case – and zero action. Blind Freddy knows that most malls and high streets in every country town, in every city, in every suburb of this once great state are littered with illegal tobacco shops and filled with crime gangs masquerading as genuine retailers. And this government, what do they do? They ring up their mate Dennis Denuto and they go, 'Dennis, who can we pick? Oh, let's go. Let's move the Camaro to get to the Torana so we can get to the Commodore.' That is the level of detail and thought that has gone into this bill today. It is a joke – it is an absolute joke. It is called the consumer amendment bill, and speaker after speaker from the Labor Party says, 'We care about the consumers.' They do not care about consumers. This government has turned a blind eye. If you have someone come into your shop or your store or your market in the state of Victoria and they walk out with knives and chase customers out and attack your shopkeeper and steal stuff from the premises, you will not ever see a policeman. You will not even know where the nearest police station is. You will not be able to get support to look after –

Members interjecting.

Richard RIORDAN: If this government were serious about cost of living, if this government were serious about protecting consumers and if this government were serious about making life easier for Victorians, they would put some effort into making sure that the retail costs in the shops in Victoria were not completely out of control, because there is so much margin being added. The cost of groceries, vegetables and basic household items every day of the week is being added to by the inherent laziness and idleness of this government in dealing with the crime crisis that is in Victoria, and it affects every consumer, every household. Talk to someone who tries to run a service station in this day and age – there is drive-off after drive-off. Do you think you can get this government to deal with that crime and that consumer cost?

Paul Edbrooke: Deputy Speaker, I know we are all struggling with this speech. The point of order, again, is relevance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes. I will bring the member back.

Richard RIORDAN: You are struggling with it because this government cannot take the truth. They cannot stand the truth. You would think the member for Frankston would understand about out-of-control retail theft and crime, for heaven's sake. But no, they are sitting there and they refuse to deal with this issue. They are making the lives of Victorians harder and harder. That is why we

absolutely need a fresh start in 126 days time. A fresh start will actually mean that you will have a government that will take this cost on consumers seriously.

Business interrupted under resolution of house of 28 July, as amended today.

Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Gippsland South electorate electricity supply

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (19:01): (1739) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action I seek is for the minister to take action on ongoing power outages in Gippsland, particularly in my electorate of Gippsland South. I have heard great frustration expressed by my constituents, particularly in the area around Yarram, Won Wron, Devon North, McLoughlins Beach and Woodside, notwithstanding that there are many others as well. This area has had so many power outages that some businesses have actually closed down because they are sick of having to turn away customers. I am talking about a couple of B & Bs in particular that literally cannot risk taking a booking when the power might be out. I have got constituents who have been keeping logs of the power outages, one who has particular medical equipment that actually shows every time there is a power outage, even if it is a 1-second blip. He has got, for January this year, literally 30 or 40 outages in that month.

This has been happening for quite some time now. I have been attempting to work with AusNet, and I acknowledge that the team that I contact there have been responsive, and I know that they have also done some work on one of the feeder lines that comes from Foster into the Yarram and district area. However, it does not seem to have addressed the issue. One of the explanations I had at one stage was that the weather had caused issues – trees falling and that sort of thing. Well, the powerlines have been there forever and a day – not literally, but certainly for five or six decades, if not longer. The trees have been there the same amount of time. I do not buy that sort of excuse.

It is a great frustration to the community. They feel like they are being treated as second-class citizens. They certainly say that this would not be accepted in a metropolitan area, and I concur entirely. I know this is a privatised system, but surely the minister can do something about it. Surely she can be calling in AusNet and asking for an explanation. Surely she can be demanding action on this, because we have seen it too often. We have instances where works are required, and indeed we need works done to keep the system well maintained, but there are far too many unscheduled outages happening, and it

is not good enough. People are paying for a service. They are not getting that service, and they are getting disruptions and interruptions that are affecting their homes, their businesses and their lives. The government needs to do something about it.

Family violence

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:04): (1740) My adjournment is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and the action I seek is that the minister update me on our government's efforts to address the scourge of family violence, including in my community of Laverton. Last week I was absolutely shocked – appalled – when I heard that Pauline Hanson went on radio and said that family violence is 'a two-way street' and that women who experience family violence should just get up and leave. This language minimises the culpability of perpetrators and puts the blame on women for men's violence. Let us be clear: whilst we know that men and boys can be victims of family violence, the statistics show us that the overwhelming incidence of family violence is men committing violence against women. Statements like this from One Nation are not new. Pauline Hanson's rhetoric on this issue over the years has been influenced by so-called men's rights activists. She has accused women who have reported family violence of lying and said that male perpetrators are victims of a Family Court system that will not let them see their kids – I mean, seriously. This is at a time when we have seen women, even girls as young as 13 years of age, allegedly murdered by teenage boys. We have this kind of rhetoric from someone who wants to be Prime Minister and someone whose party wants to govern in coalition with those opposite here in Victoria. We know on this side of the house the Liberal Party cannot govern here in Victoria without doing deals with One Nation.

Here in Victoria we have set the standard for how states should address family violence. Labor did the work. Labor transformed our system to better respond to violence against women and children. Labor have invested in services that give them the support that these people need. There is, of course, more to do; we must do more. I am keen for the minister to update me on the progress our government has continued to make in this space since we delivered each and every single one of those landmark reforms from our royal commission.

Victorian Fisheries Authority

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (19:06): (1741) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment. The action I seek is that the minister reverse the cuts to frontline fisheries enforcement, restore the fisheries officer positions lost through the Victorian Fisheries Authority restructure and guarantee that Mornington and the peninsula are properly resourced with sufficient locally based fisheries officers, vessels and operational support to provide an effective enforcement presence across Port Phillip and Western Port.

Port Phillip is not simply another waterway. It is one of Victoria's most valuable environmental, recreational and economic assets. It supports thousands of recreational fishers, boating clubs, tourism operators, charter businesses, commercial operators and local communities. It also contains sensitive marine ecosystems that deserve strong protection. The overwhelming majority of recreational fishers do the right thing. They comply with bag and size limits, respect seasonal closures and protect marine parks. They expect those who deliberately break the law to be detected and prosecuted. That requires visible, well-resourced frontline fisheries officers. Instead, this Labor government have weakened that front line.

In 2025 the Victorian Fisheries Authority reduced its workforce from 192 to 157 positions; 15 fisheries officer positions were removed statewide. The Braeside and Altona fisheries stations were closed. Mornington escaped closure only after significant community opposition and advocacy from me and many others. The government ultimately retained the station with just four fisheries officers – just four officers to help protect one of Victoria's busiest recreational fishing regions, covering both Port Phillip and Western Port. Even that level of resourcing was inadequate. Four officers cannot simultaneously conduct offshore patrols, inspect recreational catches, investigate illegal commercial activity, respond to reports through the 13FISH hotline, monitor marine parks, undertake surveillance operations,

prepare prosecutions, appear before the courts and provide the visible deterrence that protects our fisheries. The community is now asking whether Mornington's operational capacity has been reduced even further. If that is not the case, the minister should immediately clarify the current staffing levels. The government owes the peninsula an explanation. The Victorian Fisheries Authority's own figures demonstrate the consequences of reducing frontline enforcement. In 2024–25 there were 28,000 recreational fishing inspections; during the first nine months of 2025–26 fewer than 11,000 inspections were undertaken. That is despite complaints being as high as ever. We need action on this issue as soon as possible.

Casey Hospital

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (19:09): (1742) The adjournment matter that I wish to raise is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure and concerns the Casey Hospital emergency department expansion. The action that I seek is that the minister provides an update on how this upgrade will benefit constituents in my electorate of Narre Warren South. Like many in my community, I am pleased that work has recently begun on this major expansion project. The upgrade will create new treatment spaces for more presentations to the emergency department, as well as a dedicated children's ED zone. As our community grows in the outer south-east our state Labor government knows we need the essential services that we all rely upon to keep pace, including our local health services. That is why this government has invested in the Casey Hospital expansion project, which was completed in 2020, and enabled treatment of more than 25,000 extra patients and thousands more births and procedures each year.

This government has delivered more than 100 health infrastructure upgrades and expansions across Victoria, and we have also built 12 new hospitals across the state, including the new Cranbourne Community Hospital, which I know constituents in my electorate of Narre Warren South are using on a daily basis. This services my local area, and it provides a range of everyday health services while also taking pressure off the nearby Casey Hospital. But in contrast, we know what those opposite would do if they were in government: the privatisation of our hospitals and the major cuts to our health system that we have seen in the past, and cuts to hardworking hospital and healthcare workers. People in my community know how important these services and jobs are, and history shows us that those opposite do not. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

West Gippsland Hospital

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (19:11): (1743) My adjournment this evening is to the Premier, and the action I seek is that the Premier visit my community of Narracan and in particular the West Gippsland Hospital. Nobody in my community can be in any doubt of my commitment to the West Gippsland Hospital. Just last week the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Nationals came to my electorate and re-announced our commitment to the hospital of $850 million – 230 new beds, an emergency department with 33 treatment spaces, a 60-bed residential aged care facility and accommodation for healthcare workers. I have listened to the new Premier today, and the new Premier has stated on numerous occasions, 'I'm not Daniel Andrews', and he is not the member for Bendigo East, the former Premier, Premier Allan. So let us prove it. He wants to talk about integrity. He mentioned that several times today. Well, those last two premiers did not visit the West Gippsland Hospital, so will the new Premier be any different? Will the new Premier go out of his way, drive down the highway, visit the hospital, look at the condition of the hospital and listen to the nurses, the doctors and all the staff there about the horror stories of the hospital? They do a great job. But is the new Premier going to be any different? Is the new Premier going to match our commitment on the West Gippsland Hospital and actually do something the other premiers could not do and start the hospital? I know under a Liberal coalition government we will start the hospital.

The problem the new Premier has now is integrity. I do not think anyone in my community will believe him, even if he said he would, not after he has turned around and said, 'You have my full support. I will back you the whole way. I want to stand in front of my daughter and say this is what I did.' He

then turned around and knifed the former Premier in the back. So let us test out the integrity of the new Premier. Let us test out if he is different to Daniel Andrews and if he is different to the former Premier, the member for Bendigo East. I ask him urgently to come down, have a look at West Gippsland Hospital and listen to my community.

Australian Tapestry Workshop

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (19:14): (1744) My adjournment is for the Minister for Creative Industries Vicki Ward. The action I seek is for the minister to join me in visiting the Australian Tapestry Workshop in South Melbourne to view the tapestry currently being woven for the South Melbourne Town Hall, which will be installed as a permanent feature on the hall once its renovation and restoration are complete. The Australian Tapestry Workshop was established by the Victorian government in 1976, and 50 years and over 500 tapestries later, it continues to bring together leading contemporary artists and highly skilled master weavers to create works of extraordinary artistic and cultural significance. Our Labor government provides the workshop with $225,750 per year through the creative enterprises program and has previously commissioned artworks for several Victorian hospitals.

The tapestry being created for the South Melbourne Town Hall is named the *Rhythm of the Reeds*, with artwork by First Nations artist Maree Clark, and will take over 6500 hours of work by members of the tapestry workshop to be completed. When the town hall reopens this work will become a permanent part of one of South Melbourne's most important heritage buildings, welcoming residents, visitors and community groups for decades to come. A visit by the minister would provide an opportunity to see this extraordinary tapestry while it is still on the loom, to meet the talented weavers and to acknowledge the value of continued Victorian government support for important local organisations in the visual arts, such as the Australian Tapestry Workshop.

Accordingly, the action I seek is that the Minister for Creative Industries visit the Australian Tapestry Workshop to view the South Melbourne Town Hall tapestry in progress, meet with the workshop's artists and weavers and recognise the important role that public art, creative institutions and sustained government investments in the arts play in enriching Victoria's communities and securing our position as Australia's creative capital.

Government priorities

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (19:16): (1745) My adjournment matter is for the Premier. The action I seek is for the Premier to outline to the people of Ringwood the government's priorities under his leadership.

Chemist Care Now

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (19:16): (1746) Deputy Speaker, I am sure you will have much interest in my adjournment tonight as the son of a pharmacist, it coming from the daughter of a pharmacist. My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. The action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate of Wendouree to raise awareness and visit a local community pharmacy to discuss the success and future opportunities of the Victorian government's Chemist Care Now program. The Victorian Labor government continues to lead the nation in expanding access to affordable and convenient health care, and the Chemist Care Now program is a prime example of that commitment.

By enabling Victorians to access treatment and advice closer to home the program is reducing pressure on busy GPs and the emergency department at Grampians Health while providing timely care when people need it the most. Importantly, women can now access the oral contraceptive pill directly from participating pharmacists following a free private consultation without needing a GP appointment or prescription. They can also get support for UTIs and other matters, and we know that women across Victoria are so pleased to be able to do this. This reform is making health care more accessible, reducing costs and saving valuable time for women across our community. The program has also

expanded the range of conditions that pharmacists can treat, with Victorians now able to receive pharmacist care for mild dermatitis, acne and minor musculoskeletal conditions, including sprains, strains and joint pain. These are common conditions that can be safely and effectively managed through their local pharmacy, allowing patients to receive prompt treatment without unnecessary delays.

In communities like mine and like yours, Deputy Speaker, local pharmacies are among the most accessible healthcare services available. They are trusted by residents, provide professional advice and are increasingly playing a vital role in preventative and primary health care – I know because that is what my dad always did. The expansion of Chemist Care Now is helping families, workers, students and older Victorians to access health care more conveniently and closer to where they live. A visit by the minister would provide an important opportunity to hear directly from a local pharmacist about how the program is supporting patients and raise awareness so more people can access Chemist Care Now. I look forward to welcoming the minister to Ballarat and Wendouree.

Prahran electorate housing

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (19:19): (1747) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Housing and Building, and the action I seek is that the minister personally intervene to relocate social housing residents in my electorate who are living in dangerous squalor while the government ignores their desperate pleas for help. For too many vulnerable Prahran residents, public housing is no longer a refuge. It has become a place of fear, of distress and of profound emotional exhaustion every single day. Elderly people, families, children and residents living with disabilities report shouting, fights, threats, vandalism, drug-affected behaviour, repeated fire alarms, deliberately lit fires, rubbish thrown from balconies and antisocial conduct continuing throughout the day and the night. I have visited and I have seen it myself firsthand.

People affected by serious drug addiction are being housed alongside elderly residents and children without supervision, without security or support necessary to protect anyone involved. Some are camped out in unsecured lift wells and in foyers, some are even living in the laundry area. Long-term residents describe lying awake after dark, frightened in their own homes. This is Victoria. One elderly resident has endured a fire alarm inside her apartment that has not worked for a month. She has cockroaches crawling up her walls. A rubbish bin was set alight directly beneath her balcony, and residents report other fires involving doors, bins and garages. Police and firefighters have been called, yet vulnerable residents remain exposed to the next emergency.

The physical neglect is equally appalling. Six dumped vehicles were reported to have occupied scarce parking spaces for more than four years. Moss and overgrowth have been left on walkways used by elderly residents and disabled residents, creating slippery hazards. There is black mould creeping through people's homes. One lady told me that she cannot leave her toothbrush in her bathroom for more than three days because it turns black, and she has got three young children living in there. In addition to that the internet does not work in her apartment, and she has got a child that is doing year 12 at my local high school. Gardens are choked with weeds, rubbish hangs from trees and dumping has been allowed to make the complex appear derelict and abandoned. These residents remember a time when their homes were safe, stable and maintained. They have watched that dignity disappear, and it is outrageous. They have written repeatedly to housing authorities and successive ministers. They have gathered signatures and attended my office time and time again. I have contacted the minister before, contacted police and sought meetings with those responsible. Their complaints have yielded no meaningful result and their desperation is absolutely palpable. This is a persistent failure and safety issue. Housing management and basic humanity have been totally lost. No vulnerable Victorian should be condemned to this.

Broadmeadows electorate public transport

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (19:22): (1748) My adjournment is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is to invite the minister to join me to

celebrate the full rollout of new off-peak evening and weekend services on the Upfield and Craigieburn lines, giving us trains at least every 20 minutes on both lines. I have worked hard alongside the minister and many colleagues along the corridor, including the member for Pascoe Vale here next to me, to advocate for these new services, which will be so beneficial to locals, including my husband, who is on the train nearly every day for work and to the footy on the weekends. These services and the new X'trapolis trains will see an end to the overcrowding that you often see even at 10 pm. They will also be great for the many local workers in my electorate who finish late, just like the new evening and Sunday services on bus 536.

I had a ball jumping on the first 103 bus on Sunday with transport expert Peter Parker and Andrea Bunting and Maggie Cowling from Climate Action Merri-bek, who also advocated for improvements to this route, as well as local residents Nick Zull, Bronwyn White and her gunzel son Kieran, a future secretary of the department of transport, in my view.

Together with the member for Pascoe Vale, we are continuing to advocate for additional services on route 534 and for the duplication of the Upfield line. I also continue to push for improvements along other bus routes in the electorate, particularly in Campbellfield and Broadmeadows. I was really pleased to secure funding at the last budget for additional evening and weekend services on route 542, which begins at Pascoe Vale station and which serves Oak Park, Glenroy West, Jacana, Broadmeadows, Dallas and Coolaroo.

During our bus journey we also chatted about the history of the Upfield line, and I promised I would mention it in Parliament. It is an incredible story. From about 1920 a rail motor called the Beetle ran from Fawkner to Somerton. In February 1955 the then Minister of Transport announced the line would be closed. About 300 residents protested at Campbellfield, and they won a reprieve. Bolte won the May 1955 state election, and in July the new transport minister announced the Fawkner to Somerton section would be closed. There were again rallies, and the closure was delayed; however, Saturday afternoon and Sunday services on the Fawkner to Somerton section were stopped. In 1956 the link to Somerton was closed and the Campbellfield station was demolished. The line was then electrified to Upfield to service a new Ford factory. The Lonie report of 1980 threatened to close this and the other train lines entirely. Other threats came later, in the 1980s, and again in the early 1990s under Kennett. The tenacity of the community saw that proposal off. Many reps of our community here in the gallery today are from our wonderful ALP branches, and I welcome them and thank them for their advocacy and tenacity too. Improvements were made to the Upfield line throughout the 1990s, including the upgrade of timetables to run seven days and signalling improvements. More recently, level crossings have been removed and the magnificent new stations built.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind members not to acknowledge the gallery.

Responses

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (19:25): To the member for Albert Park, I very much look forward to coming to visit her community and the tapestry workshop. That is an extraordinary institution that I know was integral in creating Arthur Boyd's colossal tapestry for Parliament House in Canberra, amongst many other significant works. I very much look forward to it and thank her for the invitation.

The member for Gippsland South had a matter for the Minister for Energy and Resources and sought to take action about power outages in parts of his community. The member for Laverton had a matter for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and sought an update on the investment of our government concerning family violence, especially the benefits in her electorate of Laverton. I fully support the member's comments regarding One Nation. The member for Mornington had a matter for the Minister for Environment and sought to revoke any decision that may have resulted in less funding for fisheries. The member for Narre Warren South had a matter for the Minister for Health Infrastructure and sought an update on how the upgrade to Casey Hospital will benefit his local community.

The member for Narracan's adjournment matter was for the Premier, and he asked the Premier to visit Gippsland hospital to understand the infrastructure needs there. The member for Ringwood asked the Premier to outline his priorities. The member for Wendouree had a matter for the Minister for Health and invited the minister to visit Wendouree to visit a local pharmacy and discuss the success of Chemist Care Now, which I know many of us have experienced across our communities. The member for Prahran had a matter for the Minister for Housing and Building and sought for the minister to personally intervene to ensure that more social housing residents in inappropriate housing were moved to more appropriate housing. The member for Broadmeadows had a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport and asked her to come to her community and celebrate the benefits of the recent improvements to the train timetable, reducing overcrowding and improving everything for everyone she knows, including benefits for locals from Broadmeadows as well as Pascoe Vale and the local ALP branch, who will greatly benefit from these improvements. I will refer them on.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7:28 pm.