Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 17 June 2026

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

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

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

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

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

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

Party abbreviations

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

CONTENTS

BILLS
Corrections Amendment (Stop the Legal Loophole – Better Rights in Police Custody) Bill 2026 2245
Introduction and first reading 2245
Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Facilitating Timely Reporting) Bill 2026 2245
Introduction and first reading 2245
PAPERS
Papers 2245
PETITIONS
Responses 2246
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE
Notices 2246
MEMBERS STATEMENTS
Lighthouse Café, Footscray 2246
Gendered violence 2246
Animal welfare 2247
Landcare 2247
Southern Women's Action Network 2247
Cannabis law reform 2248
Beaconsfield ambulance services 2248
Australian Open golf tournament 2248
Refugee Week 2248
Naloxone dispensing machines 2249
Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha 2249
William Angliss Institute 2249
BILLS
Planning Amendment (Restricting New Fast Food Developments) Bill 2026 2250
Statement of charter compatibility 2250
Statement of treaty compatibility 2251
Second reading 2252
PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS
Ballarat train station 2254
Suburban Rail Loop 2258
MOTIONS
Government performance 2262
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS
Corrections system 2274
Economy 2274
Ministers statements: working from home 2276
Construction industry 2276
Construction industry 2278
Ministers statements: Aaron Kennedy 2279
Benalla Health 2280
Barwon Health 2281
Ministers statements: kinder kits 2282
Alcohol and other drug services 2283
Health system 2284
Ministers statements: neonatal postnatal support nurse program 2285
Written responses 2286
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS
Northern Metropolitan Region 2286
Eastern Victoria Region 2286
Southern Metropolitan Region 2287
Southern Metropolitan Region 2287
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region 2287
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region 2287
Northern Victoria Region 2288
Northern Victoria Region 2288
Southern Metropolitan Region 2288
Northern Victoria Region 2288
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region 2289
Western Victoria Region 2289

CONTENTS

Eastern Victoria Region 2289
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region 2289

MOTIONS
Government performance 2290
Water policy 2298

BILLS
Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026 2310
Council's amendments 2310

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE
Standing and sessional orders 2310

MOTIONS
Ombudsman referral 2310

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE
Notices of motion and orders of the day 2327

STATEMENTS ON TABLED PAPERS AND PETITIONS
Victorian Auditor-General's Office 2328
Free TAFE 2328
Department of Treasury and Finance 2329
Budget papers 2026–27 2329
Wodonga Golf Club 2329
Petition 2329
Victorian Auditor-General's Office 2330
Out-of-Home Care Services 2330

PETITIONS
Writers Victoria 2331

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE
Notices of motion 2337

BILLS
Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026 2337
Second reading 2337

ADJOURNMENT
Organised crime 2343
Road tolls 2343
Foster carers 2344
Public transport fares 2344
Youth crime 2345
Casey Hospital 2345
Vandalism 2346
Family violence 2346
Community safety 2346
Wildlife protection 2347
Be Bold Be Heard 2348
Suburban Rail Loop 2348
Triple Zero Victoria 2348
Disability services 2349
Epsom Primary School 2350
Family violence 2350
Responses 2351

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS
Written responses 2352

Wednesday 17 June 2026

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:31 am, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Bills

Corrections Amendment (Stop the Legal Loophole – Better Rights in Police Custody) Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (09:33): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Corrections Act 1986 in relation to rights of persons detained in police jails, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Katherine COPSEY: I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Facilitating Timely Reporting) Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (09:34): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 to facilitate timely reporting by the IBAC and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

David DAVIS: I move, by leave:

That the second reading be taken forthwith.

Leave refused.

David DAVIS: I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General –

Delivering School Upgrade Projects, June 2026 *(Ordered to be published).*

Improving Bus Services, June 2026 *(Ordered to be published).*

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notice of approval of the Victoria Planning Provisions – Amendment VC312.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 60, 62 and 63.

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

Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Act 2026 – Whole Act – 1 July 2026 *(Gazette S326, 16 June 2026).*

Restricting Non-disclosure Agreements (Sexual Harassment at Work) Act 2025 – Whole Act – 1 July 2026 *(Gazette S326, 16 June 2026).*

Safe Food Victoria Act 2026 – Whole Act – 1 July 2026 *(Gazette S326, 16 June 2026).*

Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Act 2025 – Chapter 5 – 1 July 2026 *(Gazette S326, 16 June 2026).*

Petitions

Responses

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: the Minister for Health's response to petition titled 'Save VicHealth'.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

The PRESIDENT: I want to acknowledge in the gallery former member of the Legislative Assembly Judith Graley.

Members statements

Lighthouse Café, Footscray

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (09:50): The Labor government is making it easier for communities in the inner west to get the support that they need, and it was fantastic to be able to join the hardworking member for Footscray Katie Hall and the Premier to officially open the Salvation Army cafe in the heart of Footscray. It is somewhere where people can go that is warm and welcoming for those that are doing it tough in our community. It will be open from 10 am to 4 pm Monday to Friday. It has been modelled on the highly successful Magpie Nest Café in Bourke Street. The drop-in cafe in Footscray will provide support for people experiencing homelessness, alcohol and drug issues or mental health challenges, including a free meal and a warm, welcoming place for patrons to get back on their feet. The Allan Labor government is proud to support this important initiative connecting locals with the care and support they need. The whole community has got behind this, including a lot of local businesses in the area who have donated to the cafe, and the whole community – community groups and individuals – have all been right behind the efforts of the Salvos. I want to thank Brendan Nottle and the dedicated team at the Salvos and all the volunteers, including a couple of Western Bulldogs players who have been getting down there and getting involved. In fact I think Mr Liberatore was donating dim sims to the cafe, which was a wonderful, generous thing for him to do. It is fantastic support that they are providing to a vulnerable community in Melbourne's inner west, and I thank the Salvos for the work they do every day.

Gendered violence

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (09:51): I rise today to reflect once again on the tragic murder of Celeste Manno by a man that she barely knew, who became obsessed with her after just one interaction. Celeste had previously complained to the police about a man who she had taken an intervention order out against at the time. The first time Celeste went to the police to express her concern about what was happening to her, with her mother Aggie, she was completely dismissed and

it was not taken seriously – so much so that that interaction was not even placed on record. The system failed her, and she was murdered in her bedroom, in her safe space, in November 2020. This was truly a horrible case, and ever since, Celeste Manno's mum Aggie Di Mauro has been fighting for change. I have previously spoken about the government's failure to implement the recommendations from this inquiry, despite the fact that, year on year, non–family violence stalking has increased every single year without exception. Daniel Andrews at the time said that this was a terrible tragedy and that 'if we can honour her memory by making changes, then that's exactly what we will do.' Today I would like to raise the fact that that has not been done more than five years later. However, a coronial inquest has now been announced. But Aggie said to me that until they have a date, they will not be happy. They are sick of broken promises and they need to see this delivered.

Animal welfare

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:53): I have spoken about my dog Aggie many times in this place before. For eight years Aggie was treated as a breeding machine. She lived on a concrete floor, slept in a plastic tub and was used to produce puppies for sale in a Melbourne pet store. When she was rescued, she had perforated eardrums, rotten teeth and mites. She was terrified of grass, terrified of being touched, and she had never known what it was like to simply be a dog. Last week, Aggie passed away at 16. Aggie's freedom should have been a testament to Victoria's landmark anti-puppy-farming laws. She was surrendered when those laws came into effect, and I believed her story represented the end of that cruelty. But the same puppy factory she came from is now back in business through a loophole and is even promoted as state government approved. A ministerial exemption allowing breeders to keep up to 50 female dogs was added late in the legislation to secure its passage. It was intended to be used sparingly, but instead some of Victoria's most notorious operators are benefiting from it. Recently, strong community opposition led to the withdrawal of a puppy farm application in Elphinstone. While attention focused on the local planning process, it is actually the state government that grants the licences allowing these facilities to operate. A system designed to shut down puppy factories should never be helping them survive. After everything Aggie endured and everything she taught us about why these laws matter, the least we can finally do is get them right.

Landcare

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (09:55): I rise to acknowledge our Landcare volunteers across Victoria, who make an incredible contribution to our state. There is nearly an MCG full of Landcare volunteers across Victoria nowadays, with hundreds of groups and dozens of networks. It has been 40 years since Joan Kirner and Heather Mitchell, who was president of the Victorian Farmers Federation, kicked off Landcare in Victoria, and it has gone on to do incredible things in Australia and worldwide. We have got two big days here in Parliament, where volunteers from across metro and regional Victoria are coming in to exhibit the work that their local communities are doing to help make farms more productive and to support local environments.

Southern Women's Action Network

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (09:55): While I am talking of milestones, I would like to acknowledge SWAN, the Southern Women's Action Network. The movement is fuelled by progressive women on the Mornington Peninsula and in Frankston. Just recently SWAN also celebrated an anniversary, with 30 years being rung up, and it is 30 years of social justice advocacy for women, especially those with disadvantage. There has been a strong focus on housing on the peninsula. I am proud to have personally worked with members from SWAN in their advocacy. Their work deserves recognition. I note the Governor-General of Australia, the Governor of Victoria and the Minister for Women have celebrated them and congratulated them personally, as have local community members – so thank you to SWAN.

Cannabis law reform

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (09:56): On this day in 1971 Richard Nixon famously declared America's public enemy number one to be drug abuse and launched his worldwide war on drugs, arguably one of the worst public policy decisions of all time. Fifty-five years later we are still fighting this war and still counting the casualties, from the mass incarceration of millions of people around the globe to the lives lost to overdose. Australia recorded its deadliest overdose year on record in 2024, with close to 2600 deaths. Communities and indeed entire countries have been devastated by this war. Globally it costs around $100 billion a year to fight. Australia arrests close to 50,000 people for drug offences, mostly for possession, and spends about $1.9 billion a year, with 55 per cent for law enforcement and 3 per cent on harm reduction. Far from ridding the world of illicit drugs, prohibition has fostered the continual expansion of the world's most lucrative illicit market, worth around $400 billion a year. Meanwhile drug use continues to increase. So do we continue to abdicate our responsibilities and leave regulation of drugs to criminal organisations, or do we accept that this war is delivering the opposite of its stated goal and seek alternatives? How about we start here in Victoria with the low-hanging fruit and end the prohibition and criminalisation of cannabis.

Beaconsfield ambulance services

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): We know that our paramedics do incredible work day in, day out, and we are so grateful to them. In the last couple of weeks I have had the opportunity to meet with the hardworking crew at the Beaconsfield ambulance branch. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for having me along, for showing me their facilities and for explaining their work – the good, the bad and the challenges that they face – and what we can do to support them. This Labor government has continued to invest in ambulance services right across the state, and I was very excited to have the chance to meet with this very hardworking group of local paramedics in my electorate to talk about how we can better support them.

Australian Open golf tournament

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): We also had a very exciting announcement this week. We know that Melbourne is of course the major sporting events capital of Australia, possibly the world, and indeed that was strengthened again this week with the announcement very excitingly that the Australian Open golf tournament has been committed to Melbourne for a further three years. I am particularly excited that the 2027 instalment of the Australian Open golf tournament will actually be held in that best part of Melbourne in the south-east, at the Peninsula Kingswood golf club. It will be wonderful to embrace the world's best golfing talent in the South-Eastern Metropolitan region next year, and indeed it will a great boon for our local economy as well in the process. Melbourne is by far and away our sporting events capital, and we look forward to having more and more major events spread not just in the inner city but in our vibrant outer suburbs as well.

Refugee Week

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (09:59): This Refugee Week I rise to recognise the courage and resilience of refugees who have made Australia their home. As the daughter of migrants from Samoa, I know that behind every journey is a story of sacrifice, hope and search for safety. We are all built and raised by communities with people who teach us, support us and stand with us in difficult times, and when we recognise that truth it becomes clear that refugees are not outside our story, they are very much a part of it. They are people. They are families. They are neighbours, friends and colleagues. Above all, they deserve to be treated with dignity and supported to thrive. One story that stands out is Nestory Irankunda. From a refugee camp to becoming the Socceroos youngest ever goalscorer in this year's FIFA World Cup, his journey is remarkable. But refugees are not worthy of respect only because of exceptional achievements. They deserve respect because they are human beings. His story reflects the potential within Australia's migrant and refugee communities to overcome the many systemic barriers in their way. To the fearmongers and divisive

voices seeking to pit Australians against one another, my message is clear: we are built and raised by communities, and refugees are very much part of that shared story. They are welcome here not as outsiders but as part of this nation we are building together. This Refugee Week let us celebrate refugee stories but, more importantly, stand firmly against racism and division and continue to lead with humanity, fairness and compassion.

Naloxone dispensing machines

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:01): Opioid overdose is a prominent cause of drug-related death in Victoria, and recently I had the opportunity to join Minister Stitt, Mr Berger and the member for Albert Park at the Alfred for the launch of Victoria's first naloxone vending machine. Naloxone is a life-saving medication that can temporarily reverse the effects of an opioid overdose within minutes by blocking the opioid receptors in the brain. It is a non-addictive, non-intoxicating substance that cannot be misused. The vending machine looks and works like every other vending machine we have ever used. You can dispense a naloxone packet containing two nasal sprays with a single dose each and clear instructions on how to use in an emergency. Part of Labor's statewide action plan to reduce drug harm will trial 20 machines, like the one at the Alfred, across Victoria – 10 in Melbourne and 10 in regional Victoria. It is installed just outside the emergency department at the Alfred. One has been installed at the Sunshine Mental Health and Wellbeing Centre at the Sunshine Hospital. I was there back at the Alfred on Sunday morning. I went past the machine and saw that it was being well used, and I think the quick uptake of this life-saving substance will do wonders to stop opioid overdose. Opioid overdose can affect anyone – those taking prescribed medications, people using illicit drugs or those who unknowingly take substances containing opioids. Carrying naloxone means that anyone can act in an emergency to save a life.

Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:03): On Sunday I was delighted to join the hardworking member for Broadmeadows Kathleen Matthews-Ward at the Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha gurdwara in Campbellfield. The community came together to mark the 135th birth anniversary of Dr BR Ambedkar and to inaugurate a bust in his honour brought all the way from India. Dr Ambedkar, known affectionately as Babasaheb, was a jurist, social reformer and one of the great champions of equality. He fought for workers rights, the 8-hour working day and the dignity of people pushed to the margins by the caste system. He also played a special role as the chair of the committee that drafted the Indian constitution. What made the visit on Sunday so special was the community spirit. The organisation is run by people who work incredibly hard, often quietly and always with generosity. They feed people, support people, keep culture strong and create a place where people feel welcome and looked after. You can feel the spirit as you walk in and its warmth – humble, practical and full of heart. This year also marked the 650th birth anniversary of Guru Ravidas, whose teachings on equality, service and human dignity continue to guide this community. Those values are alive at the gurdwara every week through langar, through voluntary service and through the belief that no-one should leave hungry. I want to thank the organisation for having us and especially thank Amarjit, Sonu and Mohinder for their ongoing leadership and service. I look forward to visiting again.

William Angliss Institute

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (10:04): We know that when we invest in training, we are investing in opportunity, and this could not be clearer than at William Angliss Institute, where I got to see firsthand the Allan Labor government's investment in world-class training facilities for students in the north. Last week the Minister for Skills and TAFE and I were able to see how the $4 million investment has transformed existing spaces into modernised training kitchens, which are already supporting the next generation of professionals. Touring the facilities it was inspirational to see students learning in real time, using industry-standard equipment in purpose-built spaces to support their success. The new super kitchen, with capacity for 32 students across dual training areas, allows

for two classes to run at the same time, and this expands opportunities for students to gain the hands-on experience that they need. Alongside this is the collaboration kitchen, and there are accessible workstations as well to ensure that these facilities are inclusive for all students. Importantly, I had a chance to meet the free TAFE students who are already benefiting from these investments. These students are gaining skills that will lead them directly to the vital jobs of the future that Victorians need, and can I just wish them all the very best with their future. I hope that it stays right here in Victoria. You see, only Labor is delivering and investing in TAFE, backing students and the infrastructure needed to build a strong and skilled workforce.

Bills

Planning Amendment (Restricting New Fast Food Developments) Bill 2026

Statement of charter compatibility

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (10:06): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the **Planning Amendment (Restricting New Fast Food Developments) Bill 2026**.

In my opinion, the Planning Amendment (Restricting New Fast Food Developments) Bill 2026, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The bill amends the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* to strengthen the authority of local governments to determine whether new fast-food establishments should be permitted within their municipal boundaries.

Human Rights Issues

Protection of families and children

Section 17 provides that families and children have the right, without discrimination, to be protected by society and the State. The bill advances the protection of children and families by restricting certain food environments near schools. By prioritising public health through the mandatory consideration of obesity data, outlet density and proximity to schools, the bill ensures the protection of children's health which supports children's right to health, well being and equitable living conditions and promotes the community's overall wellbeing.

Taking part in public life

Section 8 provides that every person has the right and opportunity to participate in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Through strengthening local government authority and locally relevant planning decisions, the bill enhances the ability of communities to participate in local decisions that affect their environment and amenities. In this way the bill reinforces democratic governance structures at a local government level.

By mandating consideration of local obesity rates and density of unhealthy food outlets in applications, the bill enables the targeting of health inequities in local areas and potentially decreases the disproportionate burden of health inequities in disadvantaged and low socioeconomic communities. In this way, the bill creates a clear legal framework for the protection of community wellbeing.

Limitations

Property rights

Section 20 provides that a person must not be deprived of that person's property other than in accordance with law.

While the provisions of the bill may limit the ability of the landholder or developer to use their land for legitimate commercial purposes, the limitation is proportionate and justifiable where this right diminishes the health and wellbeing considerations of the community, as expressed above. The bill limits the use of land only where such use contravenes public health considerations and the protection of children.

Fair Hearing

The insert of s86A overrides a specific VCAT decision and reinstates the original council decision to refuse an application and may contravene s24 the right to a fair hearing.

Conclusion

While the bill may limit certain rights, including property rights and the right to a fair hearing, I believe these limitations are reasonable and proportionate to achieving the objective of protecting children and promoting democratic participation and equity.

As such, I consider that this Bill is compatible with Charter obligations.

David Ettershank
Member for the Western Metropolitan Region
Legalise Cannabis Victoria

Statement of treaty compatibility

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (10:06): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Statewide Treaty Act 2025:

1. In my opinion, the *Planning Amendment (Restricting New Fast Food Developments) Bill 2026* 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

2. The bill proposes to amend the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* to restrict the development of new fast-food outlets and to prioritise public health as an overarching consideration in planning decisions. The bill introduces planning mechanisms to regulate or prohibit fast food outlets with consideration of public health impacts, including proximity to schools and existing density of fast food outlets.

Consultation with the First Peoples' Assembly of Gellung Warl

3. 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 the Assembly 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

4. I have considered the potential impacts of planning law and public health outcomes on First Peoples in Victoria and consider the aims of the bill is compatible with the objects at section 66(3)(d) of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025 of:

Advancing rights and self-determination (s66(3)(d)(i))

5. The Bill does not directly engage mechanisms for First Peoples' self-determination, such as decision-making authority or specific consultation rights in land use planning. However, by embedding public health as a central planning objective, the Bill may indirectly support improved community wellbeing outcomes, which are foundational to the exercise of self-determination.

5.1 The Bill does not limit the ability of First Peoples to exercise rights in relation to land, including under native title or Traditional Owner Settlement frameworks, as it applies broadly to planning controls across all land.

Addressing disadvantage arising from historic wrongs (s66(3)(d)(ii))

6. The bill does not contribute to the disadvantage experienced by First Peoples as a result of historic and ongoing injustices.

6.1 By enabling planning authorities to restrict fast food development in areas of high concentration or near schools, the Bill seeks to make a positive contribution to addressing entrenched public health disparities. Given the disproportionate burden of diet-related illness among First Peoples, measures that improve the food environment may support efforts to reduce these inequalities.

6.2 The Bill does not introduce punitive or enforcement-based measures that disproportionately impact First Peoples, but instead operates at a systemic, environmental level through planning controls.

Equal enjoyment of human rights (s66(3)(d)(iii))

7. The Bill applies uniformly across Victoria and does not single out First Peoples for differential treatment. To the extent that it alters land use planning considerations, it does so in a way that is directed toward improving public health outcomes for all communities.

7.1 By addressing environmental determinants of health, including access to healthy food, the Bill may contribute to more equal enjoyment of the right to health and related human rights for First Peoples, who presently experience poorer health outcomes than non-Indigenous Victorians.

Conclusion

8. In my opinion the Bill does not affect any of the objects specified in section 66(3)(d)(i) to (iii) of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025 and is therefore compatible with each of those objects.

Second reading

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (10:07): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Planning Amendment (Restricting New Fast Food Developments) Bill 2026 seeks to strengthen the authority of local governments to determine whether new fast-food establishments should be permitted within their municipal boundaries.

The bill amends the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to:

- ensure that public health is an appropriately weighted priority when decisions are made about the use and development of land, including by restricting use and development of lands for fast-food development (proposed section 4(2)(db));
- amend the planning scheme to provide for the regulation or prohibition of land for fast-food outlets (proposed section 6(2)(ea));
- ensure that before approving an application for a fast-food outlet the responsible authority has considered whether the applicant has demonstrated that the outlet will not cause harm to the public health of residents of the municipal district in which the land is situated; and has considered:
  - the applicable land's proximity to schools;
  - the number of fast-food outlets within a 5-kilometre radius of the land; and
  - local obesity or public health data for the municipal district in which the land is situated;
- set aside the decision of VCAT in *McDonald's Australia Limited v Darebin CC* [2026] VCAT 283 and reinstate the decision of Darebin City Council in application P1041/2025.

This is a timely bill and one that empowers local communities, residents and businesses, and their councils, to have a say over fast-food developments proposed for their neighbourhoods.

The bill comes in the wake of the VCAT decision to overturn Darebin City Council's rejection of an application to build a McDonald's in Northcote – a development that was met with overwhelming community opposition.

Northcote is far from being the only community to oppose the expansion of the fast-food industry in this state. Many of you would know of the local opposition to the development of a McDonald's in Castlemaine. We are seeing a similar situation in Phillip Island and in Bendigo.

Local governments have attempted to give expression to the strong opposition conveyed by the parents, families and young people of their community but have invariably seen their decisions overturned on appeal by corporations to VCAT.

Even while local governments are legally obligated under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 to protect, improve and promote public health, they cannot do this under the current planning framework, which facilitates the uncontrolled expansion of the fast-food industry.

The impacts on health and wellbeing are profound

Evidence shows a consistent link between regular fast-food consumption and increased risk of chronic diseases, driven by its high-calorie, low-nutrient composition and its contribution to inflammation and weight gain.

These negative effects and poor health outcomes are exacerbated among low-income populations and in outer-suburban and growth area environments. In Australia, children from disadvantaged communities are twice as likely as children from more advantaged communities to be above a healthy weight.

Melbourne is officially Australia's fast-food capital. Its growth areas have experienced a near-doubling of outlets between 2008 and 2016, leading it to be accurately described as a food swamp by Deakin University researchers. In some parts of our city there are now nine fast-food outlets for every healthy food outlet.

Fast-food consumption has surged in Australia, raising critical concerns for public health. Pre-COVID industry research found that Australians were spending around a third of their weekly food budget on fast food, rising to nearly 40 per cent for 18- to 35-year-olds.

Worse still, Victorian and Australian taxpayers are subsidising the profits of the $30 billion multinational fast-food industry. The Obesity Evidence Hub has shown that the economic burden of chronic dietary-related ill health will pass $60 billion by 2030 and reach $230 billion by 2060, fully 3 per cent of Australia's GDP.

Safeguarding community health and wellbeing, especially of vulnerable populations including young people, must be a principal priority of the Victorian planning framework. Consistent with the agency pillar of the FAO definition of 'food security', Victorian communities must be able to meaningfully shape their local food environments.

Internationally, more and more jurisdictions are recognising the cost of the unchecked development of fast-food outlets.

Countries with comprehensive public health and nutrition regulations – such as taxation on unhealthy food, advertising restrictions and strong planning controls – report lower dependence on fast food and improved public health outcomes.

Research has also found that a multidimensional policy strategy results in a significant density decrease in fast-food outlets. These policies include restrictions from schools, control of density of fast-food restaurants and limits through the obesity rates of children. More than half of local authorities in the UK have now introduced one or more elements of these policies to improve public health outcomes.

In Ireland, 'no fry zones' of 400 metres from schools and early years centres have been introduced to decrease the public health burden of childhood obesity.

And in Australia, the South Australian government last year took the bold first step of banning junk food advertising on all forms of public transport.

We need a multipronged approach to this problem. However, Victoria can demonstrate its commitment to a healthy future for its children and young people by passing this legislation to empower local governments to restrict, for the first time, the further expansion of the fast-food industry.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:14): I move:

That debate be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Production of documents

Ballarat train station

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (10:14): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

(a) in October 2022 the Victorian government announced $49.2 million for accessibility upgrades at Ballarat station as part of Commonwealth Games legacy infrastructure commitments;

(b) despite the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games in July 2023, the project proceeded without a revised business case or cost–benefit analysis;

(c) the published cost of the project has continued to increase, including a further increase in the 2025–26 state budget attributed to market escalation;

(d) serious concerns have been raised that the total cost of the project is vastly disproportionate to its physical scope including a 28-metre pedestrian bridge, two lifts, stairs and a ramp, and that comparable infrastructure could be delivered by the private sector for a fraction of the published cost;

(2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, the following documents:

(a) the business case for the Ballarat station upgrade, including any revision following the 2023 cancellation of the Commonwealth Games;

(b) all documents relating to project cost increases, including gateway reviews, ministerial briefings and departmental advice;

(c) all documents relating to the procurement model for the project, including the allocation of the project to the Western Program Alliance;

(d) a breakdown of total project expenditure by category, including design, construction, alliance overheads, project management and consultancy costs; and

(e) any analysis or benchmarking comparing the cost of the Ballarat station upgrade with comparable accessibility upgrades at other railway stations.

Ballarat railway station is a beautiful historic building that stands out in the Lydiard Street precinct for its amazing Victorian era architecture. The Victorian government started a project to build a pedestrian overpass at the station, primarily to cater for those with mobility concerns. I want to make it very clear that I 100 per cent support disability access and improving the lives of those with mobility issues, especially to public transport. But I would argue that this particular project does not really hit the mark. The problem is the design is not in keeping with the beautiful architecture that surrounds the precinct, and, I might add, it ended up costing close to $53 million. That is a huge amount of money and should have been much less of a figure. The worst part is that the overpass cannot be accessed from the adjoining car park, which just seems bizarre. You have to go into the station itself, all the way along the platform and then up the stairs to where the elevator is. For a project which is meant to be about accessibility, it does not really seem to be that accessible.

The initial budget allocation for this was $50 million. A year later it went up to $51 million in the budget, and now it is almost $53 million. I am seeking documents that show how the project cost could be that much, including a breakdown of costs line by line, which will show exactly where the $53 million was spent on a project that seemingly appears very poor value for money. I want to know how much was spent on the design of the lift and of the overpass itself. I want to know the costings of the construction and indeed how much was spent on consultants; I want a full breakdown of the construction elements and how they have been accounted for; and I would like to know how much time was billed to any department for any works that were done, whether that be public consultation or whether that be advice – whatever. There is a saying, 'If you're going to do a job, do it once and do it properly.' I cannot see that commonsense approach applied here.

The community of Ballarat also deserve answers, and the member for Wendouree has been silent on the matter. In fact Ms Addison asked me to provide her with costings, and the reason why is because I have said publicly that the project should not have cost that much. I have had contact with developers, engineers and experts in the field who have said it should have been in the vicinity of between $6 million and $10 million. I want to make it crystal clear that I am not the government and I do not have access to the department officials and the data that the government members clearly have. I encourage people like the member for Wendouree to provide those figures publicly. But of course, when pressed about those matters, nothing happened. In fact it has been brutal silence, with no attempt to release costings and no attempt to provide transparency to the public. The member for Wendouree really needs a reality check. So if Labor will not be transparent about the costings of this project, I have got no choice but to use the parliamentary processes available to me to seek those documents and get answers for the community. To be frank, I should not have to go through those processes just to get answers about a project.

People in Ballarat have a right to know exactly what the money was spent on, especially for a project that appears to be excessive in cost, ugly in appearance and completely impractical in helping those it was actually designed to help. As I said, people who have disability issues, whether it be mobility or whether it be other things that limit their movement, should not have to go into the train station when the disability lift abuts the car park. They are met with a high steel fence. That is hardly a thing that encourages anyone to feel welcome, let alone try to access the supports that are meant to be in place for them. It just seems completely bizarre. I do not know which person designed it, but they seriously need to have a look at who they were trying to serve. It is completely nonsensical, what has happened, and it sends a message to people who do have mobility issues that the Victorian government does not understand them.

I look forward to seeing the documents. I hope that the government is cooperative in providing them, and hopefully they can shed some light on what has happened here. We want to know the costs. We want to know the breakdown of those costs. We want to know where the money was spent. It is not just me; the people of Ballarat have a right to know.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:19): I am very delighted to have the opportunity to speak to motion 1486 today, because it does give us an opportunity to highlight and talk about what has been a transformational project for the Ballarat community. It is good to see that the Liberal Party are prepared to half-heartedly acknowledge, at least, that this government is getting on and doing the job. Of course back when you and I were little tackers, Mr McCracken, it was your Liberal government that closed the lines back to Ballarat. You could not go beyond Ballarat in the Kennett years, and it was Labor governments that then extended it further beyond again. Indeed it is the hardworking advocacy of good local Labor members like the member for Wendouree Juliana Addison that has been so instrumental in getting this project up and away.

Ballarat station is a beautiful station. When I have been to visit, I have had the benefit of visiting by train, and what a stunning station it is. But even years ago it was very clear that it was not fit for the standards. Indeed I am informed it was the only station on the entire corridor that did not have proper Disability Discrimination Act 1992 capabilities. As a result, the member for Wendouree has listened to her community who have been speaking up for the need for this upgrade, and she has been extremely vocal in raising these concerns of her community and getting this project delivered, because that is what good Labor governments do. They listen and respond to communities. That is exactly what good local Labor members like the member for Wendouree do, and this is what they achieve. Unlike those opposite, whose only experience with the Ballarat line corridor was closing it off in the 1990s, those on this side know the importance of our regional rail services. It is why services on the Ballarat line have dramatically increased over the life span of this government, and it is why we are continuing to invest through the regional rail upgrade and other projects on all five corridors that V/Line runs across the state. That certainly includes the DDA upgrades to Ballarat station, which I know have been

strongly welcomed by the Ballarat community and have been strongly welcomed in particular by disability advocates both in the Ballarat community and in the wider region.

We do have a beautiful heritage station that was built there in 1862, and in doing this the requirements obviously do present a lot of challenges in keeping the heritage value of that station whilst providing the modern, fit-for-purpose facilities that the travelling public need and that the Ballarat community deserve. The member for Wendouree has listened and has acted.

In your remarks, Mr McCracken, you said a few things. In reading through your motion here commenting on previous sporting projects, like the Commonwealth Games, you are implying that you do not actually support this project. You are saying, 'Well, after that change, maybe it would've been best that we didn't build it.' Well, that certainly could not be further from the truth. That certainly could not be further from what we on this side think and certainly what the member for Wendouree has been advocating for. You and I were on the committee of course – and you, Mrs McArthur. We were talking about the legacy projects that were being delivered and how we were going to double down on that investment in regional communities. We can debate the scope of how much this particular project was related to that, but certainly the Ballarat station upgrade was a key part of continuing our investment in regional Victoria. We have seen continued investment in the regions, which we do actually respect and do not just refer to as the 'toenails of Victoria', like your side do.

I think perhaps the most extraordinary comment from Mr McCracken was the accusation of silence that he applied to the member for Wendouree. It leads me to wonder if he has actually ever met the member for Wendouree, because of anything that you could accuse her of, being silent is not one of them, and certainly being silent on behalf of her community is not one of them. I have learned many a great deal of things about many issues in Ballarat and many projects in Ballarat. Despite being from, straight up, the other side of the state, I have had many good conversations with the member for Wendouree where she has been more than exuberant in telling me and anyone else who will listen about all the good things going on in Ballarat and why it is such a great place to live, work and be in. Indeed she is a phenomenal advocate, and in the time that I have had in this place to visit Ballarat as part of various committee hearings, I have got to see that firsthand. I have got to see the benefit of that Labor investment delivered by wonderful local members, such as the member for Wendouree, into their communities. I have had the privilege of seeing that on my visits into that fine city in the western region, Mr McCracken.

I look forward to perhaps coming to visit you again sometime soon, and we can marvel at the wonder of this upgraded station that has been delivered by a local Labor MP who listens to her community, who takes the fight up to government and who gets the job done.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:24): I am struck with this idea of marvelling at the wonder – a $50 million-plus edifice. It must be gold plated, Mr Galea. I have got to say at the outset that Mr McCracken and I support disability access at Ballarat station. The real problem is you failed to do it when you were doing the upgrade: 'Whoops! I forgot about disability access.' How could you possibly get it so wrong? How can you possibly say that disability access should cost in the vicinity of over $50 million?

John Berger interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: 'Do it right' – Mr Berger, that is a disgrace. You are blowing taxpayers money at the rate of millions. Mr McCracken said he got a quote from people that said it might be $6 million. I will tell you what, I spoke to some builders and developers. They said they would be still making a profit at $1 million or $3 million. Whoever heard of a disability access – a lift going over the top of some railway lines, which you cannot access, as Mr McCracken says, from a car park – costing over $50 million? This is why this state is in so much debt. This is why you absolutely enable corruption of every building organisation, like the CFMEU, with $15 billion gone down the gurgler – unbelievable. Also – Mr Galea, do not walk away, mate – they cannot mention the word 'respect' in

the one sentence. You people have no respect for the taxpayers of Victoria, not one skerrick of respect, I can tell you.

This is not just my view. In the UK, Network Rail's Access for All program delivers accessible footbridges with lifts at railway stations across Britain. The average cost is between £3 million and £5 million; that is roughly A$6 million to A$10 million, as Mr McCracken said. Closer to home, the New South Wales transport access program has delivered over 70 full-station accessibility upgrades since 2011 at a much lesser cost. We have got a situation here where the project has crept upward through at least three publicly documented figures. What we need from this documents motion, as Mr McCracken said, is every detail of this project. Let us be transparent; let us be accountable for a change and provide the documents – that is something you also never do. It started at $49.2 million when it was first announced in October 2022. It was revised to $50 million in June 2024 and was explicitly stated as $51 million by the local member. She can spend money like it is going out of fashion – not her money, taxpayers money. Then, in May 2025, in the state budget the project was allocated an additional $3.6 million due to market escalation. What in the hell is that?

The Ballarat station precinct development, a $28.3 million project, delivered a refurbished goods shed, convention centre, Quest hotel and a 405-space multideck car park – all of this literally at the station. They rebuilt everything around the platforms but forgot to make them accessible. How do you possibly manage a project so incompetently? Apparently the project, instead of going to a competitive tender, was allocated to an existing Melbourne-based alliance. We have builders in Ballarat who can do stuff. We do not need Melbourne-based alliances from inside the tram tracks wrecking our city. This approach is normally taken for high-risk multisite programs; it is not designed for a single pedestrian bridge in a regional city.

So whose pockets were you lining, and what were the alliance overheads? What percentage of the $51 million was project management, design fees and alliance margins, and what percentage actually went into steel, concrete and lifts? These are the questions. We need documents. We need these answers to make sure that we can account for the fact that over $50 million, disgracefully, went into trying to provide accessibility access, but not from the car park – you would still have to wander into the station to get across the road. For about a year the gate was locked. It was unbelievable. You are absolutely hopeless, Mr Galea. We need these documents.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): Mrs McArthur, you are welcome to say that to me when I am in the other chair, but not in this chair.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (10:30): What a joy to get up here this morning and make a contribution on this motion moved by Mr McCracken. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to talk about Labor and our enormous commitment to public and active transport. I do not know if it has actually been said by my predecessor here, but as per convention the government will not oppose this motion before us. I am going to take the time that I have to talk about Ballarat station, because it is only Labor that has new ideas and solutions, not just when it comes to making life more affordable but also when it comes to making Victorians' commute more accessible and more comfortable. Of course there are state-shaping, travel time slashing projects like the Suburban Rail Loop to smaller scale projects like upgrades to the beloved and historic Ballarat station. These are vital upgrades that were completed in March of this year, and they have made the gateway to one of our most beautiful country towns safer and more accessible while keeping the stations' charming heritage character.

I have got to say, so many Victorians have told me how they have taken advantage of Labor's free public transport throughout April and May and half-price public transport now to the end of the year. So many people have now seen the beautiful station there at Ballarat because of the necessary investments that we have made to upgrade that station as well as have half-price public transport. Investments like the Ballarat train station upgrade mean families with prams, older Victorians and people with disability can travel with ease, safety and dignity. It means that a trip to Ballarat is no

longer a logistical challenge but a simple and seamless journey. It is better and more inclusive infrastructure that opens up regional Victoria for everyone.

Accessibility and functionality are essential, but public infrastructure should also reflect the character and history of the community it serves. This is exactly what has been achieved at Ballarat station. The upgrade was delivered with a strong focus on preserving and respecting the station's significant historical overlay and heritage overlay, let me just say, through careful design and extensive consultation with Heritage Victoria, the Office of the Victorian Government Architect and local stakeholders. The project honours the rich architectural legacy of Ballarat, a city defined by gold rush traditions. Since it opened in 1862 the station has evolved from regional transport hub to historical icon, and it remains one of only three surviving 19th century railway stations of its kind, with the iconic clock tower that looks like the old train shed a constant reminder of Ballarat's proud place in Victoria's history. These vital modern upgrades are carefully designed to sit within and complement this remarkable physical setting, ensuring its character is preserved for generations to come.

Those opposite want to question the importance of these upgrades and complain it is too expensive to provide accessibility and safety to those using Ballarat stations, but clearly they have not done their homework on how thorough and technical these upgrades have been. Delivering accessibility upgrades in a live rail environment within a tightly constrained heritage precinct is not a simple task, but it is necessary. The cost of these upgrades reflects the care taken to do the job properly and to protect a statewide significant heritage site while maintaining train services and delivering infrastructure that will continue to serve the Ballarat community safely and inclusively for generations to come. This project proves that you can deliver infrastructure that is accessible, functional and fit for the future while being beautiful and deeply respectful of our state's history. Extensive consultation has occurred with disability advocates, heritage experts and local stakeholders, ensuring that the upgrades reflect the voices of people who use them every day. But critically, they affirm that people with accessibility needs deserve to fully experience our state's fantastic regional offerings, to travel easily, to enjoy our charming towns and to share in the rich cultural heritage of places like Ballarat and all that they have to offer. That is what inclusive investment looks like, and that is the legacy this government is proud to deliver, championed of course by the unstoppable force, the member for Wendouree Juliana Addison. Can I just pay my respects to her for all her advocacy that led to the completion of these works.

Motion agreed to.

Suburban Rail Loop

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (10:35): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes:

(a) a report by Infrastructure Australia in 2025 that questioned the financial viability of the Victorian government's Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) East project;

(b) that the Infrastructure Australia report advised that before committing further funding to SRL East, the federal government should receive and approve at least the following additional information from the proponent:

(i) an updated and detailed cost estimate for the SRL East and supporting station precinct interventions;

(ii) a comprehensive funding and financing strategy with supporting quantitative analysis that details how value capture will fund one-third of SRL East's cost;

(iii) analysis (including cost–benefit analysis) that demonstrates the benefits of the SRL East in terms of social, economic and environmental outcomes and its contribution to the SRL program;

(iv) contingencies and an 'exit strategy' should the project experience cost blow-outs or funding shortfalls or where expected benefits fail to materialise;

(c) that in 2026, Infrastructure Australia revised its views on the project, presumably based on information provided by the Victorian government;

(d) that this supplementary information provided by the Victorian government has not been made public; and

(2) requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council within 30 days of the house agreeing to this resolution, a copy of the information provided to Infrastructure Australia relating to paragraphs (1)(b)(i) to (iv).

This documents motion pertains to the release of updated data on the Suburban Rail Loop East, the SRL. From the outset I want to say that this motion is entirely about transparency. Legalise Cannabis Victoria is not interested in pointscoring. This is not about whether this is a good piece of infrastructure or otherwise. It is about this government's financial decisions. As I spoke about in my response to the budget, how governments invest our money is about choices and priorities. It is about opportunity cost. That which is spent on one thing cannot be spent on another. How does a government accord appropriate priorities? The SRL may have great merit, but what is it costing us? We do not know, because the government continues to rely on a 2019–20 cost plan. This cost plan makes a provision in the variation to cost of plus or minus 6 per cent, and it is waved around as though it is a great truth. But the reality is that construction costs in that same time have increased by between 20 and 40 per cent, not 6 per cent. This government, if it was taking in a cost plan or a proposal for development, would never accept a five-year-old cost plan.

Infrastructure Victoria were clearly not comfortable with the numbers. Last year they evaluated the SRL business case and advised the federal government that the project was financially risky, insufficiently detailed about value capture and potentially overoptimistic about its benefits. They even asked if there was an exit strategy, and that is an unusual question from Infrastructure Australia. Is there an exit strategy? The public has a right to know. How much will it cost? The public has a right to know. What does the cost–benefit study show? The public has a right to know. What is the return on investment?

Twelve months after expressing scepticism in the costings and the benefit of the project, Infrastructure Australia gave it the green light for the federal government to move forward with funding stage 1 as an immediate priority, apparently satisfied that their questions had been answered. We also have a right to know what the state government provided to prompt Infrastructure Australia's startling about-face. If there were simply documents provided and that satisfied Infrastructure Australia, well, that is fantastic. Let us see them. Let us understand the persuasive argument that was provided by the state government. However, there is a counternarrative: FOI documents released to the *Australian* show that their concerns were not in fact meaningfully resolved before the project was elevated to priority status. Instead, the SRL was deemed 'investment ready' because billions had already been committed, major contracts had been signed and construction had begun. Further, the FOI documents unearthed emails between the state and federal governments which reveal that in their assessment of SRL East, Infrastructure Australia was pressured to remove environmental concerns, which would have been even more damning.

As I said, this is not about the merits or otherwise of the project. Infrastructure Australia CEO Adam Copp did note in a recent interview that Melbourne will soon be Australia's largest capital city and that by 2065 Melbourne will be the size of London. So it makes sense to move away from Melbourne's monocentric hub-and-spoke network. The question is: how do we best solve that, and what are the opportunity costs of continuing to pour billions of dollars into what appears to be a bottomless sinkhole of cash when projects like Melton and Wyndham Vale electrification are continually pushed back? I would also suggest that public trust is another very real opportunity cost of this project, given the government's refusal to reveal even the most basic information about the updated costs and the cost–benefit of the SRL.

As I said, this piece of infrastructure may indeed have merit, but it is the most expensive infrastructure project in Victoria's history. It is Victoria's AUKUS, and as such it must be afforded the highest level

of scrutiny. The absolute lack of transparency around this project is somewhat, I am afraid to say, typical of the government's modus operandi. Is it any wonder that One Nation is thriving in this vacuum of public trust? I need to be able to look my constituents in the eye and tell them at the very least that I have done my best to give this project the transparency it requires. All members in this place should be able to do the same, and this motion simply seeks to give life to that basic responsibility that, as members in this place, is central to our being. It is why we are here. I would just like to emphasise that the government needs to step up and not wave around a five-year-old cost plan and business case but tell us what is actually happening. I commend this motion to the house.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:41): Despite Mr Ettershank's exhortations that he is not standing up to attack the Suburban Rail Loop, he spent 5 minutes doing exactly that. I think it belies the fact that Mr Ettershank clearly does not support investment in rail infrastructure in Melbourne and he does not want to invest in city-shaping infrastructure projects, because all we have heard from Mr Ettershank this morning, despite him saying, 'I am not up here to criticise,' is him spending 5 minutes, maybe 6, outlining a litany of alleged concerns with the project that are deaf to some of the facts. I want to use this contribution to go through particularly what we have in the public domain from Infrastructure Australia about their views on the SRL, because I would not want the debate to be left solely informed by the anti-transport critique of Mr Ettershank in his contribution today.

What we have seen from this state Labor government is decision after decision after decision to invest in the critical rail infrastructure that our city needs, whether it is the Metro Tunnel, whether it is doing cross-suburban rail like the Suburban Rail Loop or whether it is spending the $4 billion in partnership with the Commonwealth to transform Sunshine, to disentangle the lines and set up the west for the investments that it needs that cannot happen without those works. This government has a demonstrated track record of investing in infrastructure. The Suburban Rail Loop is but one of those projects.

We heard criticisms of the Metro Tunnel from the Liberal Party before it was delivered by Labor. They called the project a hoax. We had a federal Liberal government that cut billions of infrastructure funding committed from the previous Labor government to the Metro Tunnel, so on the Metro Tunnel Victoria had to go it alone. What we have seen now is almost a redux of that, where we have got criticism after criticism after criticism that is not grounded in reality, the same way they said that we could not build the Metro Tunnel, that it was a hoax. The critics line up and say the same things now about the Suburban Rail Loop. They were wrong then; they are wrong now.

Let us get to what the Commonwealth has said and done and what Infrastructure Australia in particular has said and done. Mr Ettershank, in his contribution, quoted a 2025 Infrastructure Australia report that he said was critical of the project. Well, that was the report that then saw the release of $2.2 billion of Commonwealth money flow to the project. That was in 2025. In 2026, after further discussions and analysis, what we have seen from Infrastructure Australia is not a repudiation of the SRL but an endorsement of it. What Infrastructure Australia has said is that the Suburban Rail Loop is and should be on the national infrastructure priority list – not a Victorian government body, not a body that is controlled by Victoria but an independent agency of the Commonwealth, kicking the tyres of a project that has been the subject of the sort of criticism that Mr Ettershank has levelled at it since it was first announced. Time after time after time, whether it was before the 2018 business case was announced and released or since that time, when further work has been done by Infrastructure Australia, those who decry investments in rail infrastructure, like Mr Ettershank did today, have continued to criticise the project. After putting this project on the national infrastructure priority list, the CEO of Infrastructure Australia said:

> … we do see the connections around Melbourne's outer suburbs are a really important way to spread the population of Melbourne going forward and make sure that people can move around more effectively.
>
> …
>
> The productivity of our economy and livability of our cities is all hinged on investing on the right infrastructure at the right time …

That is what the SRL does.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (10:46): I thank Mr Ettershank for bringing forward quite a good motion on the Suburban Rail Loop. I too agree with it and support this motion completely because this project does require transparency. There are a number of things that Mr Batchelor went to that I just want to speak to, and I note the absence of quite a few of his colleagues, who would, I assume, privately express dismay at this project. As we know from the *Age* and the *Australian Financial Review* in the last fortnight, supporters of Mr Carroll supposedly planned on pausing the Suburban Rail Loop and redirecting funding into other projects. Isn't that funny? But we know that this project is a dog's breakfast, and we know what Infrastructure Australia said. Infrastructure Australia said they had low confidence in the $34.5 billion price tag, and they called for an exit strategy. We know from documents released to the *Australian* that the agency's position shifted not because concerns about the project's viability were alleviated but because the Allan state government had already committed billions of dollars and signed major construction contracts, making the project difficult for Infrastructure Australia to ignore.

We know this project is going to cost over $15 billion over the next four years. That is one-fifth of the state's infrastructure projects. That includes school builds and hospital builds as well. So when the government cry foul or make a huge scare campaign about cuts to hospitals and cuts to schools which do not exist, know that they are spending one-fifth of all infrastructure in this state over the next four years on one project in the eastern suburbs. As revealed by the Treasurer last sitting week, the value capture portion is not $11.5 billion. It is not. She said it was going to be greater than that. Do you know how it is going to be greater than that? The budget papers say that it will be paid up-front and then paid back over a 40-year period and also include existing land tax and windfall gains tax and stamp duty to put towards the project, removing it from consolidated revenue that funds schools and hospitals.

Let me point out how the 40-year loan works. For any loan over 10 years, the yield on a Treasury Corporation of Victoria loan is about 6.25 per cent. So this government will be paying over $28 billion in interest for the $11.5 billion value capture component without even paying the $11.5 billion, because the Treasurer revealed it also includes interest. This is an absurd amount of money to be paying on one project. What it also reveals is that the SRL North will have to never go ahead. You are spending such a huge amount of money on SRL East that we know SRL North could literally never happen. You have not planned for it. You have not even told us where the stations are. It has got it on the map that it will be at Heidelberg station. How are you going to deal with the trains going under hospitals with the medical equipment there? Are you going to do what you did with Arden and pay tens of hundreds of millions of dollars to fix that issue? It is absurd. The government and their spinners will say we cannot look at the SRL East section without the SRL North section, but you are never going to build SRL North, so this project will never have a positive cost–benefit ratio. You are spending one-fifth of all infrastructure on this.

I did a bus tour with Mrs McArthur and Mr McCracken last week, thanks to Melton City Council, showing the infrastructure that needs to be urgently upgraded on their roads and their public transport network, which has been neglected by this government for years and years and years. And I will tell you what, it is the same in the north. Go around Mitchell shire or go around Hume, and it is the same: completely neglected. Where are the local members? The member for Kalkallo has had no conversations with her constituents.

No wonder all these members who were at the cabinet table completely rolled over on the Premier spending an absurd amount of money. SRL East alone is going to cost well over $60 billion and probably closer to $80 billion – just one project from Cheltenham to Box Hill. It is an absurd amount of money, which is why the only responsible thing to do – and what the Liberals and Nationals commit to doing – is pause and review this project in the financial interests of all Victorians.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (10:51): I am happy to get up again on a short docs motion before this chamber, this one today from Mr Ettershank – thank you very much. Can I just reaffirm

that, as per convention, the government will not oppose this motion. In fact I certainly welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate and place on record the significance of the Suburban Rail Loop as a project that will shape Victoria for generations to come. We are a government that believes in building – building public transport infrastructure, building homes and building for the future. On the other hand, others in this place have consistently opposed or sought to delay these investments, offering Victorians cuts and uncertainty.

The Suburban Rail Loop is a state-shaping project that will transform how Victorians move around our city. It will cut travel times, reduce congestion and deliver heavy rail connections to two of Australia's major universities. But it is not just about how Victorians move. The SRL is Australia's largest infrastructure and housing project. You have heard it here in this chamber before from the former minister for the SRL: it is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape our city, connecting Victorians to jobs and education services and supporting sustainable growth in the middle suburbs. These communities have voted for this over and over again, and they are getting it, with the project powering ahead as crews prepare for the launch of tunnel-boring machines. That is going to happen later this year. This ambitious project has not only been backed in by Victorians at the ballot box but has also been strongly supported by our partners in Canberra and recognised by independent experts as a project of national significance. The Commonwealth government's billion-dollar investment demonstrates clear confidence in the Suburban Rail Loop, and the broad base of support underscores that the SRL is a necessary and carefully considered investment in the future of our state.

We have just heard from Mr Ettershank and also Mr Mulholland, and what we have heard are some questions that have come to us as well as some very strong positions on this project. There were questions about when it will impact other areas across the state, including in the Northern Metropolitan Region, and I just want to place on record my support for transport infrastructure and for the Suburban Rail Loop. This is a project similar to the Metro Tunnel in the change that it will bring about for Victorians and how they move about the state, and what we are seeing here are enormous benefits for how people will move around the state, including to university. You only need to go to Parkville station to see the numbers of people that are using Parkville station and how those opportunities have now been opened up for kids that previously thought Melbourne Uni was just a little bit too hard and a little bit too far. I imagine that it will open up similar opportunities for folks considering Monash University. The truth is that what we are offering Victorians is a future with more opportunities and more access to the world-class jobs and homes, which I think folks are going to take up with absolute gusto.

I have only got 30 seconds, so can I just say this project is backed by both the Commonwealth government and Infrastructure Australia as a project of national priority, and importantly, it is progressing as planned, providing certainty for workers, communities and investors alike. At a time when our city is growing rapidly, this is exactly the kind of forward-looking investment Victoria needs, and this government will continue to get on with it. I will just reaffirm our position that we are not opposing this documents motion.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Government performance

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:55): I move:

That this house:

(1) condemns the Premier for a failure of leadership that has left Victoria less safe, less livable, more indebted, and less confident in the integrity of government;

(2) notes that under the Allan Labor government:

(a) Victoria's health system is closing beds, cancelling surgeries and struggling to pay its bills, while patients wait too long for ambulances, emergency treatment and elective surgery;

(b) crime has reached its highest level since records began, while 1500 police positions remain unfilled, police stations have been cut, and Labor's weak bail laws have forced repeated crisis-driven reversals;

(c) alleged CFMEU corruption on Big Build projects has exposed a culture of secrecy, waste and criminal infiltration, at an estimated $15 billion cost to taxpayers;

(d) state debt is forecast to approach $200 billion, with interest repayments exceeding $32 million a day, draining funding from essential services, costing families and businesses more;

(e) the cost of living has worsened under this government addicted to higher taxes, higher charges and political gimmicks;

(3) further notes that even Labor members of Parliament are now discussing whether the only way to defend Labor's record is to find someone else to front it;

(4) believes that Victorians do not need a new salesman for the same failed government, but a change of government; and

(5) declares that Victoria cannot afford more chaos, cover-ups and excuses from a Premier who will not accept responsibility for Labor's failures in crime, health, integrity, debt and cost of living.

I move this motion today somewhat reluctantly. Believe it or not, despite being in opposition, we do not always celebrate failure, even failure by our political opponents. But we cannot just stand by and watch this great state being run into the ground by a government that has plainly run out of road. I do not like to be overly personal, but ultimately politics is inescapably about personality, because at its heart it is about leadership, and there has never been a clearer demonstration of the failure of leadership in this state than the extraordinary spectacle Victorians have been forced to watch over the past fortnight.

When confronted with reports that her own colleagues, including members of her own faction, were holding secret discussions about removing her, the Premier did not seem to pause for reflection. She did not ask what it was about her leadership which has driven her own side to plotting in the background. No, instead she breezily dismissed those colleagues as 'a few scallywags out there that might need a bit of a cuddle'. The Premier wants Victorians to believe that the deep divisions in her own party room are nothing more than the mischief of a few scallywags in need of a cuddle. But the truth is rather different. The only people who need a cuddle right now are the nervous Labor backbenchers staring down the barrel of the latest opinion polls – polls that show their primary vote collapsing, polls that show the Premier with the lowest approval rating of any leader in the nation, a dismal minus 37. These are not scallywags, they are politicians who see the coming electoral apocalypse. They are not joking around, they are just terrified. And what is the Premier's response to that fear: denial. She dismisses it as navel-gazing. She tells us she is all in for this challenge. Her deputy, the member for Niddrie, when asked whether he had missed his shot at the top job, told reporters he was a marathon runner. We are left to wonder what that means.

But here is the most remarkable thing, from this morning's papers: it is not just the Liberal and National parties saying this government has stopped trying; it is now Labor's own union paymasters. The secretary of the Victorian Trades Hall Council Mr Luke Hilakari has fired a broadside at Labor MPs and candidates for failing to campaign. He has written to them on the very morning of the Premier's first caucus meeting since the leadership crisis erupted to inform them that 23 of them have had, in his words, zero conversations with voters in a fortnight. He told them, 'Start campaigning or start packing.' The subject line of his email read 'Complacent MPs should not expect any support'. I think that is pretty extraordinary. I am sure that the people of Victoria think it is pretty extraordinary as well. The union movement is now monitoring the doorknocking performance of individual Labor members of Parliament. There is an internal report tracking who has knocked on how many doors. The unions are checking up on their own MPs because they have so little faith that this exhausted, demoralised government will lift a finger to save itself. And Mr Hilakari was blunter still. He said that those who, and I use his words, 'don't give a shit about winning' their seat should not expect a cent of union support. When your own financial backers are publicly threatening to cut you off because you cannot be bothered talking to voters, that is a pretty sorry state of affairs.

Now I want to come to the central point of this motion. Whatever Mr Carroll might want to think, Victorians are not looking for a change in Premier; they are looking for a change in government. A new salesman will not fix a broken product, and it really is a pretty broken product.

Consider our health system. Beds are being closed, surgeries are being cancelled, hospitals are struggling to pay their bills and Victorians are waiting too long for an ambulance, too long in emergency and too long for the elective surgery that would let them return to work and to life. This is the lived daily reality under an Allan Labor government.

Consider community safety. Crime in this state has reached its highest level since records began. 1500 police positions sit unfilled, police stations have been cut and Labor's weak bail laws have been reversed, re-reversed and patched again in crisis after crisis – not through considered reform but through panic each time another tragedy forces their hand.

Consider integrity on the Big Build or the lack of it. CFMEU corruption on major projects has exposed a culture of secrecy, waste and criminal infiltration, at an estimated $15 billion of cost to Victorian taxpayers. Here is the tell: this government's brand is now so toxic that it is reportedly scrubbing its own vocabulary, quietly dropping the phrase 'Big Build' from its announcements because the slogan it once boasted now stands for nothing except waste, cover-up and scandal.

Consider the debt. state debt is forecast to approach $200 billion. The interest alone now exceeds $32 million a day; $32 million every single day is siphoned away from nurses, from police, from roads and from schools and is handed instead to bondholders. That is money Victorian families and businesses will be repaying for a generation and another generation.

Consider the cost of living made worse by a government addicted – and 'addiction' is the only word for it – to higher taxes, higher charges and political gimmickry. Make no mistake, the Victorian economy has crashed. The Big Build costs spiralled out of control, the public service payroll ballooned and the true engines of prosperity – the private enterprises, the risk-takers, the wealth creators and the small businesses who employ their neighbours – have been squeezed to death by a relentless tide of new taxes and anti-business regulation. This government has spent more than a decade punishing the very people who generate the wealth it so freely spends.

This is a government in a death spiral. There is an unmistakeable stench of decay about it. It is out of ideas, it is out of money, it is out of steam and it is very nearly out of time. The whole rotten edifice, to coin a phrase, is Jacintegrating before our eyes.

Richard Welch interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: Jacintegrating. Did you hear that, Mr Welch? It is Jacintegrating before our very eyes and before the eyes of the people of Victoria, Mr Welch, who are very concerned about what is happening to this once great state and who know their taxes are being misspent as they grapple with the 65-plus new or increased taxes that have landed on them.

But of all the failures, it is the failure of integrity that matters most, because it is what poisons trust in everything else. Integrity is vital to the confidence of a nation and a state. I have spoken before about Labor's trust problem, but it bears repetition, because it is so thoroughly deserved. Consider the pattern: the systematic abuse of this Parliament, treated as an administrative inconvenience; the contempt for parliamentary questions – the dodging, the deflecting, the non-answers; the lack of supply of documents when they are rightly required and asked for; the weaponisation of urgent legislation – rushing complex bills through with no time for scrutiny; the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee protection racket, an estimates process turned into a shield for ministers rather than a check upon them; the collective amnesia of officials at public inquiries – their obfuscation is next-level and they are even outdoing some of their own ministers; the broken freedom-of-information system, delaying and redacting to keep the public in the dark; the deliberate starvation of IBAC and

the Ombudsman; the politicisation of a once fearless public service; and the pork-barrelling that rewards Labor seats and punishes everyone else.

Those in rural and regional Victoria, outside the tram tracks of Melbourne, constantly cry out for attention and investment and care. You totally disregard everybody outside the tram tracks of Melbourne and outside your vanity projects, like the suburban rail link that we have just heard about in the previous motion. The millions sprayed on government advertising that is nothing more than political advertising and marketing in disguise should be paid for by the Labor Party, not the taxpayers of Victoria. There are the fake surpluses dressed up to hide the true scale of debt, the lucrative contracts for friends and allies lining the pockets of your union mates and others with alacrity. And over it all is an unprecedented army of spin doctors whose only job is to manage the headline and bury the truth. That is why Victorians no longer believe a word this government says. The trust is gone, and once trust is gone, it does not come back with a new logo or a new leader. They have passed the point of no return.

I should say, in fairness, that it is not the Premier's fault alone. The rot set in over many years under her predecessor; I think his name was Andrews. The addiction to spending, the love of the grand announcement, the cosy deals with mates – she inherited a culture and she has been unable or unwilling to break it, which is precisely why the only honourable course now would be to gracefully accept that the project has run its course and to let Victorians choose afresh. Instead, we have a Premier gripping on to office by her fingernails, waiting for a miracle that is not coming, while her own colleagues brief against her and her own unions threaten to abandon her, let alone abandon many Labor MPs who are apparently not fulfilling the needs that Mr Hilakari suggests they should be. This is terminal. It is the end of the road, and the answer is not to wheel out a new salesman to flog the same failed government. The answer is the one thing this tired, divided, scandal-plagued Labor Party cannot give Victorians from within its own ranks, and that is a change of government. That is what Victorians need. They are crying out for a change of government. We hear it every day. We see it every day. People in Victoria want a new government. They have had enough of this corrupt, lazy, incompetent, tax-addicted, regulation-addicted Labor government, which actually kills business at every opportunity.

Speak to any small business or any business organisation – which I do regularly, as the Shadow Minister for Small Business – and you hear the tales of woe and the tales of despair. They are not safe in their own businesses. At every point along the way they are worried that their premises will be robbed, firebombed or attacked. How does that leave consumers and customers? They do not want to go near a retail outlet for fear of being caught up in this absolute wave of crime. This is the crime capital of Australia. It is a disgraceful situation that we have crime out of control in this place, on top of the fact that we are so debt-ridden that our children and grandchildren will never be able to pay back what the Labor Allan–Andrews government regime has foisted on the people of Victoria.

The Labor members in Bendigo failed to turn up at a rally on Sunday in Bendigo, where over a thousand concerned farmers, CFA volunteers, career firefighters and local government councillors protested at the extraordinary and egregious tax, the so-called emergency services volunteers tax. It is the greatest insult to volunteers that you could possibly imagine. They turned up to protest about this tax that has been inflicted on them, and not one Labor MP was present. This was in the Premier's own area of Ballarat. A member for Northern Victoria Region, the Treasurer, could not turn –

Harriet Shing: Ballarat?

Bev McARTHUR: Bendigo, sorry, Ms Shing. She could not even turn up in her own electorate of Northern Victoria Region. It was absolutely disgraceful; not one local Labor MP, and they are wall-to-wall Labor in these areas.

They do not care about the people in rural and regional Victoria, but they do not care about the people in metropolitan Melbourne and the great cities of Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo. They are afflicted by this government so badly that they are despairing. The only thing that will restore confidence in this state and will restore integrity in government is a change of government, and we will deliver that

change of government in November, absolutely. The Premier may well remain; her opposition seems to have died a bit of a death. But anyway, the people of Victoria know there is an election coming on 28 November. They are geared up for it. They know what they are going to do, because they have had enough of this tired, lazy, corrupt government. All it does is tax them, regulate them or tell them how to think and behave for no real outcome for any family, any business or any individual in this state. You all ought to be ashamed of yourselves for what you have done to the people of Victoria and to this state. I urge everyone to support this motion.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (11:13): I rise to add a brief contribution on behalf of the Victorian Greens on Mrs McArthur's motion 1484. Can I just begin by saying how ridiculous it is that this chamber is focused on petty bickering and political mudslinging rather than the issues that actually matter to Victorians: the cost of living, the housing crisis, fixing the climate crisis, better public education, better public health and more public housing. It is as if people outside these walls want to bear witness to political pointscoring and retribution between the two major parties, who are dying anyway. Victorians have wised up to the fact that you do not care about them. You do not care about addressing the high cost of living or the high cost of groceries. You do not care about whether they can afford a GP or whether they can afford to turn on the heater this winter season. Victorians dealing with the cost-of-living crisis do not care whether it is Jacinta Allan or someone else leading the Labor Party. Seriously, who cares? The problem here is that people are fed up, and rightly so. They are fed up with Labor and they are also fed up with the Liberals, because all the corporate-backed political parties care about is maintaining power, keeping their seats and making sure that they have the backs of their billionaire backers looked after, not about the greater good.

People are fed up because all you care about in this place is yourselves, bowing to vested interests and your big corporate puppet masters. That is why the two major parties system is dying. People do not trust you, and who can blame them when all you are doing in here is squabbling and playing petty politics? This is exactly why we are seeing division and racism gain a foothold in this state. One Nation is a symptom of the failure of all of you. You are all in here squabbling over power and playing politics instead of talking about people and the things that would actually progress their lives and make them better. It is made worse by an Allan Labor government that is nowhere near strong and courageous enough to confront racism, while the Liberal Party waits in the wings ready to weaponise division under the guise of unity and protection. Let us be clear: swapping one corporate political party out for another will not fix everyday Victorians' struggles at the structural and systemic levels. The two-party system is simply failing to fight for people because they are too captured by vested interests.

The Greens recognise and value humanity in each other. We should not be living in societies where billionaires and a trillionaire hoard more and more wealth when others are struggling to afford rent and groceries. We should not be living in a society where communities struggle to have their voices heard while the ultrawealthy enjoy unfettered access to politicians and do all sorts of dodgy dealings behind closed doors. It is no wonder people have lost trust in these institutions. Right now, in a cost-of-living, housing and climate crisis, Victorians are looking for visionary, courageous leadership that does not falter but stands up for the working class, for the migrant and refugee families, for the young people, for First Nations justice and for all oppressed groups and does not just demonise and divide them. Politicians should be unburdening people's lives and showing them what is possible, not what to settle for – things like free public transport, like rent caps, like bringing down the cost of housing and like making the big ultrarich corporations who are ripping us all off pay their fair share. The work is far from over, but the Greens are here, and we are going to demand better for all Victorians.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (11:17): I want to go to some of the things that Mrs McArthur said, but before I do that I want to address the position just advanced by the Greens in Ms Gray-Barberio's contribution. If the Greens were interested in discussing the solutions to problems that keep Victorians up at night, they would not come to this house with cheap platitudes about how we do not care, because frankly

that does a great disservice to the work that drives us in delivering actual practical, meaningful assistance to Victorians.

This is about so much more than describing the problems, which is at the heart of the motion put by Mrs McArthur today. To that end, I would invite every single person in this chamber, if they are serious about addressing the cost of living, about addressing the challenges involved in housing and rental affordability, about the opportunities that we want to provide for our children and about managing growth in a way that ensures that we are not leaving parts of the city and the state to manage increased challenges without either investment in infrastructure or other parts of the city doing their fair share to accommodate some of that heavy lifting, if they are at all interested in those things, to look not only to identify the problems – problems which every single Victorian household knows because they live with these problems every day – but to talk to the sorts of solutions and options and support that we work every single day to deliver. They would identify them through the savings finder. It is an online resource.

There are more than 90 options available to assist Victorian families to manage the cost of living, whether that is the 20 per cent rebate on registration that is saving people up to $180 per vehicle – you can put two vehicles on it; whether it is the half-price public transport that is available until the end of the year for adults, with ongoing free public transport for people under the age of 18; whether that is the support for three- and four-year-old kinder, saving households thousands every year for each child; or whether that is free TAFE with more than 80 courses on the free TAFE list. The former minister for TAFE Ms Tierney, who is in this place, drove more than 345,000 opportunities for Victorians through free TAFE to get into a career in a growth sector.

This stuff is not happening by accident. It is not happening in a vacuum. It is not happening because of motions like this one here today. It is happening because we are talking to and hearing from Victorians about the things that matter to them. The planning and housing reforms that we have developed and delivered are not happening because of the support of this place; they are happening despite it. They are happening despite constant opposition to the sorts of things that we know will unlock land and help communities to develop and deliver more housing for people so that our children and their children have an opportunity at home ownership in the same way that we have had those opportunities, because that is fair and that is the equitable thing to do.

What we are doing is working. Despite the howls of derision from those opposite and from various parts of the media, we are building, commencing and approving more homes than other states. Housing affordability is better here in Victoria than it is in other states. Rental affordability is better here in Victoria than it is in other states. These are facts, and yet we operate in a fact-free zone full of hyperbole and anecdotal evidence which just is not supported by the empirical data that is necessary in responding to a motion like this.

We also want to make sure, as we deliver the work, the reforms and the supports that people need, that we do not stray from the things that drive us as a Labor government – public transport, public education and public health care. And we have delivered in all of these areas, because we know that it is these public services that Victorians rely upon. When we deliver enhancements and improvements to our public transport network, we are doing so because it will mean that more people can get around, that more people can live in a way that is connected to something other than moving around by car. We know that we can enhance and deliver good livability, good expansion of our communities and equity in the way in which people can live, work and spend time together.

Free and public education is another pillar of the work that Labor governments deliver. We have invested record funding into public education. We have done so with a sense of determination and resourcing that those opposite will never know and will never deliver, because they are allergic to the idea that equity and educational opportunities should be at the heart of policy decisions and funding.

When Mrs McArthur makes these lofty claims that it is only government-held seats that are the beneficiaries of these investments, I would like her to look perhaps at one of the former leaders of the opposition, the member for Berwick in the other place. Last time I checked he is not a government member, and yet we have got six new schools in his electorate. Let us have a look at the seat of Morwell, held by the member for the Nationals Mr Cameron in the other place. Again, there is record investment in that part of the world, not just to assist with transition away from coal-fired power generation but also to make sure that we have intergenerational opportunity – well over $2 billion across the Latrobe Valley region. They are not government seats; they are not metropolitan communities.

Then when we hear the opposition talk to how it is that in the event that they secure the privilege and the honour of government they will have a plan to address all of these things, they do not go anywhere near actually explaining it beyond these platitudes again, beyond these adjectives, beyond this hyperbole, beyond these general statements not backed up by any detail. They say they will fix the things that they describe as problems. They do not actually fix anything, though. They block and they wreck and they oppose. We know that they do that because they have done it before.

Let us touch on public health care, our public hospitals. When the Liberals were in government, they closed 12 hospitals and they privatised two more. They got ready to sell off the Austin. They went to war with paramedics. They ditched and scrapped and walked away from nurse-to-patient ratios, and they opposed those ratios when we introduced legislation in this place. They opposed wage theft legislation. They opposed industrial manslaughter legislation. They opposed free TAFE. They opposed three- and four-year-old kinder. They opposed the sorts of supports that they are saying need to be delivered to assist with the cost of living. You know what? If they are given half an opportunity, they will do it again, because they have already belled the cat on $40 billion in cuts. Let us talk about the health system – $32 billion in the budget. It is the biggest component of the budget, and therefore it is the part of the budget that will bear the brunt of that $40 billion in cuts.

It is very easy to shout from the sidelines and to describe the problems, but we know the problems. We know the problems because Victorians tell us these problems, and Victorians come to us and ask for solutions, as they should. This is where, again, if the coalition care at all about wanting to make sure that Victorians are assisted with the management of the cost of living, they will not go around opposing the work we are doing on power saving, opposing the 3 free hours of power, opposing the work on the Victorian default offer or opposing the sort of work that we do on making sure that water prices are the lowest anywhere in Australia. What they will do is get on board with the hard work of delivering on the sorts of things that make a difference, dollar by dollar, pay cheque by pay cheque. Never once has the Liberal Party supported an increase in the minimum wage for workers, and One Nation, their coalition partner, is led by somebody who thinks that penalty rates should not actually apply. Again, these are the things that we will see imposed upon Victorians at the end of the year, should there be a change in government. Those cuts will mean that Victorians pay, and the government opposes this motion.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (11:28): It is so ironic that the minister then just mentioned how the Liberals have never supported minimum wage increases for workers, yet in the gallery today there are workers that have not had a pay rise in six years because of this government. But anyway, that is an aside. I rise today to speak on Mrs McArthur's motion and in support of it, and I believe that it is an important one. I am going to particularly focus on one part, and that is part (2)(b), and it notes that under the Allan Labor government crime has reached its highest level since records began, while 1500 police positions remain unfilled, police stations have been cut and bail laws are weak. This is the part that I am going to focus on: weak bail laws have forced repeated, crisis-driven reversals.

I am going to start on the current bail laws, not from my perspective and not from the perspective of a focus group but from the perspective of an ex-crim, one who has turned his life around, one who I think is absolutely inspiring. I first read about his story in the *Herald Sun*, and that would almost make a lot of people on the opposite side completely disregard it. But regardless, I think you should go back

to 18 February and read his story. This was the headline: '"I needed jail": A former youth offender's confronting story of redemption'. I tell you, it is a story that changed my perspective and changed how I look at things. He was featured there. His story is inspiring, and I am happy to declare that it is now on my bucket list to meet this young guy Judo. I was so impressed, because his story is one of true redemption, a life turned around. He is now having honest conversations about why people end up in crime and what we need to be doing to prevent it. This young man is living proof that no matter what your background is – where you were born, what family you were in, what your socio-economic circumstances were – you have the power to turn your life around. I tried to speak on a similar topic yesterday when we were talking about the area of justice. A government member called a point of order and said it was out of order, and I could not speak about it. But today is our day, and I am glad that I can speak about people that have turned their lives around by the choices they have made and the power that they do have.

Judo was a young offender. He is now a youth worker. He is a mentor and somebody who is leading people out of the darkness and destruction of crime, not by making excuses for them but through learning and accountability – I am going to really focus on the part of accountability – and by creating a better path forward for kids that have ended up in a very bad situation. One of the things that started his turnaround was actually an awareness exercise when he was locked up in jail called the victim awareness exercise. What he had to do was to sit with a psychologist and he had to speak from his perspective about what it was like carrying out a home invasion. Then he had to flip it. He had to speak from the perspective of the victim and what it was like being the victim of that exact same home invasion and then speak from his mum's point of view, and it started his turnaround. He is currently mentoring seven young offenders who are on bail, and I hope that we see the same turnaround in them that we have seen in him.

Earlier this week he was chatting to Commissioner Bush, the Chief Commissioner of Police, about the current justice system in Victoria, which allows offenders back on the streets about 3 hours, roughly, after they have been charged with committing a crime. He talked about the destruction of that. I am going to quote him. These are his words, not mine. He said:

> … honestly it's pathetic …

He is talking to the commissioner of police, so 'you guys' is the police:

> … these kids, you guys are giving them bail, giving them an opportunity and another chance to go out into the community and do the exact same thing … you're putting the community at risk.
>
> These kids, they need some time to really sit back and understand what they're doing is wrong …

He said custody is the perfect time for intervention. He went on to say:

> … you just gotta hold them a bit longer … get us involved …

He is talking about mentors, and that is something we are going to do as a coalition – mentoring – to drag these kids out of the pit of hell that they have ended up in, down the path of crime and destruction. He said:

> … we'll talk to them, we'll mentor them, we'll give them the right advice, and hopefully it clicks …

He spoke about that in the *Herald Sun* in this article and about when what he called some 'old heads' came and spoke to him. He said:

> I had a couple of old heads come up to me and tell me 'you're better than this, you have a future, you've got a family out there that love you and care about you, you shouldn't be doing this, there's more to life than hanging out with these …

unparliamentary word, so I will say 'fellas'. Basically what he is saying is when kids are in custody they are free. They are not on drugs, they are not with their friends and there is an opportunity for people to get to them and to turn their life around.

This kid, Judo, 24 years old now, is a South Sudanese Australian who went down an extremely dark path, but it is a common trajectory and one that I am worried that our policies are setting up for other children to also follow. His story explains why we have to begin with interventions not when we see a machete-wielding kid on the street but when they are at school.

This is his timeline. On not doing well in school, he said, 'I wasn't the smartest kid in the class.' He also said he struggled in the classroom. From starting to smoke – first with shisha pens, then marijuana – and then doing other drugs, at 15 he got expelled from school. There were mischievous activities at school, he said, which turned into low-level offending at shopping centres. Still nothing was done. Then petty thefts from shops progressed to robbing people on the streets. Still nothing was done. At 16 he was stealing cars, and then there were the home invasions that landed him in prison. We must be able to acknowledge and see that by not tackling this early on, we are causing these children to take riskier steps. You can see that we should be seriously considering what we could be doing. With compassion in our hearts, saying, 'Oh, these kids don't have the right to think for themselves,' what we may be doing by not addressing it there is sentencing them to a life of crime. We see it often. We should seriously consider that when we raise the age of criminal responsibility and when we tell these kids that they are not smart enough to even figure out that robbing somebody is wrong, we are actually setting them on a path. When we bail kids back into the same old situation and the same friendship group, we are in fact training them to be living a life of crime – living a hell, really, that sucks them in further, and the further it sucks them in, the harder it is to get them out.

I was with some firefighters last week, and one of them said to me that the reason these kids were not charged with serious arson was because they did not actually know how to do the job properly. What they will then do if they are let off and bailed is they will get out, they will figure out how to do it better and they will go and end up in a worse situation where they could be locked up for life. It is wrong. I think we have to realise that our soft-on-crime approach is not compassionate. It is not kindness. It is setting children on a path, when they could be doing so much more.

Some people in this house talk about the effects of power imbalances, and when the commissioner was talking to Judo on Monday they brought up a perspective that, quite frankly, changed mine. They said this: 'People do not have a choice when somebody is invading their home. It is their safe space. But the invader has a choice to enter that home.' Think of this: that is a power imbalance, because perpetrators have choice; victims do not. If you want to talk about a power imbalance, that is one. That is a real power imbalance, because I tell you what, choice is power. The one holding the cards here is not the one innocently lying in their bed while a child breaks into their house and terrorises them. The person holding the power in this situation is the child.

Another thing is that one of the things that set Judo on this path, and I wish I had more time, was that he saw a friend shot. He was in a terrible situation. However, he says it is not a proportional response to your hurt to go out and hurt others. I am out of time, and hopefully there is an opportunity where I can talk about that later.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (11:38): Mrs McArthur has brought to this chamber a list of grievances and recycled attack lines, and she has called it leadership. It is nothing of the sort. It is what a party reaches for when it has no plan, no policy and no agreement amongst its members about what it actually stands for. The opposition has invited a conversation about leadership, so let us have one. Weak leadership is a party that would cut $40 billion from the Victorian budget and the services Victorians rely on every day while it looks after its own wealthy and powerful mates first. It is a party so emptied of values that it is prone to capture by religious lobby groups, by the extreme right and by neo-Nazis. It is a party that preselects candidates who are ineligible and unsuitable and who share so little in common that they spend their days fighting one another instead of representing –

Members interjecting.

Gayle Tierney: On a point of order, President, I think that there are unnecessary interjections. We have heard the others in silence, and I would expect the same courtesy to be held in respect to Ms Ermacora.

Nick McGowan interjected.

The PRESIDENT: No, you were not assisting. I uphold the point of order, and as the last speaker did not get interjected on, I expect the same for this speaker.

Jacinta ERMACORA: It is a party where MPs sue each other and then internally litigate the outcome, a party that leaks nasty text messages about an incumbent preselection candidate and a party that makes up its priorities each morning based on what it reads in the media bubble because it has no values of its own to guide it. The divided Victorian Liberals are now on their sixth leader in seven years, and nothing has changed. The former member for Nepean did not just walk away; he quit, saying behaviour inside the Liberal Party room had fallen below the standard he came into public life to accept. A party that cannot govern itself cannot govern Victoria.

I could go on, but I want to talk about what good leadership looks like, and we need look no further than the Jacinta Allan Labor government. What does this good leadership actually look like? It looks like a record you can stand behind; it looks like 11 new hospitals and 40 upgraded, and 40,000 more doctors, nurses and healthcare professionals with a 28.4 per cent pay rise; it looks like a record number of planned surgeries completed – over 212,000. When those opposite were last in office they cut billions of dollars from health and closed hospitals in 12 regional towns.

Leadership means safe communities, and we will not be lectured – sound familiar? – about community safety by a party that slashed $130 million from Victoria Police the last time it was in government. Our record is more police and tougher laws. The machete ban has resulted in 40,000 weapons off the streets and knife crime is down 10 per cent.

Leadership is leading the nation in building new homes and reforming the planning system so that young people have a real chance to buy a home of their own; it is the stalking law reforms and the work on women's pain, which for too long was ignored; it is closing the loopholes that stop survivors of historical sexual abuse from claiming the compensation they are owed from the Catholic Church; it is protecting people's right to work from home; it is progressing treaty – a positive and constructive initiative in the face of appalling dog whistling from those opposite and in the face of an awful politicisation of the circumstances of First Nations people in this state. Strong leadership is standing up for diversity and inclusion while those opposite keep trying to sow division and hate.

The motion also includes a figure on worksite crime that is simply false. Mr Watson himself, the author of the report the opposition is citing, said publicly he was misquoted on that figure. They know it and they use it anyway. They call for a royal commission. Australia already had a royal commission – two years, $46 million, one conviction. Ours is the approach that is actually working. You are the party of doing the same and expecting a different outcome.

On the economy, the facts speak plainly. Victoria's economy is now 12.7 per cent larger than it was pre pandemic and 28.7 per cent larger than when Labor came to government. We are the only state on the eastern seaboard to deliver an operating surplus. And we are putting money back in people's pockets: 20 per cent off vehicle registration – 2 million Victorians have applied; and free kinder, saving up to $2700. But understand what this motion is really meant to distract from: the opposition's own plans – at least 1500 workers across regional Victoria, 430 in Barwon South West, 350 in Ballarat, cuts to the public sector. These are the communities that I represent. Cutting too hard and too fast wrecks frontline services, it costs jobs and it shrinks our economy. That is not responsible leadership, it is just ruthless.

Bev McArthur: Where's the PET scanner in Warrnambool?

Jacinta ERMACORA: I will take you up on Warrnambool. It has a low unemployment rate and incredible population growth – all growing beautifully.

We do not see responsible leadership from those opposite, and they will not even do it alone. Along with One Nation they are offering a coalition of cuts and closures. We on this side know what we stand for and we stick to it: working people, families, diversity and inclusion and equity. A stronger, thriving and more equal Victoria – that is what we stand for, and we know it. That is the difference between a government that delivers and an opposition that only knows how to tear things down, including its own leaders and its own MPs – fighting amongst themselves, suing each other, litigating each other, leaking texts about each other and generally undermining each other. This motion is a statement of Liberal desperation, not Liberal vision. There is no vision, and the government oppose this motion.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (11:47): I thank Mrs McArthur for bringing an excellent motion to the chamber. Victoria cannot afford any more chaos than has been demonstrated. I think particularly over the last two weeks it has been a very inelegant way to conduct yourself or a government. I note Ms Ermacora in her Premier's private office written contribution mentioned the $15 billion – the number that is on the lips of each and every Victorian, as they know themselves and have been briefing the papers about. But I want to point to the Premier's train wreck interview on ABC's *7.30* last night. She obviously had a pep in her step, having overcome the challenges of the day, and thought it would be a good idea to go on *7.30*. She was asked for 4 straight minutes if she refuted the $15 billion figure, to name her own figure. She could not name a figure of corruption on construction sites in Victoria. We have seen time and time again wicked corruption on construction sites, women being put into locked rooms, ghost shifts, bribes, cash payments, strippers, drug deals – as we saw on the Hurstbridge line site – and using taxpayer-funded cars to take out hits and murders. This is the kind of thing that has happened under this government. And who has been responsible for enabling the CFMEU monopoly on construction sites? Who was the minister responsible? It was the Premier. It was Jacinta Allan, who was the minister for the last 10 years.

She also happened to be the Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery. How did that go? Six hundred million dollars down the toilet. 'We're going to spend all this money on regional infrastructure that these communities are going to get.' How much of that has been built? Maybe if some of these members actually talked to constituents, they would realise that none of this has been built. They are not getting anything that they promised because of the failure of this Premier.

Some of the comments that Labor MPs have been putting out there are pretty brutal:

> One MP from the party's Socialist Left said the south-east group have "never been happy" with how Allan came into the role, effectively appointed by Andrews. Andrews himself was a member of the south-eat grouping.
>
> "Now because her polls are down, they see it as an opportunity to move" …
>
> They argued the Premier was "always on borrowed time" because while she was "notionally in the left" she never had their support.

That is probably true. Another article states:

> One Labor MP said they believed Allan's leadership was now "terminal" and the caucus was expecting a challenge within the next two to six weeks.

So watch this space.

> The MP said a "significant number" of Labor MPs are talking about the possibility of a change.

Further:

> Some MPs have realised it is really, really bad and that [Allan] is politically inept … 'Jacinta has been –

and I will not use the expletive –

> … hopeless for three years. What makes anyone think she will improve in the next six months?'
>
> …
>
> 'We are entering the killing season …'
>
> …
>
> One MP said bad polling was finally dawning on other members, who were increasingly nervous after the Victorian Labor Party headquarters emailed MPs in recent weeks to talk about their election campaigns.

That is not nearly as brutal as some of the comments about the Deputy Premier as well, who says he is a 'marathon runner'. They wanted him to strike. They are using terms like 'wuss' and 'hopeless', that he has 'botched it' and is – expletive – 'hopeless'. They are not a happy camp over there.

Who is paying the price? It is Victorians that are paying the price, because you have a mob over on that side of the chamber that is not focused on Victorians. They are not focused on the fact that the infrastructure is failing in the growth areas of Melbourne. They are not focusing on the fact that ambulances do not turn up when you call them. They are not focusing on the fact that police stations are closing and reducing hours in every neighbourhood. I note the Deputy Premier repeated his comments from last week that they want to see police stations open. This government is closing police stations in every neighbourhood. They are reducing hours of police stations, like they have in Craigieburn, like they have, as recently as last month, again in Mernda – the same suburb where we had an awful tragedy recently. This government is an absolute joke.

We note that Labor MPs have been briefed that their internal polling has Labor in the teens. Is it any wonder senior ALP figures are contacting people like me, begging for preferences in inner-city seats to save the Labor Party from annihilation? Of course the preferences are not up to me, but you can tell the desperation in these ALP figures for some sort of assistance from the great Liberal Party. To be honest, you do not know who to speak to because you do not know who their leader is going to be. It seems like they are not very experienced in how to operate a spill over there, given they have not done it since 1999. Instead of glum faces over there, maybe they could learn how to actually pull the trigger.

They are all at sea over on that side of the chamber because they have a Premier who has failed this state fundamentally – $600 million on the Commonwealth Games, $15 billion lost to corruption on construction sites. And reportedly she really pissed off colleagues by belatedly, last sitting week, announcing changes to IBAC – follow-the-money changes that have been called for for a very long time. But she never called a royal commission. When you have the kind of scandal that we have seen and we have known about since mid-2024 – and we know from documents the Premier knew about it much earlier and was warned about it much earlier – that demands a royal commission. We can see in Queensland they have now extended their royal commission, such was the work that it was uncovering through its investigations.

But we know through reporting as well that was in the *Age* by Shannon Deery that both the Electrical Trades Union and CFMEU figures within the ALP were propping up the Premier's leadership because they do not want a royal commission. So the very thing she is holding out on, which has become a political liability for this Premier, is the exact thing that is keeping this Premier in her job. Seventy-five per cent of Victorians polled want a royal commission into Big Build corruption on construction sites. This Premier has not delivered that. In fact the fact that she has not delivered that is keeping her in her job. Is it any wonder why Victorians have worked out this government?

Gayle Tierney: On a point of order, President, can I please ask that when people speak into the microphone, they do so without yelling? It has been constant yelling from those opposite, including the current speaker. Tone it down, for God's sake.

The PRESIDENT: I sympathise, but there is no regulation on how loud someone can speak.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I know they are a bit edgy about the last couple of days, and why wouldn't you be? You have got a Premier that has fundamentally failed Victorians. You have got a Premier and a head office that keeps delaying upper house preselections so as to not finally get rid of several members on the other side and supposedly to move people from a different district downstairs into upper house positions – potentially roll ministers, potentially roll people in the Northern Metropolitan Region and shuffle around members, as we know, in several other regions as well: Southern Metro, Western Region, North-East Metro. You see members despairing that the Premier has not sought to abolish group voting tickets, keeping a rigged system that works against the voters. That goes to show the Premier's failure. It is no wonder why her colleagues do not think much of her, because this Premier has fundamentally failed Victorians.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Corrections system

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:00): (1357) My question is for the Minister for Corrections. The United Nations advise that solitary confinement should be authorised only in exceptional cases as a last resort for as short a time as possible, and it should be subject to independent review and should not exceed 15 days. However, my office has been informed of an allegation that a prisoner who was not a threat to others and who themselves was under no immediate danger has been held in separation for well over 300 consecutive days at the Hopkins Correctional Centre. Can the minister advise if it is true that any prisoners have been kept in isolation for more than 300 days in recent times?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:00): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question and his interest in the Corrections portfolio. I will make sure that question is referred on to the Minister for Corrections in the other place for a response in line with the standing orders.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:01): My supplementary is: if it is true that prisoners have been kept for this long, can the minister explain how this has complied with international standards and the standards of Corrections Victoria itself?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:01): I thank Mr Limbrick for his supplementary question. I will make sure that question is passed on to the Minister for Corrections in the other place for a response in line with the standing orders.

Economy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:01): (1358) My question is for the Treasurer. Treasurer, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has delivered a scathing response to your tired Labor government and its 2026 election platform, saying:

> … Victoria's recent economic growth has been sustained by strong inward migration rather than productivity improvement. Per capita GSP growth is declining. That means the economy is getting bigger in aggregate, but the value for each Victorian is, on average, going backwards.

I ask you: why has per capita GSP contracted during the two years to June 2025?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:02): The simple answer to your question, Mr Davis, is that more people are choosing Victoria to be their home, more businesses are setting up and more workers are finding good and fair jobs in the state of Victoria. I was asked yesterday, and I have the great opportunity to again talk about the Victorian economy and the strength of the Victorian economy. The national accounts show that Victoria is going from strength to strength. The economy grew by 0.9 per

cent in the March quarter, the second highest growth in the nation in that quarter. Over the last decade the Victorian economy has grown faster than any other state. We expect our economy to continue to grow over the forwards, which is in the budget that I released just over a month ago.

As I said yesterday, the growth is backed by a record number of businesses making commitments to Victoria. Business investment grew by nearly 8 per cent over the last quarter and around 15 per cent over the year, the fastest in almost two years. There is continual investment. There is confidence in relation to growth. Surveys from the banks have indicated that businesses that are here are very positive about expanding, making more investments, investing in capital and employing more people. With that, it shows in the stats. When you employ more people, more people are in work in Victoria. Since 2020 more than 648,000 Victorians have found jobs, the strongest growth in the nation again. There are now nearly 3.8 million Victorians in the workforce.

Mr Davis, in relation to the stats, the economy is strong and the economy is growing. Does that mean that we rest on our laurels? Of course not. We continue to work with industry to attract new investment and attract the innovation of the future. They are the conversations that government are proactively having. They are the conversations that particularly I and the minister for economic growth have every single day. Those conversations are positive because there is so much positivity in Victoria. You would not know this given the constant talking down of this lot. Those that talk down Victoria generally have a vested interest. There are those opposite that do not want to admit that the state is strong, for obvious reasons. There are those in other states that talk down Victoria because they want what we have here in Victoria. Mr Davis, I will continue to trumpet the successes of Victoria. I will continue to back Victorian workers and back Victorian businesses and continue to demonstrate to you that the facts do not correlate with your view of Victoria.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:05): Way out of touch.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I respect Mr Davis's waiting for silence to ask his question. That is terrific. When he asks his question, we will be able to hear him, and when the Treasurer goes to answer the question, we will be able to hear her, in the perfect world that I want to live in.

David DAVIS: I say to the Treasurer: your own budget figures last month forecast that real GSP would grow by only 1.5 per cent in 2026–27 while population would grow by 1.7 per cent. Therefore, Treasurer, will you confirm that income per head in Victoria will fall on your own budget estimates in the forthcoming financial year of 2026–27?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:06): Mr Davis, what I can point to is the ongoing strength of the Victorian economy. As I said, yes, more people want to live in Victoria; yes, more people want to set up businesses in Victoria, and there is –

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Davis, to be clear, the Victorian economy is tipped to grow this year by 1.1 per cent, next year by 1.75 per cent and every other year over the forwards. Of course there are national inflation pressures, there is conflict in Iran, there are difficulties that ensure that the Victorian economy has got headwinds, but because of our strength, because of the positivity, because of the continued investment, whether it is private or government, we continue to go from strength to strength. Our agencies are securing foreign investment tenfold over other states. From the stats I have got here: in the past two years, expected to deliver $2.3 billion of capital expenditure, $730 million in wage expenditure and over $600 million in innovation expenditure. Yes, there is still work to do – of course there is always work to do – but we come from a position of strength.

Ministers statements: working from home

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:07): I would like to talk about the Labor government's work-from-home legislation that has now been introduced into the Parliament. We are enshrining the right to work from home in law, and we are not leaving casuals and part-time workers behind; they will be covered by the legislation as well. The Productivity Commission says that people who have found it difficult to find fair and dignified employment, such as carers, parents of young children, people with a disability and people living in remote regional areas, were more likely to find a job since working from home came into effect effectively after the pandemic. It is no wonder that since last budget we have more women working in Victoria than ever before. It is backed by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia, whose research shows that working from home has increased workforce participation by 4.4 per cent. CEDA also states that working from home on average saves people around $110 a week or $5000 a year. That is important, because working from home is about making sure every Victorian has the opportunity for fair and dignified work, because a fair economy is dynamic, is stable, is progressive and contributes to the economy, Mr Davis.

There are people running around talking a false narrative about working from home being bad for the economy. Our survey found that already around two-thirds of workers in Victoria regularly work from home. It is this that is contributing to the strength of the Victorian economy. As I said, the latest ABS statistics show that Victoria had the second-highest economic growth in the March quarter, backed by business investment of nearly 15 per cent over the last year and over 55 per cent since 2020. Again, we continue to outstrip everybody else in the nation. It is very quiet over there now. It is only Labor that is on the side of working Victorians. Unlike some who are against workers rights and do not support pay rises for the lowest paid workers in the state, we will continue to back workers every day.

Construction industry

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:09): (1359) My question today is to the Special Minister of State. Last night the Premier appeared on ABC's *7.30* and refused to answer repeated questions over how much alleged corruption on Big Build sites has cost Victorians. It has been evident from past responses from the government that it does not want to give a dollar amount as to the alleged funds that are alleged to have been lost to corruption on these sites. So instead can I ask, Minister: to your understanding, can you inform the house what is the scale and scope of the alleged corruption that is alleged to have occurred on government Big Build sites?

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, it is a strange question, but the minister can answer it as she sees fit.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (12:10): I thank Mr Puglielli for his question. Of course some of the information that the member is seeking is not directly within the Special Minister of State's remit, but what I can talk about is our government's commitment to making sure that this kind of behaviour is not only not tolerated but stamped out. Others across the government, including the Premier, have said that we have taken strong and decisive action already, and we have zero tolerance for unlawful behaviour on any Victorian worksite, whether that is a Big Build worksite or a private project. There is already evidence that the additional powers that have been provided to Victoria Police and the Labour Hire Authority are resulting in significant charges being laid and over 150 labour hire licences being cancelled. This is immediate action right now.

In addition to that, I have obviously made it very clear that in response to the important work of the Integrity and Oversight Committee when it comes to the powers and the scope of IBAC's work, IBAC is an independent agency and I do not seek to speak on behalf of them. However, the government has provided a comprehensive response to the work of the IOC committee. We have indicated that it is

complex work – it will require detailed analysis – because we have to get the balance right between procedural fairness and also acknowledging that there are powers that –

Aiv Puglielli: On a point of order, President – and apologies, Minister, for the interruption – just to come back to the question, it was not with respect to the government's responses to these issues; it was regarding the scale and scope of what has been alleged on these sites. If you could bring the minister back to the question.

The PRESIDENT: The minister addressed that at the start of her answer in terms of where her responsibilities and remit lie.

Ingrid STITT: I was going to issues that are relevant to my portfolio responsibilities, which the member is required to actually have some regard to when asking questions in the chamber.

Aiv Puglielli: President, I was not going to do any further points of order. But, Minister, you are leading the work of government in transparency, integrity and accountability. They are not my words; they are the Premier's words post the ministerial reshuffle. This is directly within your remit.

The PRESIDENT: That is just debating the point of order. The minister to continue.

Ingrid STITT: I do note that the very issues I was just going to Mr Puglielli has taken points of order over. I was in the process of saying that this is complex work because we have an interconnected integrity system here in Victoria. There are multiple integrity agencies involved in that work. That is why the government has committed to standing up an expert reference group, which will have all those key integrity agencies on it, chaired by the secretary of my department. That careful work will occur at that level, and then we will have a legislative proposal to bring back to the Parliament. This is incredibly important work. We want to get it right. It is easy for some people in here to ridicule that effort, but I am very committed to working closely with all the integrity agencies to get it right.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Mr Puglielli has not interjected during the answers to his question, so respect him and the minister.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:15): Minister, in your response you referred to some of the government's commitments in responding to what has been alleged regarding these sites. Specifically, that response included the establishment of the expert reference group. It has been characterised as a review of a review in some parts of the community. But given this government has already opposed follow-the-money laws from both the Greens and from the opposition, are you seeking advice from this group because you do not know if what is alleged to have occurred on these sites is corruption, or is this just kicking it off to beyond the election?

The PRESIDENT: I think that is asking the minister for an opinion.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I appreciate the voices in my head trying to help me.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: It is very helpful. I will put the question to the minister, and she can answer as she sees fit.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (12:16): I will draw the member back to the comprehensive government response to the IOC committee report, which includes a commitment to expand the scope of IBAC's powers to include follow-the-money powers and includes a commitment to change the definition of 'corrupt conduct', something I note those opposite have not committed to do. In fact they spoke against it. Jess Wilson

got on ABC radio and said she did not support changing the definition. I have very clear advice from my department that if you do not do both, then you render powerless and toothless any changes to follow-the-money powers.

Construction industry

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:17): (1360) My question is for the Minister for Industrial Relations. The Premier last night in an ABC *7.30* report was asked about corruption on Big Build sites costing taxpayers at least $15 billion. While the Premier continued to dispute that number, she again failed to provide an alternative figure as to what this corruption has cost taxpayers. It has now been four months since the eminent integrity expert Geoffrey Watson SC revealed that figure. Amidst ongoing revelations about criminal activity on government projects, will you, as Minister for Industrial Relations, finally reveal how much taxpayer money has been lost to Big Build corruption?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:17): Mr Welch, there is no evidence that supports claims of a figure of $15 billion. That is why it was removed from a draft report that was leaked, and it has been said by the administrator that there was no foundation for that and that it was not properly tested. Within the last couple of weeks, we have heard from Geoffrey Watson, who obviously has been quoted and attributed as the person who has put the $15 billion figure out there, and I quote, in relation to him talking about that figure recently:

> A lot of it wasn't taken away in corruption. This is one of the things that they keep misquoting. I'm not saying that this has all gone into the hands of a few corrupt individuals. No, no, no … it went into the hands of decent hardworking people who were getting paid …

for their work. So what we have is the person who put the number of $15 billion out in the public domain saying it is not $15 billion. That money went to wages, wages that were subject to EBAs that were signed off by the Fair Work Commission. This is where the $15 billion figure comes from. Geoffrey Watson has corrected Geoffrey Watson.

In relation to any corruption that has amounted to any misappropriation of funds, that is the job of the Victorian police. If you read the reports of the charges that have been laid, the allegations that go towards those charges in relation to –

Richard Welch: On a point of order, President, we are well over 2 minutes into the answer, and the first 2-and-a-bit minutes were spent agreeing with the question that the Premier disputes the figure but went nowhere near the actual question itself, which is: what is the figure, then? If it is not $15 billion, what is it?

Harriet Shing: On the point of order, President, try as they might, those opposite do not want to listen to the answer and have interjected constantly, seeking to shore up the position that they wish were correct. Maybe if they could actually just listen, they would hear what the minister has had to say about how Geoffrey Watson is sick of being misquoted by people just like you.

The PRESIDENT: I will address the point of order. The minister was relevant to the question at the beginning of the answer. After that I do not know, because Mr Welch asked the question and all his colleagues started yelling and I could not hear. Maybe if there was a bit of cooperation, I could respond to points of order in a better fashion.

Jaclyn SYMES: Before I got interrupted, Mr Welch, I was explaining about the people who talked about $15 billion and how they have now described that. In relation to any misappropriation of funds that police are investigating, I was referring you to criminal investigations, criminal charges – some of those are attempted extortion and the like. In relation to the charges and how they play out through the courts, there may be a figure attributed to that, but I would point to David Hayward, professor of public policy and the social economy at RMIT University, saying there does not seem any reason to

believe criminality was as financially significant as the redacted Watson chapters suggest. In relation to the $15 billion, wages and escalation of costs versus the criminality cost, if there is any criminality cost, it is likely to be not significant and it will come out in any court cases.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:22): This, my friends, is why we need a royal commission: because the amount of mental gymnastics required to avoid the question, to put a figure on it and in fact to minimise it – in fact it is the minimisation that is the truly shocking thing about that answer. I would ask the minister: have you even bothered to ask your department how much the CFMEU corruption scandal has cost taxpayers?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:23): Mr Welch, we continue to talk about a figure that has no evidence. It was removed from a report. In relation to explanations as to cost escalations on Big Build projects, you have Geoffrey Watson saying it was not corruption, it was wages. You have Saul Eslake saying the engineering construction implicit price deflator, a measure of price growth used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, showed costs in Victoria went up by 36.8 per cent between December 2014 and September 2025. In relation to cost escalations, overruns can be largely due to increased materials and equipment costs and issues at particular projects. So in relation to the explanation for the figures that you have bandied around, there are independent people out there explaining where some of these figures may have –

Richard Welch: On a point of order, President, while I am sure Victorians appreciate the explanation of rising project costs, except for the SRL, the question was: have you asked of your department what the amount was? You have got 6 seconds left – you can still do it.

The PRESIDENT: The minister addressed the question at the start of her answer.

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Welch, as I explained, the courts will be looking at the charges that are brought by Victoria Police, as is appropriate in relation to any criminality – *(Time expired)*

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:25): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Ministers statements: Aaron Kennedy

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:25): Today I rise to recognise Mr Aaron Kennedy. He was awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal in this year's King's Birthday honours. The Australian Fire Service Medal recognises distinguished service by members of Australian fire services. During his 23 years of dedicated service Aaron has demonstrated exceptional leadership, professionalism and unwavering commitment to the safety and wellbeing of both the Victorian community and our frontline emergency workers. He has served through some of the most difficult and confronting events faced by our fire services. This includes his leadership during the Beechworth Library Road fire on Black Saturday and the care and guidance he provided following the tragic deaths of two firefighters at Harrietville in 2013. These were extraordinarily challenging circumstances, and Aaron's response demonstrated not only operational leadership but compassion, courage and a deep sense of responsibility for the people serving alongside him.

His contribution extends well beyond individual incidents. Through his leadership of Forest Fire Management Victoria and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Aaron has helped build a stronger, safer and more capable emergency management workforce. Our forest firefighters undertake demanding and often dangerous work to protect lives, communities and the environment. They deserve leaders who understand that responsibility, who put their safety and wellbeing first and who continually strive to improve the way that work is undertaken. Aaron Kennedy has been such a leader. This is a richly deserved recognition of his distinguished service, his care for

his colleagues and his lasting contribution to the safety of our state. Congratulations, Aaron, and thank you for everything you do for Victoria.

Benalla Health

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:27): (1361) My question today is for the Minister for Health. My constituent Neil reached out with a disgraceful story regarding the urgent care clinic at Benalla Health. This is a nurse-led public service where nursing care is free, but should they need to call on a doctor from one of the three privately owned clinics, it then becomes a user-pays model. Neil was once charged $350 for a 2-minute consult. Minister, can you please explain why patients at Benalla Health are not entitled to free urgent care treatment?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:27): Thank you, Ms Tyrrell, for that question. I am very happy to take some of the details on the matter that you have raised, so perhaps we can have that conversation: we can get some consent and we can work within the parameters of patient privacy to talk to what has occurred. I am very happy to look into that for you.

But let us use this opportunity perhaps to talk about the interface between public health systems and private health and healthcare service delivery. Labor governments work across three really important pillars as they are relevant to this conversation: public health, public education and public transport. In this year's budget we have got $32 billion for the public health system. That is about making sure that we can treat and provide care and support to people in any number of different circumstances, whether that is early intervention and prevention; the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department; the help that people get when they call 000, including through secondary triage; work within our emergency departments; or access to surgery across the categories that people well know and understand. We are increasing our service response and funding across the public health system because we know that it is public health care that makes a real difference when people need access to those services and supports.

When it comes to specialists, we have added 45,000 additional specialist appointments in this year's budget. When it comes to the interface with public health units, with primary health networks and also with the Commonwealth, we are continuing to work on how we can alleviate the cost burdens for people, who all too often are faced with those out-of-pocket expenses. The federal minister Mark Butler has been working alongside states and territories to understand where and how we can bridge those gaps. But this is also about workforce. What I would take this opportunity to do is to provide due recognition and respect to those people across our rural and regional workforces within the health system. We need to make sure that there are attraction, recruitment, retention and professional development opportunities for people, and that is where virtual and telehealth also come in.

I also want to make it clear that we are continuing to invest in the sorts of primary care and community-based care that will then take pressure off the hospital system, whether that is in emergency departments or accessing that virtual care as well. And again, where there are individual issues – and I would say this to anybody around the chamber who has got specific matters that they wish to raise – let us talk about them in a way that means that with patient consent and by reference to patient privacy and those obligations and commitments that we all have, we can have those conversations about solutions that might well help us to get to the bottom of what has occurred.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:30): The emergency department at Benalla Health was redesignated as an urgent care clinic around 2018. Currently patients from Benalla have to travel to either Wangaratta or Shepparton to access emergency treatment at a hospital. Will the minister investigate the viability of hiring permanent doctors for the urgent care clinic at Benalla Health?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:31): Thank you very much, Ms Tyrrell, for that question. When we are talking about Commonwealth resourcing of primary care, we want to make sure that we have that funding to

continue to support those nine existing sites, but then also the Commonwealth has funded 29 out of 38 of those urgent care clinics in Victoria. We do want to make sure that we can continue to support the delivery of health care, including in communities like your own. And again, we do have an ongoing commitment to the sort of care and meeting the needs that you have outlined in your question for your constituent and for people in particular who find that the tyranny of distance is often a barrier to accessing care, and that is therefore a question of equity of care. So I am really happy to have ongoing conversations with you, and indeed with anybody around this chamber or anywhere else in this place or more broadly, about supporting each and every single Victorian and their communities to access care that is safer, easier and more affordable.

Barwon Health

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:32): (1362) My question is to the Minister for Health. On 29 May two Geelong hospital midwives were assaulted and chased back into the hospital after a night shift. These very skilled nurses are forced to park blocks away on dimly lit streets because Barwon Health provides no safe staff parking. A survey of staff has since found that every single respondent feels unsafe walking to their car. The protective shuttle bus has been axed and security escorts are being refused. Minister, what will you do, and by when, to keep these workers safe?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:32): Thank you, Mrs McArthur, for that question. Occupational violence and aggression is something which I have turned my mind to in discussions with ministerial colleagues, with counterparts in other states, with people working across the health system on the front line and with those people who are managing our health services and the adjacent services that people across Victoria deserve and rely upon. It is never acceptable to intimidate or harass anybody in any workplace, and it is never acceptable for those workers in our health system, who quite literally come to our aid in our most vulnerable of moments, to be exposed to any disrespect. We are having this conversation in the aftermath of some really distressing incidents that have occurred, matters which have had a lot of public coverage and that have also been part of ongoing conversations that I am having, that Minister Stitt is having and that Minister Blandthorn and others are having. This is where we have invested more than $47 million into initiatives and training to prevent and respond to occupational violence and aggression. That includes everything from de-escalation training to the safe wards model and the work that is happening within the Department of Health and Safer Care Victoria. There is always more work to do, though. There is no finish line when it comes to addressing the obligations and responsibilities that governments and health services have to make and keep people safe.

Those staff at Barwon who have been exposed to these really, really distressing experiences deserve our continued support and engagement. It has been really distressing, so police have been engaged and staff at Barwon are being supported. Barwon Health, I am advised, are taking a range of actions to address those security arrangements that have been discussed. When I was there, I actually had a look around the physical environment. There is a lot of construction happening there, but in addition to that there is car parking that is available. It is not free parking in the way that free parking is available some distance away. We have got the new appointment of David Pattie as an emergency management and security coordinator. That is a move that has been welcomed by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation. It is my expectation that Barwon will continue to work really closely with staff and with partners to identify those OVA concerns. I also want to make sure that we continue to support people as they work in a clinical environment and as they get to and from work to stay safe and to have the systems and supports around them that recognise the importance of safe systems of work. We will need to keep having those conversations. I am committed to continuing to have these conversations, and we are continuing to invest the funding to support workers to do what they do in a safe way.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:36): I still do not hear how these nurses instantly in Geelong are going to be made safe. The Nurses' Professional Association of Australia wrote to you on 5 June demanding a response within 14 days. Staff told the hospital survey they no longer report attacks because they believe nothing will change. Minister, will you prove them wrong? Reinstate the

shuttle bus, fund 24/7 security escorts and deliver safe, lit parking – or do Geelong's midwives have to wait for the next assault before this government acts?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:36): Mrs McArthur, I went to these matters in some significant detail in the answer to your substantive question, but I am going to say it again. Everybody deserves a safe workplace. Whether you are, again, selling a T-shirt or giving someone an organ transplant, you deserve a safe workplace. You deserve to be able to go to work and work in a way that is free from harassment or intimidation or the threat of violence. Wherever there is a case of that occurring, we need to make sure that our systems are sufficiently equipped to make sure information is being exchanged, that systems are robust and that we are working across different agencies. This is where just recently I had another set of conversations with stakeholders on occupational violence and aggression in frontline service delivery. This is where, again, we have had a number of conversations in this place and in parliamentary inquiries. Minister Stitt and I have most recently had another occupational violence and aggression round table, and that work goes on.

Ministers statements: kinder kits

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:38): I rise to update the house on the successful rollout of the Allan Labor government's kinder kits initiative. We are ensuring that every child, no matter their background, is receiving access to free learning materials so they can continue their learning at home. Since 2022 more than 300,000 children have received a kinder kit, and this year's kits were delivered to some 70,000 children. These kits are provided to all children attending a funded three-year-old free kinder program. I would say free kinder saves families across their kinder journey over $5000, not an insignificant amount. Through a carefully selected range of books, toys and games, children and their families can play and learn at home. As highlighted by our updated Victorian early years learning and development framework, supporting learning at home is critical for the development of each individual child.

You will forgive me if I was staggered yesterday to hear those opposite, who I would note are yelling out right now in their opposition to these kinder kits, label them as a bribe. Mrs Hermans indeed said that there was no training offered by the government for items such as playdough, crayons and threading beads to help children count. I will help Mrs Hermans ascertain exactly how much it counts. Budget paper 3 – one, two, three –

The PRESIDENT: Minister! Prop.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: on page 13 – one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine –

The PRESIDENT: Minister, please.

Ann-Marie Hermans: On a point of order, President, yesterday when I was holding up my notes to be able to speak I was accused of having a prop, yet you have allowed in this place a very obvious prop that the minister has been holding up for quite some time, which is completely inappropriate and against standing orders.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: On the point of order, President –

The PRESIDENT: I do not know how you are going to come back on the point of order.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: On the point of order, President, I know it would take many more counting beads to count the cuts that those opposite would make.

The PRESIDENT: I will rule on the point of order. The use of props is not allowed. Mrs Hermans, you said I allowed this prop. I was calling out to the minister and everyone was yelling and she could not hear me, but I was going to ask the minister to refrain from using props and continue with her ministers statement.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Mrs Hermans might also be interested to know that the tool is made in her community in Rowville. Perhaps these very threading beads, which teach children everything from motor skills to how to count, might be put to good use. But as I said in my point of order response, it would take many more counting beads to count the cuts those opposite would make to free kinder and that those opposite would make to kinder kits. The Leader of the Opposition has previously written to me asking for the right to charge fees instead of free kinder, and now they want to take kinder kits too.

Alcohol and other drug services

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:41): (1363) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health on alcohol and other drugs. Back in 2020 the health complaints commissioner tabled the report of its investigation into private alcohol and other drug rehab services. It found that the largely unregulated sector had a detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing and financial situation of clients and their families. Then commissioner Karen Cusack warned that overwhelming demand, the high vulnerability of clients and a profit-driven model created 'the space where poor consumer outcomes seem most likely occur', and that is a significant understatement. Recommendations included mandatory licensing of private AOD providers, registration of AOD workers and protection of professional titles to reduce the greatest immediate beneficial effect on safety and quality. Minister, given this was a government-commissioned investigation, what has the government done to forward the recommendations of the commissioner to advance basic safety and accountability in the private AOD rehab sector?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (12:42): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question. These are important issues, and of course our government takes very seriously efforts to reduce harm when it comes to not only drugs but also alcohol. We know that alcohol does have a devastating impact in the community. When people get into a cycle of addiction when it comes to alcohol, it can be incredibly harmful. Our residential rehab beds in Victoria, which we continue to invest in, have actually doubled in number since we came to government. Many of those –

A member: They put two in.

Ingrid STITT: Two, that is right. But back to Mr Ettershank's important question. I know that from the data that I see from the department that many of those beds are actually taken up by people who have an alcohol addiction. This is important work, and it forms a key part of our AOD service system in Victoria. In answering your question, I think I would take you to the work of the statewide action plan to reduce drug and alcohol harm in the community, including the AOD strategy, the 10-year strategy which the government released late last year, and the establishment of an expert AOD ministerial advisory committee, which has many experts from the alcohol and drug sector. I am grateful for their expertise, and I know that they are going to give me lots of frank and fearless advice about what the priorities need to be. One of the areas that I know is in their work plan is to look at the private providers in the rehab space to make sure that there is strong regulation but also looking at what the most up-to-date treatment options are. Maybe it is time to look at some of the newer treatment options that are not being taken up across the health system to the extent that they might be able to.

I would also point to the work of Dr Paul MacCartney, who is the chief addiction officer, which was another initiative out of the statewide action plan to reduce drug harm across the state. He has been very closely engaged with a number of really important health service providers and peak bodies, including VACCHO and including some of our community health providers, particularly around some alternative treatments when it comes to drugs and alcohol. But the regulation of private services is certainly something that I have been in conversations with my department about, and I am happy to engage further with you about that work.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:45): Thank you for that response, Minister. I guess after five years to have a committee and an addiction officer is perhaps small change. But the

Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and the government's 2022 integrated treatment, care and support guidance spoke of the importance of service-level integration across the mental health and AOD systems to provide people with co-occurring mental illness and substance dependence safe, integrated and appropriate care. The government has embedded these principles across the public system in response to the royal commission's recommendations. These integrated care reforms only apply to the public system. Private AOD services do not have any equivalent safeguards, minimum standards or requirements for qualified staff despite the clear risks identified specifically by the health complaints commissioner. Given the government's strong commitment to service integration in the public system, how will it extend these protections to the private AOD sector to afford the same level of safety, quality and accountability to their clients?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (12:46): I thank Mr Ettershank for that question. It is quite a complex one, and I have only got 1 minute, but I will do my best. I do want to take issue slightly with what you said about the progress in relation to these matters. Since 2014 and coming to government, our government has invested more than $3 billion – $3.6 billion to be exact – in drug treatment supports and harm minimisation services for those who need them. That is in publicly provided services of course. It is not the role of the state government to fund private providers, but it is certainly the role to regulate appropriate services, and I absolutely take that very seriously. It is something that the department and also Safer Care Victoria have been doing work with, and I have been engaging closely with them around that work. We need to really strengthen the regulatory arrangements for private providers in the AOD sector, and I am not taking issue with that with you.

Health system

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1364) My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, given the well-known cash crisis that hospitals are currently experiencing, are all hospitals in Victoria paying their bills on time?

Harriet Shing: Sorry, what?

Georgie CROZIER: Are all hospitals in Victoria paying their bills on time – yes or no?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:48): Ms Crozier, the premise of your question indicates that you have actually got no intention of hearing about the work that we are doing to invest in hospitals to meet that demand and to make sure as we continue with the work on model budgets and on funding that hospitals continue to have the support that they need to be able to deliver that care to Victorians in any number of different circumstances. Across the health budget we are continuing to invest in those health services that provide a difference every single day in a range of different settings. Ms Crozier, you are well acquainted with the system that operates here in Victoria, which is somewhat unique in comparison to other states. We have many more health services in metropolitan and rural areas. We also have a range of supports and services that overlap across various parts of the health system. This is why, again, it spans a number of different portfolios. We have got 78 health services. Sixteen of those are metro. We have got six large regional hospitals, 51 smaller regional, rural and multipurpose hospitals and five specialist and statewide hospitals. We have increased the staffing by about 50 per cent across the health service landscape since 2015. That would be vulnerable to $40 billion in cuts. We have continued to invest in health to the tune of tens of billions of dollars, with $32 billion in this year's budget, and we are continuing to make sure that our public hospitals have the support that they need in order to be able to deliver those life-saving services.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I have been listening to the minister's answer intently over the last nearly 2 minutes. This is a serious question, and I ask the minister to come back around. Are hospitals paying their bills on time? It is a very simple question, and I do not know that we need a whole history of what has gone on – just a very simple answer.

The PRESIDENT: I think the minister was being relevant to the question. I do have a concern as to whether the minister would have that level of detail for every hospital and whether there is one late bill, but I will bring the minister back to the question.

Harriet SHING: Ms Crozier, you are actually making a really good case at the moment for cost-of-living support, which is exactly why we are investing in the health system with $32.3 billion in fact. We are delivering record health funding for our system, because we need to continue to build on years of positive investment. As is the usual practice, Ms Crozier, as I would hope you would understand, individual hospital budgets are developed through a draft model budget process, which I flagged in my opening remarks, before they are finalised. That process kicks off after the budget is handed down, as I am sure you are also aware, Ms Crozier, and those processes are made public through the statement-of-priorities process and annual reports, as I am sure you are also aware. We are continuing to deliver that funding, we are continuing to make sure that frontline workers and patient care are front of mind and we will continue to work with health services to manage their cash positions. They can fluctuate, Ms Crozier, as I am sure you are aware, but all Victorian health services had the funding they needed at the end of 2025 to meet their financial obligations and maintain high-quality care.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:52): I note that the minister failed to answer the question, and she was referring to last year. It is now June 2026. Minister, what advice have you received from your department in relation to the impact on patients as a result of this cash crisis, and in particular, are services at risk?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:52): Ms Crozier, the only way there will be a cash crisis in the health system is when you take an axe to it to fund your $40 billion in cuts.

Renee Heath: On a point of order, President, question time is not an opportunity to attack the opposition, and I ask the minister to come back to the question.

The PRESIDENT: I will ask the minister to come –

Georgie Crozier: What advice have you got? Is that it? Is that your answer?

Harriet SHING: Yes.

Georgie Crozier: Is that her answer, President?

The PRESIDENT: I believe so.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:53): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Ministers statements: neonatal postnatal support nurse program

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:53): We know that the hours and days immediately after birth are critical for bonding, in particular between Mum and bub, and that is why the Allan Labor government is backing in our nurses and midwives to provide additional support and ensure that babies with additional needs can stay with Mum. Last week I had the great pleasure of joining the Premier, the ANMF secretary Maddy Harradence, nurses and midwives to announce the extension and expansion of the neonatal postnatal support nurse program. This pilot was introduced to provide registered nurse roles within postnatal wards to support midwifery staff in delivering care to newborns who require more support, and the hospitals already running these programs have reported really positive results, like fewer hospital readmissions of neonates and fewer complications like hypothermia and hypoglycaemia. It

also means more support and more pathways into a really rewarding career in midwifery. As one of the participants at Barwon noted:

> We don't know how we worked before without them. The improved staff satisfaction speaks for itself.

Our $8.1 million investment boosts the program across the state to every level 6 maternity hospital and doubles its workforce from 32 to 65 nurses. We are also really pleased to welcome Victoria's first chief midwife Elisa McDonald. She is an expert in her profession and will ensure that the voices and perspectives of midwives are embedded in our maternity work.

We have listened to our dedicated workforce and also to Victorian families and we are investing in these programs that make a difference because that is what Labor governments do. By contrast, the coalition, when they were in government, went to war with our nurses. They ran a campaign of cuts and closures and privatisations. Given the chance, they will do it again. They walked away from nurse-to-patient ratios. They did not care about safe systems of work. They opposed any meaningful increase to wages for people as part of enterprise negotiations, and they will continue to do that, because that is who they are.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:55): Can I thank Minister Erdogan, who will chase up, under the standing orders, the answers from the Minister for Corrections for Mr Limbrick.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I would suggest that both of my questions were not answered by the minister, and I would ask that you review her responses. They were very simple questions, and I believe that she failed to answer them adequately. In fact I was flabbergasted about how poorly she answered them.

The PRESIDENT: I am happy to review that.

Constituency questions

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:56): (2395) My constituency question is for the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts. Last week the Allan Labor government broke ground at the iconic Fitzroy Gasworks site in the Northern Metropolitan Region, marking a massive milestone in our work to build more homes where Victorians actually want to live. Only Labor is getting on with the job of delivering well-designed modern homes close to schools, services, public transport and work. This landmark project is transforming a former industrial site into a vibrant, connected community. The precinct will deliver a mix of build-to-rent, social and affordable housing, complete with green open spaces, a rooftop garden, co-working areas and over 1000 bicycle parking spaces. The development also sits alongside the new Wurun Senior Campus and the Bundha Sports Centre, Australia's first vertical multiuse sports centre, which Labor have already successfully delivered for our community. My question to the minister is: how many new homes will the Fitzroy Gasworks project bring?

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:57): (2396) My question is to the Minister for Police. Under Labor crime is up and community safety is eroding. It is incredible that in regional Victoria people have to second-guess themselves when they want to go to the supermarket. In Latrobe Valley a lady attending Coles in Morwell was allegedly carjacked by people wearing balaclavas and hoodies and carrying bats. This is not acceptable, and this is not the first incident where people have done this. This government is not keeping Victorians safe in my electorate, and I call on the minister. Will the minister work with Victoria Police to ensure that there are additional police personnel patrolling our streets in the Latrobe Valley to ensure that people can get to the supermarket and home safely?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:58): (2397) My question is to the Minister for Planning. My constituent Adam rents in Hawthorn, along with other families who live in the four-apartment block that he calls home. Recently, though, his block of flats was sold, and Adam fears that the same fate awaits his home as what he has seen on other nearby sites, where existing multiunit housing was demolished and replaced by large single dwellings or a couple of town houses, resulting in an overall loss of housing in the neighbourhood. Adam supports growing housing availability in well-serviced suburbs like Hawthorn, and in fact his current home is very close to the government's planned activity centre. But when existing flats are demolished for lower density housing, this undermines the government's policy intent of boosting housing supply and affordability. As Adam has observed, this is not an isolated case. On Adam's behalf, I ask the minister if she will consider instituting a planning consideration of no net loss of housing, which he hopes would prevent the loss of good quality, well-located existing multiunit housing.

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:59): (2398) My constituency question is directed towards the Minister for Creative Industries in the other place. My constituency is one where the creative industries play a significant role in both the economy and the cultural life of the community, whether it be the Melbourne arts precinct or whether it be our other fantastic creative institutions. These are the things which help create such a high quality of life in Melbourne. They also make Melbourne such an attractive tourist destination for interstate and international travellers. The *Creative State 2028* strategy acknowledges how important our creative industries are for our economic and cultural life. They are important to maintaining our brand as a state where exciting things happen and where incredibly talented people live and work. My question to the minister is as follows: how will the *Creative State 2028* plan benefit our creative industries and institutions across the whole of the Southern Metropolitan Region, including the arts precinct?

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

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:02): (2399) My constituency question is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. In Glen Waverley the hoarding around the RSL site has narrowed the laneway between Coleman Parade and Montclair Avenue alongside Kingsway to pedestrian-only access. Several local businesses back onto this laneway and depend on it for the delivery of stock and supplies, and it is essential to their staying open in fact. With the hoarding expanding into it, delivery trucks can no longer pass through. The site is owned by the Suburban Rail Loop Authority, and there have been repeated requests and indeed complaints from the Glen Waverley Traders Association over many months with no resolution. Could I ask the minister to please intervene with some common sense and ensure that we can restore safe delivery access to this laneway for the traders of Glen Waverley?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:03): (2400) My question today is to the Minister for Education. I have been contacted by a number of families in my electorate, particularly parents from Templestowe College, who are concerned their local school will be discontinuing their Montessori programs. These parents have explained to me and my office the benefits that their children have experienced in this program and their disappointment that future cohorts of children will not have the same opportunities, so I ask: Minister, what are you doing to ensure that public schools in our state have the resources and funding available to continue to run Montessori programs, should they wish to?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (14:04): (2401) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. Residents have raised concerns about the spread of pests and noxious weeds on public land, including roadsides in Bendigo and across northern Victoria, in particular the spread of hairy fleabane and prickly lettuce. These two weeds are increasingly appearing along roadsides and creeping into pastures. Media reports highlight that the government's own performance measures show a 30 per cent reduction in pest control overall and a reduction in departmental staff involved in pest and weed control. There is also a reduction in the annual weed control target from 50,000 hectares to 40,000 hectares, and department reports show a steady decline in pest and weed control over the last 11 years. The failure to control weeds and pests such as foxes, deer, pigs, wild dogs and rabbits on Crown land impacts on agricultural productivity and farm businesses and also damages native vegetation and biodiversity. Given ongoing concerns about weed and pest infestations on Crown land and roadsides, can the minister advise what additional action the government is taking to control pests and invasive weeds and prevent their spread into surrounding communities?

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (14:05): (2402) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport. Users of Tony Clarke Reserve in Macedon are desperately calling for urgent upgrades to facilities or at the very least a temporary solution of some kind. Three women's sporting teams work out of the change rooms at Tony Clarke, with the reserve also hosting a range of other activities that bring around 300 visitors every week. Despite this, it has only one change room each for home and away teams, with both women's and men's teams sharing the facility, which includes one big open room with doorless showers. This is obviously completely unacceptable. I understand that the Macedon Ranges Shire Council have applied for a grant and are still awaiting an outcome. Will the minister expedite this process to end this disgraceful situation at Tony Clarke Reserve in my electorate?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:06): (2403) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Residents in Port Melbourne are being kept awake night after night by hoon behaviour and excessive vehicle noise from cars and motorbikes. They feel unsafe, and some people are even too scared to leave their homes at night. I have been contacted by a number of constituents about this issue, which has been going on for years. It was reported today that a resident fed up with the constant disturbance earlier this year was punched in the face when he confronted one of these hoons. The government has announced a $1.3 million trial of roadside acoustic cameras managed by the EPA to detect illegal noise levels, capture number plates and issue fines, yet this community remain frustrated that they have no clarity about when these cameras will be operational or where they will be located. Minister, can you please tell my constituents when these noise cameras will be installed in Port Melbourne to address the reckless, dangerous and disruptive hoon behaviour?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (14:07): (2404) My question is for the Minister for Planning. Will the minister finally approve the Gisborne and Romsey structure plans that have been sitting on her desk for the past two years? Rural town planning under Labor is in total chaos as big developers get special fast-tracked treatment but local councils go ignored by the minister. New structure plans for Gisborne and Romsey have been sitting on the minister's desk for two years waiting for authorisation and exhibition so that locals can give feedback on the plan, but the minister has ignored them. I raised this matter in Parliament last year, and in reply the minister said she asked for this work to be undertaken as a priority. Nine months after the minister said the plans would be prioritised, they have still not been authorised. This delay is outrageous and is holding up planning changes that are crucial for the orderly development of these towns and the release of new land for housing.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:08): (2405) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health. My constituent is from Springvale and contacted my office after encountering several barriers during Monash Health's complaints process. My constituent is from a CALD background and has a disability. He formally raised concerns regarding the care provided to his elderly mother. He has received conflicting information from Monash Health staff, and his request for a reasonable adjustment was disregarded. This has resulted in a confusing and needlessly lengthy complaints process which remains unresolved. Often people with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have barriers engaging with these services and are not supported in a culturally sensitive manner when making a formal complaint. As current legislation requires complaints processes to be easy and accessible, my constituent asks: will the minister advise how Monash Health's complaints process will be made more accessible to those from marginalised backgrounds?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:09): (2406) My question for the Minister for Small and Family Business concerns businesses in my region. Minister, why is this government failing to properly resource the Victorian Small Business Commission, leaving small businesses and landlords waiting months for dispute resolution? Currently, retail lease disputes must first be referred to the commission before they can proceed to VCAT. When the government expanded the commission's responsibilities in 2017, concerns were raised that wait times would increase without adequate ongoing funding. Today the commission's own website advises of response times of up to 20 weeks. So what is this government's solution – a measly one-off $400,000 funding boost, presumably to fund temporary dispute resolution officer positions lasting just six to 12 months. Minister, these inadequate funding arrangements are leaving landlords out of pocket and driving small businesses in my area and their tenants out of business.

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:10): (2407) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and it is: will the minister prioritise the Inverloch fire brigade for the new next generation medium pumper when they become available within the next two years? Rochelle Halstead, the Liberal candidate for Bass, recently met with this incredible brigade. Local volunteers expressed their extreme frustration with the allocation of funds for the pumper trucks that are coming out soon. They expressed their disappointment with the Allan Labor government's recent announcements of how they are going to be allocated. It is hard to understand what framework the government are using when they are making these decisions. Inverloch has a 27-year-old pumper truck that is unable to carry all the equipment needed to ensure their volunteers' safety, yet the replacement is not a priority. Inverloch residents are paying your tax on volunteers and emergency services, yet they are still not receiving what they need.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:11): (2408) My question is to the Minister for Police on crime prevention. The latest statistics reveal a deeply disturbing surge in family violence offences across the City of Casey, Greater Dandenong and Cardinia regions. In just over seven days police attended 161 family violence call-outs, arrested 95 alleged perpetrators and laid 290 charges, including strangulation, threats to kill with weapons, armed robbery, animal cruelty and attempted arson. Police have stated publicly that more than half of these offences involved breaches of intervention orders and that several offenders were recidivists who had repeatedly harmed partners and children over extended periods. While under-resourced police need to prioritise domestic violence callouts, they remain unavailable to attend other crimes. Given these deeply concerning findings, what specific resources will the government provide to ensure there are enough police in the south-east to

protect victims from repeat offenders who continue to be released on bail and who breach intervention orders with impunity?

Motions

Government performance

Debate resumed.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:13): I would not say I am pleased to rise, but I think it is important that we make a contribution to Mrs McArthur's motion. It is a grab bag of grievances. It is a description of desperation, of half-truths, really, and recycled attack lines, from a political party that is so bereft of positive plans that it cannot give Victoria and cannot give Victorians anything positive to be inspired by at the upcoming state election. All the Liberal Party have got is a list of grievances that are built on half-truths that are seeking to either demonise or distort the realities that exist and to obfuscate the real plans that the Liberal Party have – the real plans that are being concocted behind closed doors by the Liberal Party to cut fundamental and vital services across the state of Victoria.

We know, based on the track record that the Liberal Party has, that when it comes to the type of leadership that they want in this state, it is a type of leadership that seeks to attack workers rights, that seeks to undermine vital services and that seeks to rip funding out of things like our TAFE system and sack teachers, sack nurses and rip funding out of organisations like the CFA. We know that is what is on the Liberals' agenda because it is what they have done before. It is what they did when they were last in government. It is the only logical policy consequence from some of the statements that they have made about what they see as being important for the future of this state. The logical consequence of the few policy positions that the Liberal Party under the current leader, their sixth in seven years, have taken to the people of Victoria is setting a blueprint and a framework for cuts. We know that the cuts are going to come because cuts are what Liberals do – they have done it before; they will do it again – and they will be cuts to the heart of the very services that the people of Victoria rely upon. That is the truth of what is going to come from the Liberal Party, not the distortions and obfuscations that exist in Mrs McArthur's motion before us today.

I did want to take just a little bit of time, given some of the other speakers in this debate have had cause to pause and reflect on those who make comments on the wider political landscape here in the state of Victoria. Mr Mulholland's contribution was replete with excerpts from learned scribes who seek to give us their views on what is happening. I thought it might be worth sharing the views of some of those from the Liberal Party, who have a contribution to make on how they are tracking. This is not from months ago or years ago when they were cycling through the last set of leaders. This comment is from last week in the *Australian Financial Review* on 10 June, referring to the challenges that exist for the new Liberal leader and the new Liberal state president. This is what Mr Terry Barnes, who was a former adviser to Liberal governments, said in the *Financial Review*:

> Wilson and Loughnane, however, are also racing against time to get the Liberals battle-ready, which is crucial given that some new MPs must go straight into a Coalition ministry to supplement the existing, largely mediocre, frontbench. Yet preselections are still incomplete; the Liberals and Nationals are losing donor dollars to One Nation, and the membership is exhausted after years of internal conflict and division. It all undermines Wilson's promise of a fresh start if Liberals remain mired in the same old feuding, fussing and fighting.

I think it is a pretty damning indictment from Terry Barnes in the *Financial Review* last week, a former senior adviser to both the federal Liberal Party and the Victorian Liberal Party and, I might say, an architect of repeated Liberal plans to gut universal health care in Australia. I cannot say that I am a regular adherent to his perspectives, but I do think it gives a useful insight into where the Liberal Party are today. The Victorian Liberal Party are in such disarray that even their own spear carriers are dismayed by what they are offering. That is the reality the Liberal Party is facing.

We know of course that the Liberal Party here in Victoria is facing an existential crisis. The polling that many have referred to in this place released on Monday – for example, the Resolve poll – showed that the Liberal Party's primary vote has fallen 13 percentage points since Jess Wilson took over as their leader. From December to now their primary went from 39 per cent to 26 per cent in the poll on Monday. If that does not tell you something about just how on the nose the Liberal Party is in the state of Victoria, I do not know what does.

Mrs McArthur's motion says that Victorians need a change of government. She posits that things will be better if there is a change of government. What we do know – what is happening to the Liberal Party and that crashing of their primary vote – is that the only prospect of there being a Liberal government in the state of Victoria is one where they are in coalition with One Nation. The Liberal–One Nation coalition is what is going to be brought to Victoria if Labor does not win this election. The choice in November is between a returned Labor government and a Liberal–One Nation coalition. We have seen today, in the last two hours, just a hint and just a window into the sort of policy agenda that we can expect from a change of government to the Liberals and One Nation. The Leader of One Nation in this country stood up at the National Press Club not 2 hours ago and said that she wants a fundamental industrial relations overhaul in this country and that bosses should be able to sack workers more easily. That is what is coming under the Liberals and One Nation, an IR overhaul where bosses can sack workers more easily.

The putative coalition partner of the Liberal Party here in Victoria also said that we cannot be a multicultural society. She does not believe in multiculturalism and she does not think we can be a multicultural society. She also said that they will get rid of SBS, the Special Broadcasting Service, and will fundamentally and radically gut the ABC, and I quote:

> The ABC will still exist, but in a very different form.

The One Nation plan, which the Liberal Party is probably going to have to sign up to, will render the ABC in the cities a subscription service. They then also went in and backed yet again the nuclear power folly and pledged to cut renewables.

So we go from sacking workers to stopping multiculturalism to scrapping SBS and gutting the ABC and putting all of those resources into promoting nuclear power. That is the future. That is the change of government that Mrs McArthur is calling for in her motion. That is the essence of what confronts Victoria if Mrs McArthur's motion that calls for a change of government comes to fruition. The choice for Victorians in November is between a Labor government delivering for Victorians or a Liberal Party in coalition with One Nation, starting out with, in the words of their leader today, an industrial relations overhaul that makes it easier to sack workers. That is what is coming if the Liberals and One Nation team up to take government here in Victoria at the next election. The only way to stop it is to vote Labor.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:23): We see that those on the other side of the chamber, the Labor government – the Labor MPs – are very, very, very concerned about what is happening in Victoria, because for the first time, I think, in the last 10 years, they genuinely know that they are going to lose government in November. They are worried, highly worried, about their seats in the lower house and in the upper house and being removed from this place. The Premier has an approval rating, a popularity rating, of negative 37. It is really going to send her away from Parliament after 27 years. She is at negative 37. She has been in for 27 years, and it will be Andrew Lethlean in Bendigo East that gives her her marching orders. She is that worried –

John Berger interjected.

Melina BATH: I will take up the interjection. First of all, Andrew Lethlean from Bendigo East lives in his electorate. Now, that is a novelty for some members of the Allan government. He is going to take the Premier out. The Premier is that worried that she is doorknocking in her own electorate and trying to sandbag her electorate. The people up there, the people in Bendigo East – and my good

colleague Gaelle Broad behind me knows the reality; she lives in the area, she has her office in Bendigo and she knows what they are saying in the seat of Bendigo East – have had a neckful of this Premier.

Going to the point of Mrs McArthur – who I endorse – in this motion that the Premier has failed in the leadership, that Victoria is less safe, less livable and more indebted and that people have less confidence in integrity, this Premier has been at the helm. Either as the right-hand person of the former Premier Mr Andrews or of her own making, she has been there. She has been the architect of the corruption on our Big Build sites. She has been there, hammer and tongs. She made the decision, I am sure, to introduce a vile thing called the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. Why is it vile? People were demonstrating in Bendigo East over the weekend, and the Liberals and Nationals were standing with those people. They were revolting against a Premier – and it is so disingenuous, and they do it with art – who stands there and says that everything is going to the emergency services. Well, that is right, but what is going to the CFA is not everything that is going to the emergency services. It is going to core government business that should have been funded from the budget, not taken out of the hands of families, not taken out of the hands of small business, not taken out of the hands of farmers – it is coming, and it will impact and has been impacting those farmers – and not taken out of the hands of volunteers who feel cheated or ripped off while they are driving around in their 30-year-old vehicles.

In Ruffy, for example, we heard in the inquiry that my colleague Mrs Broad and others have been on that those volunteers are driving toward the flames in vehicles that are 27 years old. The Premier has been in Parliament for 27 years. Well, that is how long ago this truck was purchased back in the day. It has one cabin, and the volunteers sit outside in the outer carapace, as we say, open to the elements. It is 27 years old. That was the date that the Premier came in. It needs replacing – by goodness, that vehicle needs replacing, and so do so many others in the CFA sector – and so does Jacinta Allan as Premier, and Andrew Lethlean will be the one to do it, there is no doubt about it.

The other point about this is Victoria feels less safe. I raised today a constituency question from my fabulous electorate – from Latrobe Valley, part of my electorate, and indeed it is Acting President Bourman's electorate as well. Somebody had been to the gym and then they were going to the supermarket in the evening. As they got back into their car, thugs wearing hoodies – allegedly, because we need to say 'allegedly' – and carrying a baseball bat approached that lady and harassed her such that she had to drive at risk to get away from people attacking her in our beautiful region. Why? Because we need more police on the beat. Our local police do an outstanding job. We are forever grateful for their presence, their diligence and their commitment to our communities, but there are just not enough of them. If we look across the board, there are 500 fewer police today than there were some three years ago when Jacinta Allan became the Premier. On the books across the board there are 150,000 vacancies in terms of police in our system. The Liberals and the Nationals have made a solemn commitment – that has been budgeted – that should we form government in November, we will ensure that there are 3000 new, additional police on the beat doing the work to protect our communities. How is it that in my patch regional Victorians should feel threatened going to the supermarket? This is not my state, and we need to turn that around; we need to completely turn that around.

There is another point that I really want to raise. I feel the integrity issue has been very well canvassed, and I thank Mrs McArthur, I thank Mr Mulholland and I thank Mr Welch; I thank all of us that again and again reiterate the concern that people have. I hear it in my area all the time: the $15 billion that has gone into dodgy contracts and into the most shocking channels. Who wants to understand that government money – taxpayer-funded money – could be going to strippers, bikies, drugs and corruption? That is not our state, and we need to turn that around. We have that plan, and we will conduct a royal commission. We will have those follow-the-money powers. We will make sure that these people are held to account, and we will bring integrity back into Victoria.

One of the things that I really want to touch on is Mrs McArthur's second point:

> (2) notes that under the Allan … government:
>
> (a) Victoria's health system is closing beds, cancelling surgeries and struggling to pay … bills, while patients wait too long for ambulances, emergency treatment and elective surgery …

68,000 people are on an elective surgery list. That is blowing out. These are people who in a modern society expect their state to provide adequate health care, but we are not seeing it in this state. Again, I was contacted by somebody recently who went to a fantastic hospital in a community that is waiting for a new hospital. Guess where it was? It was in Warragul – the old Warragul hospital, where my grandfather was born. I do not think it is the original one, because he was born 120 years ago, but it is an 80-year-old hospital. It is archaic. The government is giving it a little bit of sprinkle food to fix the leaks and the roofing or whatever it is. This government made a commitment that they would build a new hospital on a piece of land that was donated. They made that back in 2022. This is what the government does. It makes these promises to regional Victorians. It breaks its commitments. I have a whole list. I have only just got started, and I see my time is nearly up. I could speak for an hour on this.

Members interjecting.

Melina BATH: By the way, democracy means fairness. You can have your turn when you are due if you wish to. We need to change this government, and I endorse entirely this motion of Mrs McArthur and the Liberals and Nationals.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) incorporated the following:

> I rise to speak on the motion the liberals have brought forward.
>
> This motion is not a serious attempt to improve outcomes for Victorians.
>
> The opposition has sought to paint a picture of a state in decline.
>
> It is a narrative built on pessimism rather than evidence and one that ignores the investments being made across our health system, our justice system, our infrastructure and our communities.
>
> At its core, The Allan Government is focused on easing pressure on Victorian families while continuing to invest in the infrastructure, healthcare, education and transport systems that our growing state relies on.
>
> Under Allan Leadership this government provided instant relief with **$155 million** to make public transport free for everyone in April and May, taking the pressure off fuel demand.
>
> Investing a further **$278 million** to halve the price of public transport until the 1st of January 2027.
>
> This includes trams, trains and bus services across the state.
>
> I would like to address several of the claims made in this motion.
>
> Firstly, on health.
>
> The Allan Labor Government has made record investments into Victoria's healthcare system because every Victorian deserves access to quality care when they need it.
>
> This Government has invested in the people who make our health system work. Since coming to government, Victoria has recruited more than 17,000 additional nurses and midwives to strengthen our hospitals and improve patient care.
>
> Those are not empty promises. Those are thousands of additional healthcare professionals caring for Victorian families every single day.
>
> Alongside that workforce investment, this Government has continued to build the infrastructure our growing state requires.
>
> Eleven new hospitals have either been completed or are being delivered, providing modern facilities and increasing capacity across metropolitan and regional Victoria.
>
> Healthcare is also becoming easier to access.
>
> Victorians can now attend one of our free Urgent Care Clinics instead of waiting in a busy emergency department for non-life-threatening conditions.

The Victorian Virtual Emergency Department has become one of the most successful innovations in our health system. The Government is investing a further $437 million to almost triple the program's capacity by 2028–29, allowing more Victorians to receive expert clinical advice from their own home.

We have also introduced the Community Pharmacy program, allowing pharmacists to provide treatment for a range of common conditions without requiring a GP appointment. That means quicker care, reduced pressure on general practice and emergency departments and better convenience for patients.

These reforms demonstrate a government focused on practical improvements to healthcare delivery rather than simply criticising the system from the sidelines.

Does our health system face pressures? Of course it does.

Every health system across Australia continues to deal with increasing demand, an ageing population and workforce pressures following the pandemic.

But the response of this Government has been to invest, recruit and build.

Not to walk away.

Turning now to community safety.

Every Victorian deserves to feel safe in their community.

Community safety has always been, and will continue to be, a priority for the Allan Labor Government.

The opposition often presents crime as though government has done nothing.

The facts tell a very different story.

Victoria now has the largest police force in the state's history because this Government has continued investing in frontline policing.

Earlier this year this Parliament passed some of the toughest bail laws anywhere in Australia.

These reforms ensure stronger consequences for serious and repeat offending while placing community safety at the centre of bail decision-making.

Already we are seeing those laws working.

Bail refusals and bail revocations have reached record levels.

In the Magistrates' Court, bail revocations have increased significantly following the reforms.

This Budget presented under Allan backs in those policies, with investments including:

$62 million to recruit up to 200 police reservists for police station counter duties

$55 million to support Victoria Police operations.

$51 million to deliver 50 new PSOs

$229 million to increase capacity in the corrections system, including youth justice

$43 million to deliver programs within prisons to reduce reoffending

This Budget also invests **$81 million** to respond to and prevent youth crime.

This Government has also strengthened our youth justice system by recruiting more than 1,000 additional staff across corrections and youth justice over the past year.

Importantly, our approach recognises that strong enforcement must be accompanied by long-term prevention.

That is why the Allan Labor Government has established a permanent Violence Reduction Unit.

This initiative works with children and young people who are at risk of offending by connecting them with mentoring, education, employment pathways, sporting opportunities and community support.

International evidence demonstrates these approaches work.

Violence Reduction Units have contributed to significant reductions in violent crime in cities such as Glasgow and London.

Strong policing and tough laws are essential.

But if we genuinely want fewer victims tomorrow, we must also invest in preventing young people from entering the criminal justice system in the first place.

That is exactly what this Government is doing.

The motion also makes claims regarding integrity.

Integrity is far too important to become a political slogan.

It is fundamental to public confidence in democratic institutions.

Victoria's integrity framework exists precisely because governments should never investigate themselves.

Independent agencies perform that function.

The Allan Labor Government respects that independence.

It does not direct investigations.

It does not determine findings.

It does not interfere with statutory responsibilities.

That independence is protected in legislation.

This Government has strengthened the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission through legislative reforms and record funding.

The 2025–26 Victorian Budget delivers $65.5 million to IBAC so it can continue carrying out its work independently and effectively.

Following independent reviews across government, recommendations have been accepted and reforms continue to be implemented to strengthen governance and accountability.

That is what responsible government looks like.

It is not achieved through political commentary.

It is achieved through strong institutions, transparent processes and independent oversight.

The opposition also raises the issue of state debt.

No government should ever borrow irresponsibly.

But there is an important distinction between borrowing to fund day-to-day operating expenses and borrowing to build productive assets that will serve Victorians for generations.

The infrastructure being delivered across Victoria is exactly that.

New hospitals.

New schools.

The Metro Tunnel.

Regional rail upgrades.

Road improvements.

Level crossing removals.

These are investments that improve productivity, reduce congestion, create jobs and support economic growth long into the future.

Every major economy invests in productive infrastructure.

The budget shows that the government is on track to deliver five consecutive surpluses between now and the end of the forward estimates.

with an average surplus of $1.7 billion over the budget and forward estimates years.

The last budget 2025/2026, was able to deliver a surplus of $700 million, the only one among the eastern states.

That demonstrates a government balancing responsible fiscal management with investing in the infrastructure that Victorians rely on.

What this budget demonstrates is a government focused on practical support while continuing to invest in the long-term needs of the state.

The alternative consistently presented by those opposite is simply to cut.

Cut services. Cut projects. Cut investment.

Cut the very infrastructure that growing communities rely upon.

Victorians deserve better.

No-one in this House would deny that families are facing pressure.

Cost-of-living pressures are being felt right across Australia and indeed across much of the world.

The responsible response is to provide practical support while continuing to invest in the services that people rely upon.

That is precisely what this Government has sought to do through investments in healthcare, education, transport and community services.

Strong public services reduce household costs.

Accessible healthcare reduces out of pocket expenses.

Reliable public transport saves families money.

Quality public education gives every child the opportunity to succeed regardless of their background.

Government is about making difficult decisions.

It is about balancing immediate pressures with long-term investment.

It is about strengthening the services Victorians depend upon while continuing to plan for future generations.

That is exactly what the Allan Labor Government is doing.

Rather than engaging in political point scoring, this Government continues to recruit nurses, build hospitals, strengthen our justice system, invest in police, deliver major infrastructure and maintain independent integrity institutions.

Those opposite may choose to focus entirely on criticism.

This Government remains focused on governing.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:33): Can I thank everybody for their contributions, and particularly my colleagues Dr Heath, Mr Mulholland and Ms Bath, because we on this side of the chamber know what really matters for Victoria. I heard one of the people on the other side talk about the things that matter. The thing that matters to Victorians is being kept safe in their homes, in their businesses and on the streets. They are not safe to walk around in this city particularly, but even outside the city. This is the crime capital of Australia. People do not feel safe. That is what matters to the people of Victoria. That is what we will fix. What other things matter? Yes, housing matters, but you have managed to apply so many taxes, charges, regulations and cultural heritage assessments, plus the cost of labour courtesy of the CFMEU corruption in Big Build projects and the shortage of materials because you are soaking them all up – they add almost 50 per cent to the cost of any dwelling in this state. Inquiry after inquiry that I have been on has demonstrated that there is no capacity for developers to produce a dwelling that anybody can afford, especially in this city. You have imposed housing targets on every municipality – 79 of them around this state. They do strategic plans to produce proper numbers of housing that they can deliver with social licence in their area. You have applied the top-down approach, but not one house or dwelling or flat or apartment will end up being produced. The thing that matters to people is getting off a ramp and into a hospital bed. That is a major problem in this state. You cannot get the health care when you need it. You are lucky if an ambulance picks you up on time so that you do not die en route, it is so bad, and then you have to get into a hospital bed.

We have in this state the highest level of taxation, from a Premier and a Treasurer at that time that we heard say, 'There will be no new taxes under my leadership.' Well, welcome to Victoria, the highest taxing state in Australia. We pay more taxes than anybody else. You have introduced 65-plus new or increased taxes, and you promised not to introduce any. You have completely broken the trust of the people of Victoria. The level of indebtedness in this state: there is more debt here than in the whole of the east coast states put together. These are the things that matter to the people of Victoria, and that is what we have addressed in this motion – what matters to Victoria and the solution to it, which you have opposed, which is a royal commission into the corruption of the CFMEU. You opposed our bill which would have given IBAC the powers to follow the money that has been lost, that has been absolutely abused in this state – $15 billion and probably counting. You opposed that.

You oppose every facet of transparency and accountability. We cannot get documents when we call for them – documents motions that pass through this chamber. You do not provide the information so that we can properly assess where money is being spent, what the outcomes are, who was involved and what level of corruption existed. We constantly hear that the document is commercial in

confidence or they need more time or they just cannot deliver it. Well, that is not good enough. In a democracy we need proper accountability of government, and we need a new government. That is the only thing that is going to fix this state – a new government in Victoria, one that will be led by Jess Wilson and the coalition. We will deliver the outcomes that Victorians want. I once said Jess Wilson will be Victoria's best friend and Jacinta's worst enemy, and that is exactly what has happened in this state under the leadership of Jess Wilson. And you are all paying the price. You could not organise a new leader yesterday. You are probably not going to get one till the election. We will absolutely deliver for Victoria, and this motion actually demonstrates that.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (14): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (18): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion negatived.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, I have raised this in the chamber previously, but there is a problem with the lifts, coming from the annexe, and the 4-minute cycle. The lifts sometimes freeze, and in this case, as a number of MPs – four of us in fact – discovered, the lift was frozen on the second floor, and the other lift was also not moving.

Members interjecting.

David Davis: No, this actually is quite a serious point. And it is not a partisan point in any way. This could happen to any member of the chamber, being caught in a lift that is just frozen and will not move. It is almost certainly the case, we concluded as we came up the stairs, that in fact somebody was holding the lift higher up. There may need to be better signage, but the lifts themselves are extremely slow, and MPs will eventually be caught in this. Somebody will not get to the chamber, through no fault of their own, for a division. That is a direct intervention on democracy if that is to occur, and I am alerting you to deal with it.

The PRESIDENT: After the last time you alerted me, I do not think that the speed of the lifts can be altered. Having new lifts, that might be the new standard. I cannot control if someone is going to hold a lift at one level. They should not be doing that. Maybe signage is the answer. The other answer is a 5-minute bell.

David Davis: Further to the point of order, President, I am not sure that that is the only other solution. I think there are technical solutions with the lifts, but further, people holding the lift is a problem. Somebody will be caught, and a vote may well be affected in the chamber.

The PRESIDENT: I am not disagreeing with you. If someone holds the lift and people are waiting for the lift, it is a problem. I am trying to find a solution. Because we cannot control everything, maybe we will go to 5-minute bells. We will have a discussion at the Procedure Committee.

Water policy

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (14:47): I seek leave to move motion 1487 standing in my name in an amended form.

Leave granted.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: I move:

That this house notes that:

(1) farmers are the lifeblood of the Northern Victoria region;

(2) many of those farmers rely on irrigation to grow their crops and livestock;

(3) water needs to be protected for communities and food and fibre production;

(4) the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's 2022–23 surface water reports show that more than 570 gigalitres of water held in the River Murray–Goulburn Murray Water share accounts and 915 gigalitres from Goulburn and Campaspe basins was written off as spillable water;

(5) when water is lost during storage overflows, this impacts farmers;

and calls on the government to investigate the viability of all reclassification options in carrying over water spilled from storages to alternatives such as environmental water and report it as such.

First off, I would like to thank the Minister for Water for her constructive engagement on this motion. There is no doubting that water is the lifeblood of the Northern Victoria Region. Many of our farmers rely on access to irrigation water to provide the food, fodder and fibre needed to feed and support the state. For decades our farmers have been forced to wear the costs associated with spillable water during wet years. They use carryover water as a way to secure their water needs from year to year. They pay fees to carry this water over, on top of the costs of the water and yearly fees charged by the water board, just to have access to water on their properties. Farmers are charged at almost every step of the process. Then in the very wet years, when the storage has become too full, they lose that water without compensation. It is just written off as spillage and gone from their accounts. It hardly seems fair, does it? In recent years northern Victorian farmers have seen enormous volumes of carryover water classified as spillable and subsequently written off. Victorian water accounts show that in 2022–23 alone more than 570 gigalitres of spillable water was written off from Murray Water share accounts, while more than 716 gigalitres was written off due to spill events across the broader Goulburn system. Those are staggering volumes of water, all at the cost of our farmers. Imagine going to the pub, buying a beer and watching the barman pour half of it down the sink but still having to pay the full price.

The pool of water available to irrigators is getting smaller and smaller every year. Only 28 per cent of the water held in storages is assigned for irrigation, industrial use or communities. Eighty-two per cent of the water recovered by the Murray–Darling Basin plan has come from the southern basin. The southern basin is where 40 per cent of Australia's food is grown. If this continues, Australia will become a net importer of agricultural products by 2037. It is unimaginable that this could happen to a country that for decades has been proudly touting its world-class agricultural products. We have seen some of the best food and fibre products in the world, but the industry is slowly and painfully being destroyed by a system that is stacked against it.

Reclassifying spilled water from carryover is just a small step towards keeping the system fair. The question is simple: if this water is no longer available to the entitlement holder, where does it go? In many cases the water remains in the river system. It contributes to river flows, wetland inundation, environmental outcomes and downstream system benefits. If that is the case, then surely we should be honest about its use and recognise it for what it has become – environmental water. The reclassification of spillable carryover water would improve the transparency around where our water goes and what it is used for. Governments regularly report environmental water holdings and environmental watering outcomes. If hundreds of gigalitres of privately held water are effectively contributing to those outcomes, Victorians deserve to know.

Environmental benefits achieved through spilled carryover water should be counted when governments assess environmental water needs and future water recovery programs. It makes little sense to ignore water already delivering environmental outcomes while simultaneously seeking to acquire more water from productive agriculture. Reclassifying spillable carryover water would recognise the contribution made by irrigators. Farmers are frequently portrayed as competing with the environment for water, yet when spillable carryover is written off, irrigators are effectively providing water that benefits the environment without recognition or compensation. That contribution should not be invisible.

This proposal is not about reducing environmental outcomes; it is about accurately accounting for them. Every megalitre that leaves a farmer's account and contributes to river health should be recorded accordingly. At a time when communities are being asked to surrender more productive water through federal government buybacks and recovery programs, the government must be transparent about all sources of environmental water. If spilled carryover water is helping achieve environmental objectives, then it should be counted as environmental water.

Victoria's irrigators deserve fairness, taxpayers deserve transparency and our water accounting system should reflect reality. I therefore call on the government to investigate the viability of all reclassification options of spilled carryover water, such as environmental water, report it as such and ensure that the contribution made by irrigators is properly recognised in future water policy decisions.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:54): I thank Ms Tyrrell for her motion. It takes me back to water, although I am not a very north-of-the-divide water person, so we will see how we go. We recognise the amended motion, which removes wording the government was not in a position to support. With these amendments the government will not oppose the motion. We acknowledge Ms Tyrrell's continued advocacy for regional communities' water rights in Northern Victoria Region.

As a person raised on-farm and in a farming community, a community that relies on agriculture, rainfall and water are really important things. It has been a part of my life, and I recognise the critical role of farming in our communities and our nation for economic, social and environmental reasons. In terms of our water system in Victoria, we have got a number of government-owned water authorities that are charged with managing the water resource in our state and in doing so making sure that the environment, the economy and communities and cities and agriculture are all accounted for in an even-handed, as best as possible, way, given the moving variables, which are climate change, seasonal variations and the chosen land use. It might be using a dairy-farming form of agriculture in a dry irrigation area, which is perhaps a really high use of water and a low-value product.

There is always the dynamic of demand and supply. You have got the existing demand; then you have got future demand; then you have got climate change. Then you have got a low climate change scenario, a medium climate change scenario and a high climate change scenario, all supported by evidence and applied to the particular relevant areas. Then of course you have got supply, and again that is related to how big your storages are, if there are any storages what the flows are and the variation in those flows. For example, a large storage serving a small community is highly unlikely to ever encounter restrictions, whereas the reverse is definitely the case. A small engineered storage supporting a growing community that might have outgrown its infrastructure would more regularly experience water restrictions. Rainfall, rainfall catchments and types of catchments and then reticulation systems and the types of reticulation systems for water and their efficiency, again, become a variable. Then, as I mentioned, environmental flows are very important to support the landscape from which the water has been taken in the first place. And of course there are sometimes recreational water flows, which are about supporting tourism industries, caravan parks and waterskiing and fishing in regional communities.

Of course you have got urban water, which is the big cities, urban communities and the small urban communities as well. I think it is true to say that 70 to 75 per cent of water consumption is agricultural irrigation and about 20 to 25 per cent is urban water consumption in this state, so it is certainly a very

important issue that Ms Tyrrell has raised. Because of that, one small saving, one small efficiency in the agricultural irrigation space, is going to produce some really strong outcomes. Then of course you have got business uses for water – we have got not just agricultural uses, but a number of manufacturing industries rely on water. In fact cities have often grown up around industries that have relied on water. In my community we call it dryland farming; no irrigation is the norm, I suppose. We have got a few small farms in south-west Victoria that do a mixture of irrigation and dryland farming, but irrigation is certainly the big picture north of the Divide, and that is where we have a water-trading market. We try and supply the economic system with a trading system that provides the right balance for the economy, the environment and the agricultural businesses. I want to take the opportunity to say thanks to the water corporations and those involved, as a former water person, because they do some very good work, and well-managed water is central to the economy and the market of Victoria in general.

In terms of spillage and spillage works, the premise in the motion is a good one and worth having a look at. Carryover and spill rules have been refined over time and in close consultation with water users and the community, but that is not to say that this scenario is not worth having a look at. Irrigators and environment and water corporations have all been involved in those consultations. These communities are impacted when there is spill water, and as Ms Tyrrell said, that is impacted by drier years versus wetter years. Water can be redefined as it is spilt. I think the scenario of investigating whether or not it ought to be called what it is being used for in the first place, since it does end up back in the environment, is a valid question to consider.

The Victorian Environmental Water Holder leased 20 billion litres worth of carryover space in the 2024–25 year to help farmers get water during drier years. There is that sort of capability for the system to adapt in drier years. The basin plan is premised on environmental water holders having that flexibility, and spills are already accounted for in basin plan water recovery targets. Deducting spills from the environmental water holder accounts would mean more held water would need to be recovered. Farmers and rural communities could end up carrying that cost.

Our record on supporting northern Victorian farmers is a strong one. Let me be very, very clear about who delivers for those communities when it comes to water. There is no conflict of interest, unlike with the Nats, and no Office of Living Victoria looking after their mates –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ERMACORA: If you are going to poke at me, I will raise some of the disasters from last time you were in government.

David Davis interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Mr Davis, if you are going to interrupt, it has to be from your spot – repeat offender.

Jacinta ERMACORA: I have not given myself enough time to detail some of the disasters last time the coalition was in government in this state in relation to water, so I will not actually go into them, but your comments and interjections have given me an idea for a future speech should you raise the matter. I have run out of time, so I will say thank you very much for raising the issue and I will leave my contribution there.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (15:04): I rise to support the motion, although I have to say that I am a little bit disappointed. The motion runs through about five points that are a little bit motherhood in statement. But then it did have a call to actually 'reclassify carryover water spilled from storages as environmental flow and report it as such'. But of course it has now been watered down, pardon the pun, to just say 'investigate the viability of all reclassification options'. I think it is a pity that the amendment has been accepted because I think the first motion was much stronger. I strongly support the concept of overflows or spilt water being classified as environmental water, because farmers do not benefit from spills, the environment does. The farmers cannot actually capture any of

that spilt water – not that they would, because water is only spilt in years where it is pretty wet and the farmers probably do not need additional water, and if they did, it would be pretty cheap anyway. But the environment does benefit and the Commonwealth and state environmental holders also have the option to actually release more water on top of the spilt water to create environmental waterings in those years, therefore only the environment can benefit from that water.

However, water does not spill very often. What we have seen is in the 16 years since 2010 there have only been four times when water has spilt. It is highly unlikely that we will get any water spilling this year – very, very unlikely. The four years that we have had water spill have been after flood years. We had flooding in late 2010 and early 2011, and we saw spillages in 2011–12 and 2012–13. And then of course we had the very big floods in Victoria in October 2022, and we saw water spill in 2022–23 and in 2023–24. There were nine years in between those two lots of spillages where there were no spills whatsoever.

If we look back at the history of carryover water, we know that carryover water was introduced in the Murray and Goulburn water systems in northern Victoria in early 2007. This was done as an emergency drought measure under conservative rules that limited the amount that individuals could carry over. After the success of the 2007 year there was a review, and the carryover water was continued on. But when carryover water was first proposed, it was proposed by the environmental water holders, and the ministers at the time were just going to make it for environmental water holders. But of course the irrigators were upset with that. They wanted carryover water, and the Victorian Farmers Federation, which was supported by the Victorian Liberals and Nationals, insisted that it also be applied to irrigators' water. The argument in this motion that the first water spilt should be environmental is one that we put strongly from the very beginning. Following the review that happened after the initial carryover water was put in, there were limited changes made, and carryover, of course, continues today.

In the motion Ms Tyrrell talks about one year where there had been a large release of spillable water, and that is the year that was affected by the 2022 floods. And of course there was going to be a large amount of water released that year, because the reason that we actually do have the spilling of the water is to ensure that we do not exacerbate more floods in the area. If we do not create airspace in the dam to collect the current year's inflows, then we are going to be in real trouble. But if we look at the 570 gigalitres that was released in the Goulburn–Murray water area, there was little or no environmental water that was spilled in that – it was all irrigators' water entitlements – and in the Goulburn and Campaspe area, where Ms Tyrrell talked about 915 gigalitres, only 78 gigalitres was environmental water, so 837 gigalitres was water that belonged to irrigators. So we see that irrigators are losing out here. It is irrigators' water that is being spilt. The environment is benefiting from it, but no-one is compensating the irrigators, and no-one is actually holding the environmental water holders accountable for making sure that there are environmental flows. Irrigators are the ones bearing the cost for no benefit. Again, the only benefit from these spills is to the environment, or perhaps to Labor's mates in South Australia.

The spilling of water is used to prevent large floods and damage to water storages. Figures used in the motion follow the biggest flood in Victoria, and I have spoken about that already. Water does need to be released from dams when the dams are full so that there is available airspace for the water that is coming in from new inflows for the new season. In fact some communities, like Rochester, would like to see water spilled earlier from the Eppalock dam in wet years to minimise the flood risks and the heights of floods in their communities – you can never eliminate it, but to actually minimise the risk to their community. Part of the problem at Eppalock is that there is limited ability with the infrastructure when it comes to water releases. When the community raised this issue with Minister Shing in her previous role as water minister, the last time she had the portfolio, her response was to tell them that if they wanted to live on a flood plain, they should get used to being flooded. It was a disgrace. It went down like a lead balloon, and she was virtually chased out of town.

Why should the government listen to this request? Well, the answer is fairly easy. This motion follows many years of advocacy by irrigators and the coalition for spills to be classified as environmental water. The reason for that is because irrigated agriculture is highly productive and contributes greatly to Victoria's gross state product. In 2020–21, 5400 farm businesses irrigated in Victoria, accounting for 25 per cent of Victoria's 21,600 farm businesses. The total area of irrigated land in Victoria is 490,000 hectares, which is only 4 per cent of Victoria's total farming area of 11.4 million hectares, but from that 4 per cent they actually produce $5.24 billion of irrigated agriculture, which is about, I think, 25 per cent of Victoria's total agricultural production. Most of the Victorian irrigating farm businesses are in the Goulburn, Broken, North Central and Mallee systems, so they are in northern Victoria. They receive their water from a number of sources, some through irrigated channels, some through rivers and creeks, groundwater, reused water, farm dams et cetera, but they contribute greatly to the agricultural production – as I said, about 25 per cent of the state's agricultural production.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (15:15): I rise to speak on this motion today. I understand that Ms Tyrrell has made an amendment to the motion. In its original form we probably could not have supported it, but I understand that that amendment has been made and a review is probably a reasonable thing to do. I will still make my contribution based on some of the points that have been made in the motion and the contributions that have been made so far.

I do at the outset want to acknowledge that farmers in northern Victoria are vital for Victorian food security, as are farmers right across the state, including in my own electorate of Western Victoria. As we all know, access to water is critical for farming, but climate change is making farming work harder every year. Irrigators depend on reliable water allocations, but that reliability is being undermined by a warming climate, overextraction and decades of market-driven water policy. The fundamental problem is that water is treated like a commodity or an asset to be bought and sold. This view fails to see our rivers, groundwater and other waterways as inextricably linked to each other and to all life around them. We all – farmers, communities and the ecosystems around us – depend on healthy river systems, and unpicking the mess of the commodification of rivers and moving back to a holistic understanding of water that existed for tens of thousands of years in this country is perhaps an almost impossible task, particularly given how heavily modified and exploited our rivers are and how entrenched the market model is.

This motion today brings to the surface many of the issues with the water market, but I am not sure that the action it is suggesting in making spills environmental water will do much for our rivers or our small farmers, who it is purporting to help. Instead the main winners from the proposal could well be big institutional investors like overseas superannuation funds and Wall Street traders playing the water market, who could further rip off farmers and shift the risk onto taxpayers.

Firstly, it is worth reviewing what spillable water actually is. The river system in question here is highly regulated, with many dams and weirs. Water entitlement holders get an allocation of water and can also have carryover water banked from wet years to have in reserve for drier spells. It is a sensible way to deal with natural variations in water availability to stock up in wet years as insurance against the drier ones. The water is considered spillable if allocations plus the carryover exceed the total entitlement for that water holder, and that water cannot be traded or used until the system manager determines that dams are very unlikely to fill. If that determination is made, entitlement holders can use it or trade it. If they do feel there is a risk of overflow, water is spilt to help manage storage and flows.

With respect to the costs that were outlined in the original motion, while spills are definitely losses for the entitlement holders, the estimate that was provided of $57.1 million for spillages has been calculated based on the market price of water. The problem with that is that the market price does not apply to spills; it only applies to water if there is available storage capacity, so it is not really accurate to apply this cost. Further, all water entitlement holders that have used carryover bear the cost of spills. It is not just farmers. Spills are an integral part of the overall assumptions underpinning the basin plan, forming part of the base flows within the plan. If they were to be reclassified, as has been suggested should be done, it would require the whole basin plan to be reviewed, including how much water can

be taken through all of northern Victoria, and would actually quite likely increase the amount of water needed for the environment.

Here is why. Environmental flows are not the same as base flows. All the regulation and modification of the river system through dams and weirs have altered the natural flows of river systems. High flows into flood plains and wetlands in winter and spring and receding flows that drew nutrients back into the channel in summer all supported native ecosystems and life cycles. That was the natural flow of rivers. But now it is all topsy-turvy as water is pushed downstream to support export crops like almonds in the summer, and all the normal rhythms that ecosystems – including those of fish and bird species – rely on have been messed up. This is where environmental flows come in. They can be used to try to somewhat recreate the natural pulses of water down the river that have been disrupted through intervention and modification over many decades. Environmental water is fundamentally different from base flows. It is planned, timed and targeted to ensure that our flood plains and species like birds and fish get what they need when they need it. So if base flows, which spills constitute a form of, are considered environmental water, we may need more environmental water than previously to meet the required outcomes.

Why is this change being proposed? It could be worth having a look at who would benefit the most from this. All water holders use carryover; for example, farmers to plan for dry years and environmental water holders to ensure they can meet seasonal demands. But institutional investors also benefit from it and they use it; they absolutely love carryover. Currently big investors and speculators like overseas superannuation funds and Wall Street traders buy and sell water shares for profit. They do not have any connection to the land or water. They do not grow anything or have practical use or need for the water other than to line their own pockets. They hang on to carryover in dams and sell it on the market at peak prices for maximum profit. Meanwhile, small family farmers literally pay the price of this, having to buy water being sold by these investors at the highest price. As climate change makes Victoria hotter and drier and as water becomes more scarce, exacerbated by things like the El Niño we are currently now officially in, these big investors stand to gain even more from farmers who have no choice but to buy water from them if they are to have any chance of keeping afloat. But at least at the moment, all entitlement holders using carryover bear the cost and risk of spills, including those Wall Street traders. If spillable water gets reclassified as environmental water, this effectively shifts the risk for those institutional investors onto taxpayers, while they still get to rip off family farmers.

This is not to say there is not scope for a review into how the system works and how reliability for water entitlement holders could be improved; for example, by creating a more flexible system to manage water releases. The Greens have also long argued for bigger reforms regarding transparency in the water market so we can have a clearer view about what is going on and stricter rules about who can trade water. It has been broadly acknowledged that the water market is opaque relative to other markets. The lack of transparency creates information asymmetry and mistrust in the system, and there have been several reports and recommendations to government regarding this issue but inadequate action in Victoria to improve transparency. At present the public is only able to access information on those corporations that own 10,000 times the amount of water shares as compared to the average water holder.

It is fundamentally problematic that big institutional investors can distort our water markets to maximise profits at the expense of our food growers, who end up paying more for water in the end. We believe at the very least water shares without an associated water licence or intention to get one should be recorded on the Victorian register. The government previously rejected our amendments on this when we tried to make them to the Water Act 1989 a couple of years ago.

While spills are losses for all entitlement holders, including farmers, reclassification as environmental flows we do not believe is the answer. Instead of spreading the risk across all entitlement holders, this would shift all of the risk onto taxpayers, and what a boon that would be for the big institutional and overseas investors. They can buy up even more water and bank it, knowing that Victorian taxpayers

are underwriting their risk, while making bigger profits off the backs of the everyday farmers in northern Victoria who actually need the water to grow our food – the very farmers that this motion is trying to help. In that sense we really do not support the reclassification as environmental flows but totally accept that a review is a reasonable thing to do, given many of the issues and frustrations that farmers are experiencing.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (15:24): Thank you very much for the opportunity to make a contribution on the motion moved by Ms Tyrrell and then provided in an amended form here to the chamber. I have some remarks that I want to present, some with respect to the former motion as it was presented and some with respect to the newly amended one. But it is safe to say that I join many members of the chamber in acknowledging the importance of water management for regional farming and that of course it is one of our most precious resources in rural Victoria.

Water is quite literally the lifeblood of our regional communities and our agricultural sectors and economy. The motion before the house highlights important points about the deep dependency of our hardworking farmers on highly reliable irrigation to grow their world-class crops and successfully manage their livestock. It notes that water needs to be protected for our communities as well as our food and fibre production. The motion before us points out that according to the surface water reports for the 2022–23 financial year there are more than 570 gigalitres of water held in the River Murray and Goulburn–Murray water share accounts, and there are another 915 gigalitres from the Goulburn and Campaspe basins, and that was written off as spillable water. The motion notes that when the water is lost during storage overflow, this impacts farmers.

I must confess, unlike my colleague Ms Ermacora, who has a long history with water policy in our state – and can I thank her for being our lead speaker; she is someone who I have from time to time turned to for advice and counsel on water issues in our state – I needed to do a little bit more research into the topic to fully understand the issue and why reclassification is so complex. I needed of course to understand how our carryover and spill rules function here in Victoria. These rules have been carefully refined over many years in close consultation with water users and the regional community. The carryover framework is an essential tool because it enables people to keep their unused allocated water at the end of the season so they can carry it forward to use in the next season, providing farmers with much-needed flexibility to hold, use or trade their water when it is of the highest value to their operations, allowing them to prepare for shortages during drought. Carryover space is successfully utilised by active irrigators, environmental water holders and urban water corporations managing vital town water supplies across the state.

Because our water storages have a finite capacity, we must have robust rules in place to ensure that carryover water does not unfairly impact other users, and under the established rules only water that sits above your full entitlement volume is lost through spills. When dams get too full, this excess carryover water is the very first water to spill, ensuring that water users are not blocked from receiving their current allocations. Crucially, these spills are applied proportionally to absolutely everyone holding water rights over their full entitlement volume, meaning irrigators, environmental water users and town water corporations all take that hit equally, and there is no charge for any water lost from a spillable water account. We will always continue to look for opportunities to improve the current system to benefit all users.

Whilst also turning to Ms Ermacora I had a chance to reflect on some of the work undertaken as part of the Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into the floods. It reactivated my memory about the significance of our water holdings here in the state and how it does certainly impact right across the state. To the other members of that inquiry, can I just acknowledge all our work during that time, because that was an enormously challenging inquiry that went over a considerable amount of time. It certainly, to my mind, opened up my understanding of the preciousness of our water here in Victoria and particularly our regional communities.

There is a misconception that exists that water written off during a storage spill is simply lost to the system. Spills from dams do not just disappear, they flow directly downstream. This creates various massive benefits across the entire river network, being the critical needs of downstream irrigators or of course downstream storages needed to directly support more reliable entitlements for everyone.

There is more that I can say. I know that this is an area that many of our regional members in this chamber have some very firm views on and do want to take the time to share them with the chamber. So I will just perhaps, if that is okay, wrap up and say that the government certainly is very much focused on real, strategic and perfectly balanced water management that fundamentally supports our farmers, rigorously protects our natural environment and confidently secures Victoria's long-term economic, social and environmental future.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (15:30): I am pleased to be able to speak to this motion and indicate that the Nationals certainly are very supportive of the motion. Spills cause losses. Farmers are certainly paying the price for that when it is written off with no compensation, and when farmers pay, we all pay. That cost is extended. I note that there have been some changes made to the motion. Certainly the cost impacts have been removed, and rather than 'reclassify' it has been changed to 'investigate'. So I trust that the government will, as Ms Ermacora said, be supportive of this motion.

One thing that has not been changed, which is good, is that 'farmers are the lifeblood of the Northern Victoria Region'. That is so true. I cover the Northern Victoria area, and farmers drive so much of our regional economy. They have got kids in school, they are using health services and visiting the retail stores and they need to have transport – so many different aspects that help drive regional economies – and we appreciate the work of farmers. I grew up on a farm, so I am biased, and I know the importance of water and how significant it is. Dad would often be out there irrigating – including on Christmas Day – morning, noon and night when it got hot. Water is so important to our food and fibre production in this state.

I remember attending a water leadership forum in Bendigo, which was with the Goulburn–Murray irrigation district. There were over 100 industry leaders there, and they were very strong on the point of being against water buybacks. That is certainly an issue that we have talked about in this chamber before. I remember speaking to a dairy farmer who was recalling the water-saving measures, and they were actually moved to tears as they recalled the pain of what it was like losing their water. Just as an example of the impact of water, I remember Jason Limbrick, who is CEO of Australian Consolidated Milk, spoke about the impact of water buybacks on Victoria's dairy industry. Twenty per cent of Australia's milk production comes from northern Victoria. Eighty-five per cent of milk produced in the basin comes from northern Victoria, and we also supply milk to the northern states. The dairy industry creates about 13,000 jobs in northern Victoria alone, and 20 years ago northern Victoria produced 2.7 billion litres of raw milk. Now, because of reduced water availability and higher water prices, we produce half that amount – about 1.4 billion litres. So we need water. It is absolutely critical.

Government – certainly the federal government, as we have seen – often focuses on water buybacks, but water security and ensuring that we have capacity to retain water are so important. I think about the infrastructure development back in the 1870s. Bendigo is a town that was developed, rarely, without a river near it. It relies on water being transported. It was Joseph Brady, an engineer, in the 1870s who helped design our gravity-fed water channel. It is an open water channel that still exists. It took until 1877 for water to get to Bendigo via that channel. It just astounds me that it is still an open channel, and it is so important to the water supply for the Bendigo area.

I know Tim McCurdy, my Nationals colleague and the member for Ovens Valley, has been a strong supporter of the Big Buffalo dam and of expanding that, because we need to be able to capture water and ensure that it is put to productive use. We cannot keep squeezing juice out of the same lemon; we need to be thinking about making cordial and really prioritising efficiency projects and infrastructure over water buybacks. I think it is likened a bit to musical chairs. I feel at the moment, certainly with the federal government, that they just keep removing the chairs and thinking everyone is going to get

a seat at the table, and it is not the case. I remember at that leadership forum they talked about water buybacks and that Swiss cheese effect where when you take people off the line – and it could be anywhere; there was no coordination to it – it is very difficult. The social impact and the economic impact that water buybacks have on our region are extensive.

I was part of the flood inquiry and certainly saw, with the intense rainfall that we had, that spills did cause some towns to have very little or no warning. We saw that certainly in Rochester. I remember years ago when I worked at Coliban Water that at the time there was a lot of discussion about stormwater and intense rainfall and how we capture it. It just gets lost to the system. I know some water groups have actually talked about how they cannot put any more environmental water to good use. More environmental water in the system is not going to actually help the system.

I remember being at Benjeroop and meeting with a number of farmers there. Following the floods they talked about their region. A number of them have been actually tracking water levels in dams. The environmental water gets stored, and the level of their dams increases. They were talking about how over the years, when farmers used the water, the levels would go down, but since the introduction of the environmental water they have increased. Then we have got a problem, like we saw following the floods: when we get that heavy rainfall, it is already at high capacity, and then we have the overflows that can occur. Another thing that the Benjeroop farmers mentioned were the levees and the lack of maintenance of levees. A lot of them are full of holes, and the levees do not work. If it is like a bucket with a hole in it, it is no good.

The Nationals are very pleased to support this motion because when farmers pay the cost, we all pay the cost. The Nationals support this motion and will continue to support our farmers.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:36): I also would like to speak on this motion brought forward by Ms Tyrrell. I will say from the outset that the Libertarian Party will be supporting this amended motion. The original motion I did have a couple of problems with, mainly because I was concerned that the government could not actually do what was being asked unilaterally. I see that there has been a change here to look at the viability of reclassification.

But this is a real issue in that spillover water does go into the environment but is not counted, and there should be a way of reclassifying it. I am not pretending to have the answer, and I do not think that this motion is pretending to have the answer either. It is saying 'Let's look at the viability of classification options', and I think that is a sensible thing to do. It is vitally important that we manage our water resources well, especially up in northern Victoria, because of all of the irrigation and the food and fibre production that occurs up there. It is vitally important.

I know that my colleague from the last term of Parliament Mr Quilty had a lot more to say on the Murray–Darling Basin system and the Murray–Darling Basin agreement. I think he wanted it basically restarted from scratch. I know that there are a lot of people who are unhappy with the arrangement. Nevertheless, if we can look at ways of improving current faults in the system or things that are oversights in the system, then that is a good thing, and therefore I will be supporting this motion.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (15:38): I want to give a contribution on motion 1487 regarding water storage from Ms Tyrrell. The farmers of Victoria are the lifeblood of our state. They are the people that grow the food we eat, produce the fibre that supports our industries, employ thousands of workers, support local businesses and keep our regional towns thriving. From dairy farmers in Gippsland to fruit producers around the Murray, these farmers have built their livelihoods around hard work, resilience and careful management of their resources.

Farmers rely on water to produce crops and maintain livestock. Irrigation provides the certainty needed to invest, employ people, improve productivity and contribute to the economic strength of our state. But the farmers cannot plan properly if the rules around the water are unclear or if the value of their water can simply disappear without proper recognition. They have invested in equipment, planted

crops and managed their businesses based on the expectation that their water entitlements would provide security.

One consequence when water is lost due to storage overflows and returns to the environment is that the consequences are not shared equally. The water may physically leave the storage system, but the financial impact remains with the farmers who held that water and depended on it. These farmers are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for recognition and fairness that the water that is lost should count towards the environmental water allocation. The current approach creates the situation that when water spills from storages it can be counted as a loss, while the environmental benefit of the water may not properly be recognised. This does not provide a clear or transparent picture of how our water resources are being managed. A transparent system benefits everyone. It benefits farmers so they can better understand how their water is being managed, it benefits communities because they can have the confidence in government reporting and it benefits environmental decision-making because the true contribution of different water sources can be accurately measured.

Farmers have invested in efficiency improvements. They have adapted their practices. They have embraced new technologies and found ways to produce more with less. Yet the burden for farmers continues to grow. These negative outcomes cannot continue to fall disproportionately on regional communities. Our farmers have carried the responsibility of maintaining food and fibre production whilst navigating some of the most challenging water conditions in our history. They have dealt with drought, floods, rising costs and changing markets. The least they deserve is a water management system that is fair, transparent and accountable. Water security is food security. Supporting agriculture is supporting regional jobs, local economies and the future of Victoria's prosperity, and I commend this motion.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:41): I am very pleased to rise today to speak on water, a very important part of government policy – perhaps starkly ironically so, given I have just spilt a glass of water over my desk, a good way to kick off my contribution with my soggy notes and –

Jeff Bourman interjected.

Michael GALEA: No, it was not a stunt, Mr Bourman. But this is a very serious and important topic, because we are talking about the livelihood of our farming communities and the ongoing environmental and economic sustainability of regional Victoria, in particular northern Victoria and the Murray–Darling Basin. This government has a very long, proud and determined track record of support for northern Victorian communities, whether it has been through, as Mrs Broad touched upon, the devastating floods that we saw just four years ago or other major disasters and fire events. Indeed, as mentioned in another contribution on another topic earlier this week, it is starkly the case that we are in an environment where places can be under bushfire and flood threat at the same time. So when it comes to the news that we saw this morning – that is, the declaration of an El Niño – it reminds once again those of us who live in the south of the state just how precious and critical northern Victoria communities are. It reminds us of the work that our farming communities do in order to keep us all fed and to keep their local economies and our broader state economy moving strongly and indeed of the very real social impacts that that has on them when faced with extreme weather situations in either scenario. That is what brings us to discussion of this topic before us today.

Having recognised the important role that our communities face, I acknowledge as well that although I still have relatives in the north of the state, they are no longer involved in agriculture, but for quite some time they were in fact dairy farmers, not too far away from Ms Tyrrell's property back in the day, up in the Kyabram area. As a younger person I got to go up and spend time with them and see the wonderful things that that lifestyle provides but also the very real and ongoing challenges that our farming communities face, especially when weather conditions change in unpredictable ways.

The carryover and spill rules that we have in place currently have been refined over time and in close consultation with water users and the community, which does enable people to keep their unused

allocated water at the end of the season to use in the next season. It is an important tool that gives people more flexibility to hold, use or trade water when it is of the greatest value to their business and to prepare for shortages due to drought. There are currently rules in place to make sure that carryover water does not unfairly impact on others, including that only water above your full entitlement volume is lost through spills, so that when dams get too full, it is the first water to spill, ensuring that others are not unfairly impacted because there is additional water in the storage and that spills are applied proportionally to everyone holding water over their full entitlement, including irrigators, the environment and water corporations for town supply, which is also critical. There is no charge for any water lost from a spillable water account. But in saying that, it is important that we are always adaptable and open to new and better ideas of how things can be improved, which is why I do welcome the chance to speak to this motion, which as Mr Limbrick highlighted perhaps does not seek to be prescriptive or give an answer in its current form but does enable us to have that genuine and open discussion.

I have been in and out of the chamber, but I know there have been some valuable contributions from regional MPs already. I look forward to hearing further from regional colleagues too, because we still know – even those of us that live in the metropolitan, growth or exurban areas – the importance that our farming communities have for our state, and that is in every corner. That is in Gippsland, that is in the west and it is absolutely in the nation's food bowl in the Murray–Darling Basin, which in Victoria is perhaps the food bowl of the food bowl. That is probably a bad analogy, but it certainly holds true that we are part of the Murray–Darling Basin, which is one of the most productive regions in the whole country.

I acknowledge Ms Tyrrell for amending her motion to enable the government to support it today. It is important that we can have these discussions openly and frankly. Whilst I will not spend too much time dwelling on the motion we were debating just before this one – this place can get frivolous on a Wednesday in particular – when it comes to the livelihoods of farming communities, and all Victorians, of course, but regional Victorians in particular when they are facing particular and unique challenges, it is an important opportunity for us to come together across the aisle, I hope, and share ways in which we can make important changes which will support our farming communities. There is much more I could say, but I understand there is a long list of speakers, so I will pass back to you, Acting President. I am happy to have had the opportunity to speak on this motion today.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:47): I rise to speak on the motion before the house regarding water management and the impact on local farmers. There is no question that farmers are the backbone of our regional communities. Farmers play a vital role in Victoria. They contribute enormously to the prosperity of our state, and this government intends to continue to support them all through the work that they do. Water is an important asset in this state that needs to be managed responsibly to support communities, agriculture and the environment, especially as our climate is becoming more volatile. Our farmers continue to face droughts, bushfires and changing seasonal conditions, and our farmers are central to the strength of our regional communities and food security.

The Allan Labor government's budget commits $84 million in support for Victorian farmers and their agricultural industries. Importantly, that includes $60 million in response to the January 2026 bushfires, providing primary producers with grants, concessional loans and emergency fodder to support and help farming families recover and rebuild. We are also providing $5.9 million for programs that support the health and safety and wellbeing of our farmers and agricultural communities, recognising that farming brings not only financial pressures but also personal challenges. This includes funding for the National Centre for Farmer Health and the Rural Financial Counselling Service, ensuring that farming communities have access to practical advice and support when they need it.

The government is investing in the future of Victorian agriculture through initiatives that improve productivity while supporting sustainability. The Allan Labor government is also investing $5 million to support farmers with reducing emissions on their farms and $2.2 million to extend the fox bounty program to manage the impact of livestock predation. We know drought and tough weather conditions

put real pressure on our farmers and communities. Labor has backed Victorian farmers with more than $146.5 million as part of the drought support package, recognising the ongoing challenges presented by drought. This investment is supporting our farmers and communities to stay resilient and overcome drought conditions. We are also investing $7.6 million in biosecurity, protecting the future of our agricultural industries. The strength of Victoria's agricultural sector is reflected not only in the resilience of our farmers but also in the results they continue to achieve on the world stage. The recently released 2024–25 *Victorian Food and Fibre Export Performance Report* demonstrates just how significant our agricultural industry is to both Victoria's economy and regional communities.

Victoria's food and fibre exports reached a record $22.1 billion, increasing our share of Australia's total food and fibre exports to 28 per cent. This is an extraordinary achievement and one that belongs to the hardworking farmers, producers and agricultural businesses across the state. Despite challenging seasonal conditions, they have delivered a fourth consecutive year of record export growth, highlighting both the quality of Victorian produce and the resilience of those who produce it. Exports increased by almost $2 billion compared to the previous year, with Victoria exceeding its ambitious $20 billion export target well ahead of schedule for the second consecutive year. Our meat industry continues to be the cornerstone of that success, generating $8.2 billion in exports. Strong demand for Victorian beef and sheep meat has increased our national market share from 28 per cent to 30 per cent, reinforcing Victoria's position as Australia's second-largest meat-exporting state.

These outstanding results extend across the agricultural sector. Grain exports reached $4.6 billion, dairy exports totalled $2.8 billion and horticulture recorded its strongest year-on-year record, with exports valued at $1.9 billion. These figures demonstrate that Victorian farmers are not standing still. They continue to innovate, adapt to changing global markets and produce high-value products that are recognised internationally for their quality. While China remains Victoria's largest export market, accounting for almost $5 billion in exports during 2024–25, our producers are also successfully expanding into markets including the United States, Japan, Indonesia and New Zealand. Importantly, almost half of Victoria's export income now comes from markets outside our top five trading partners. That diversification strengthens the resilience of our agricultural sector and provides greater certainty for producers in an increasingly competitive global economy.

Of course we recognise that these successes have not come easily. Many farmers continue to face the challenges of drought, rising input costs and increasingly unpredictable weather. That is why the Allan Labor government continues to back our agricultural sector through the practical investment shown in this year's budget – the commitment to supporting Victorian agriculture alongside drought support to help farmers and regional communities respond to the challenges they are facing. Our *Economic Growth Statement* also identifies agribusiness as one of Victoria's priority industries, recognising that a strong agricultural sector combined with growing trade will continue to drive economic growth, create regional jobs and strengthen communities across our state.

The Allan Labor government will continue to back our farmers. Supporting our farmers means supporting the industries that sustain regional jobs. With that, I conclude my remarks.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (15:53): I wish to thank all of my colleagues for their contributions. Irrigators in my communities in the Northern Victoria Region have been calling for a very long time for change to the system. Investigating changes to spillable carryover water is a very small first step. Maybe the next step could be investigating the viability of removing speculators from the system so there is more water for farmers in the environment. The water system must be made fairer for all who use it physically and rely on it to preserve life in our irrigation communities and river systems.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

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

Council's amendments

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad) (15:54): I have received a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026:

> The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Building Act 1993** in relation to places of public entertainment, emergency orders, building notices, building orders, decennial insurance, flood-prone areas and minor matters, the **Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002** in relation to adjudicators, authorised nominating authorities and reviews of that Act, the **Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025** in relation to the statutory insurance scheme, minimum financial requirements and minor matters, the **Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Act 2025** in relation to minor matters, the **Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Act 2026** in relation to Ministerial guidelines, flood-prone areas and minor matters, the **Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Act 2026** in relation to a minor matter, the **Sale of Land Act 1962** in relation to off-the-plan contracts and section 32 statements, the **Water Act 1989** in relation to floodplain management, the **Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund Act 2012** in relation to exemptions and offsets and the fixed charge on residential land, the **Duties Act 2000** in relation to the concession from duty for newly constructed dwellings and the **Land Tax Act 2005** in relation to the principal place of residence exemption and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

Business of the house

Standing and sessional orders

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (15:56): I move, by leave:

> That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended to the extent necessary to allow the following order of business on Friday 28 August 2026 to apply:
>
> Messages
>
> Formal business
>
> Members statements (up to 15 members)
>
> Government business
>
> At **12 noon** questions
>
> Government business (continues)
>
> At **10 pm** adjournment (up to 20 members).

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Ombudsman referral

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (15:57): I move:

> That this house:
>
> (1) notes:
>
> (a) on 20 September 2023, the government released Victoria's housing statement, outlining its intention to demolish Victoria's 44 high-rise public housing towers and redevelop the land;
>
> (b) the government commenced relocation of residents in the following three initial tranches of public housing towers:
>
> (i) tranche 1: Carlton, Flemington and North Melbourne;
>
> (ii) tranche 2: South Yarra and Richmond;

(iii) tranche 3: Flemington, Kensington, North Melbourne, Prahran, St Kilda and Albert Park – all housing residents aged over 55;

(2) pursuant to section 16 of the Ombudsman Act 1973, refers the following matters to the Ombudsman for investigation and report:

(a) the impact on residents at the first three tranches of public housing to be demolished of the project to date, including but not limited to:

(i) moving from homes owned and managed by the government (public housing) to homes managed by not-for-profit agencies (community housing), including how this affects rental and utility payments and other costs such as utilities, access to enforceable, transparent and protective rental policies and security of tenure, as well as residents' mental, social and physical wellbeing;

(ii) the adequacy of the homes offered to the residents required to relocate, including location, general standard, and suitability of the homes to each resident's unique housing requirements and any impacts from the government's reliance on using privately owned housing to relocate residents ('head-leasing' arrangements);

(iii) the outcomes for residents who refuse homes offered for relocation;

(iv) the impact on residents living in towers where the majority of the other residents have relocated;

(v) the practices and methods of contact employed by the government, Homes Victoria, agencies and relocation staff to secure relocation, and whether these are compatible with the human rights of the residents, which could include but is not limited to:

(A) communication and confusion around residents' 'right to return';

(B) communication around the differences between community and public housing;

(C) limiting the number of homes offered for relocation;

(D) consequences communicated to residents should they not agree to relocate or accept offers;

(b) the specific impacts on elderly public housing residents in tranche 3, with regards to paragraph (2)(a);

(c) the timeliness and adequacy of the government's maintenance of all 44 public housing towers, particularly in comparing the periods before and after the announcement on 20 September 2023 and the ongoing impact on residents;

(d) whether, having regard to all the circumstances, the demolition of the public housing towers is the best course of action; and

(3) requires the Clerk to write to the Victorian Ombudsman to convey the terms of this resolution.

I am pleased to rise to speak to motion 1485 in my name. I am proud to speak to this important motion, a referral to the Victorian Ombudsman to investigate and report on the impact of the state government's decision to demolish Victoria's public housing towers with regard to its impact on current tower residents as well as those already forced to relocate.

In his last major act as Premier, on 20 September 2023 Dan Andrews held a media conference at the North Melbourne public housing estate to announce the state government's intention to demolish all 44 high-rise public housing towers and redevelop the land. But what for me was the most telling thing about that announcement was not the actual policy being announced but more who was invited to be present at the Premier's announcement, because you would normally expect that the most important people and stakeholders regarding an announcement about the redevelopment of public housing land would be the public housing residents who currently live there or, if not them, then maybe the record numbers of those who are homeless or waiting for social housing in Victoria under state Labor. But these were not the people that Labor and the Premier invited to this announcement. Instead of those currently living in or desperately waiting for public housing, Labor actually invited all of the commercial property industry players: the Housing Industry Association, Master Builders Victoria, the Property Council Australia and the Urban Development Institute of Australia.

While this media conference was being held on public housing land, this was not an announcement about reducing the social housing waiting list, increasing the shockingly low proportion of social

housing in Victoria or improving the health and wellbeing of those living in public or social housing. What this was actually about was selling off public land to the for-profit property sector, the developers and those whose primary objective is to see property prices and their own corporate profits rise as high as possible. That is why it was the property developers, not the residents, that were invited to the announcement. In fact we learned later that public housing residents at North Melbourne or any of the other towers had not even been afforded prior notice by the government that their homes were to be demolished and they were all to be relocated, even while the Premier was laughing and posing with property developers in front of the media pack at the announcement just below them. What a truly revolting display of disrespect and disregard by a state government towards the lives and human dignity of some of the most vulnerable and powerless members of the Victorian community. But it said everything we needed to know about this Labor government's priorities, because this no longer is a government that stands up for traditional Labor values of social justice. It no longer stands up for workers; in fact it works with the Liberals to water down WorkCover protections for those injured at work. It no longer stands for public education in state schools; it has ripped $2.4 billion of Gonski funding from them. It no longer stands for quality public services; it has privatised VicRoads, the land titles office and now, it seems, most of public housing. It no longer stands for public health; it plans to abolish our only public health agency, VicHealth. But most of all it no longer stands up for the powerless, the less wealthy and the most vulnerable against the big vested interests: the gambling industry, the property industry, the big banks and the billionaires. As we have seen this week, it actually gives the most powerful and wealthy all of the benefits of government, whether they be stamp duty concessions for multimillion-dollar penthouses or 40-year leases on public housing land. And in return, it tells all of those who are really struggling just to get by that this discredited form of drip-down economics that overwhelmingly favours those at the very top may leave a tiny morsel of help behind for them.

This Labor government repeatedly treats public housing residents with unapologetic contempt and disdain, as we saw with the lockdown of the North Melbourne housing tower during COVID and then again with Dan Andrews's housing announcement at the same location in 2023. The Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers heard from all the groups that Labor completely ignored when it rushed into this announcement with the property developers. We heard from community legal centres, housing experts, human rights experts, peak bodies and advocacy groups, but most importantly we heard directly from the public housing residents. The undeniable testimonies made it clear: pressing ahead with the demolition and privatisation of public housing towers was and continues to be a disastrous plan for residents that this government should urgently reconsider. The committee made 21 recommendations based on overwhelming evidence from these stakeholders, which, true to form, the Labor government arrogantly mostly dismissed, supporting just four recommendations in full.

When a government fails to listen to the people whose lives it impacts, it is the job of all non-government members of this place, along with the responsible media and our integrity agencies, to draw attention to it – to shine a light on what is really going on. This referral charges the Ombudsman to investigate and report on how the government's decision to demolish public housing and relocate residents has impacted and continues to impact the lives of residents living in the towers as well as those who have been forced to relocate. It goes beyond what was looked at by the Legal and Social Issues Committee – for example, the specific impact on elderly residents living in the third tranche of public housing to be demolished as well as the effects of the announcement on the already appalling levels of maintenance at all tower sites generally. This Labor government has disrespected and ignored residents living in public housing. It is our job to afford them the respect they deserve by ensuring that their voices and stories are heard when determining the future of the public housing towers. I commend the motion and this referral to the house.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (16:04): On the motion brought about by the Greens, right from the beginning of my contribution I just want to say that this is a clear-cut case of manufactured fear and circulation of widespread misinformation. When a Labor government actually gets on with

the hard work of delivering homes for vulnerable people, it is quite telling that the first instinct of some is to move motions that entirely – well, they get this thing stuck in a lengthy investigation.

To understand why this motion is misguided, we have to look at the undeniable reality of these buildings and the actual physical make-up of these sites. On 20 September 2023 this government released *Victoria's Housing Statement* and announced the largest ever urban renewal project in Australia. We announced our firm intention to demolish and redevelop all 44 of Melbourne's ageing public high-rise towers. This is not just about replacing old buildings; this is about doing significantly more for the community. These buildings are now more than 60 years old – older than a lot of people in this place. They were originally built with an expected life span of only 50 years, meaning that they have well and truly exceeded that, and not just by a little bit. The physical reality of these structures is staring at us right in the face. They completely fail modern standards when it comes to noise, sustainability, waste management, ventilation, fire safety, extreme heat resilience and seismic safety. That is an extraordinarily long list, and disability access in these buildings is entirely noncompliant, as well as emergency services, which I have not also listed on here. The plumbing and the sewerage systems are literally breaking down as we speak.

The renters living in these towers have told us directly that the safety and security situation they face on a daily basis is unacceptable. The number of constituents that have raised this shows me that it is not pretend; they are families that desperately need up-to-scratch housing. Yet the Greens would rather we not say any of this out loud. They conveniently leave out crucial facts from their public campaigns, like how the internal structures and concrete panels inside these towers simply cannot be moved. There are walls, doorways and corridors that cannot be modified no matter how hard you try. The ceiling heights are simply too low to meet modern standards. These are not just little chips that can be painted over; these are hard physical limits that cannot be overcome. These buildings can only be replaced. That is not a political choice; it is a cold, hard engineering reality. As representatives that care about the people living in these towers, especially since so many of them fall within my electorate, we must be completely honest about these facts.

We saw this denial of reality play out during the recent Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers. The evidence that the committee sat through, including five full days of hearings and 807 submissions, detailed really distressing evidence about failing sewers, mould in the walls caused by leaking sewerage and concrete cancer, but somehow that was left out of the report. Now, suddenly, they want an Ombudsman investigation into whether the government is doing enough for the residents of those exact same towers.

There is a lot of talk about retrofitting as some sort of magic silver bullet. I have heard it now time and time again, but every viable solution, including the Greens' preferred retrofit option, requires relocating residents – every single one of them. I believe firmly in my heart that a person living with a disability on the 12th floor should not be subject to staying in a building where the lifts have to be turned off because it is the preferred option of the Greens. My view is that people with a disability, people with access needs and people that have genuine health concerns need to be in a place that is fit and right for them – every single one of them.

The only question we have to answer is where those residents will go when the work is done – plain and simple. Our program moves them into better homes, whereas the alternatives would have them living in a live construction site for half a decade. These are old folks; these are families and people living with some pretty significant trauma and hardship. I have lived beside a construction site at a time in my life, and frankly, it was hell, and I am surely not going to wish that on anybody. It in no way respects the rights of residents to the quiet enjoyment of their home. But rather than being honest about these engineering constraints, because that is what they are, the Greens will say one thing and do another. They will tell the social media followers that the residents of these towers are desperate to stay. Yet since January last year nearly 15 per cent of all correspondence sent to the Minister for Housing and Building from Greens members has been on behalf of constituents wanting to relocate from the towers. They asked for relocations because they know exactly what this government knows:

these towers are no longer fit for purpose. Whilst that is 15 per cent that have gone from Greens members to the minister for housing, I did not have the good fortune of taking the time to calculate what my constituents are telling me when they come to me, but I will tell you what I know to be true from the vast amounts of correspondence that I have dealt with, and that is that they are seeking relocation. They are seeking to live in a place that is fit for their aspirations for their home and their aspirations for their family, and these towers are no longer fit for that purpose. They have reached the end of their useful life, and no amount of retrofitting is going to fix that.

It even gets worse when you look at the actions of the volunteers on the ground. I have heard stories from people that have heard deliberate misinformation being spread. They have been telling vulnerable residents that they are going to become homeless, and that includes residents that literally are about, I do not know, 200 metres from my office. They come in time and time again telling me about misinformation, and I have reassured them myself and had the good fortune of having the now former minister for housing come along and say straight to them, 'No, you will not be left out on the streets because of this.' This is misinformation, and frankly, a lot of it is lies. They have been telling people that the towers will be demolished while people are still living inside them. That was one of the most frightening ones. I could not believe that when folks came to my door, almost in tears about that, asking if the government was going to kick them to the kerb and if they would need to fend for themselves. This is a morbid, disgraceful scare campaign that is leaving some of our most vulnerable truly terrified.

On the relocation process, as this motion seeks to investigate, the government has commenced relocation of residents in three initial tranches: (1) Carlton, Flemington and North Melbourne; (2) South Yarra and Richmond; and (3) Flemington, Kensington, North Melbourne, Prahran, St Kilda and Albert Park. I am going to say to this chamber what the housing minister said directly to housing residents: no renter will be made homeless due to the high-rise redevelopment program – not a single one. That was said directly to renters, directly in their community and directly in their homes. When residents move, they are fully supported. Their rent settings stay exactly the same. No resident pays more. Even if they transition into community housing, they receive support tailored for their health, community, cultural, accessibility and location needs. They have the ability to move to the same building or floor as their neighbours if they choose to do so. I heard the minister say that to residents in Kensington. 'I like my neighbour, who has been my neighbour for 12 years, and we help each other out. Can we keep that going?' 'Absolutely, yes', said the minister. If they wish to come back, they absolutely have a guaranteed right of return to the redeveloped towers when the new homes are built, and Homes Victoria arranges the movers and pays all relocation costs.

We are focused on supporting older residents in tranche 3, which is for residents over the age of 55. Residents across these specific sites will be supported to carefully move over a two-year period, which will include support through a dedicated buddy program called Hand in Hand. I am enormously thankful to the workers who have been supporting so many of our older residents during this time. What they will find are new homes that will be close to public transport and easier to heat and easier to cool, with much-improved security, lighting and ventilation – places that I know so many of them need, and they are very much looking forward to it, if the traffic through my office is anything to go by. Victorians, and especially the communities that live in these towers, deserve representatives who back and build public housing not just for the theatrics for Instagram reels.

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (16:15): I am pleased to rise to talk to Ms Gray-Barberio's motion. I thank her for bringing it to the chamber, because it is an important matter and justice for the residents of the housing towers is important. The issue was obviously more broadly discussed in the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into this matter. The report was handed down in December 2025. Twenty-one recommendations and 36 findings came from that inquiry. But one of the most important aspects of that inquiry was to hear directly from those affected by the demolition of the towers. The committee held hearings across a number of the tower sites, and we heard firsthand from residents. I should also note that there were, as has previously been said, 807 submissions to the

inquiry. The vast majority of those were from residents of the towers. I do not want to directly quote some of those residents, because some of them put those submissions forward either confidentially or with their names withheld. But concerns were certainly raised about the style of communication received, the timing of that communication and the form of that communication, whether it was verbal, written or public meetings. There was also the manner in which it was delivered, with some evidence suggesting that the first time the residents learned of the demolition of the towers was from a flyer that was put under their apartment doors.

We heard that residents were asked to move away from the communities they love, the communities in and around the towers. They were asked to move to locations sometimes kilometres away from the towers themselves. Many said that due to the significant amount of time that it would take to complete the tower works, they doubted they would be returned back there, despite there being a right to return. I have to say, residents did not seem to have a clear understanding of what the right to return actually meant, how it could be enforced and even if there are any review mechanisms around that process. It was very unclear. At least that is what we heard from the residents.

The impact on residents was explored deeply in chapter 4 of the report, from page 78 onwards. Evidence given from multiple witnesses and submissions talked about severe trauma, mental health concerns, anxiety and separation from community, amongst the plethora of negative impacts on residents, especially those who were elderly or spoke English as a second language. Many who gave evidence suggested that consultation was poor: it did not meet the needs of residents; it did not seek to understand them. That very clearly came through. Many said that it was rushed, which then, unfortunately, led to the creation of rumours and misinformation, and that started a trail of anxiety and fear that circled through the towers. That was certainly explored in depth too, from page 98 onwards in the report.

One of the major challenges in the inquiry was obtaining documents, in particular relating to the justification of the demolition and the rebuild of the towers. We made multiple requests for the documents, including engineers reports and condition reports and also reports like a cost–benefit analysis, which would have helped the committee understand why the government had taken the action that it had decided on – to demolish the towers and do a rebuild. But other stakeholders called for the production of information as well. For example, the Australian Institute of Architects called for the release of geotech engineering reports; structural engineering reports; civil engineering reports about stormwater and drainage; mechanical, electrical, hydraulic and lift engineering reports; fire safety reports; acoustic engineering reports; inclusivity and accessibility reports; hazardous material reports; and building surveying assessments detailing the buildings' condition. I am going to say it very clearly: those did not come forth to the committee. Finding 9 of the report states, and this is directly from the report:

> The Victorian government, including Departments and the Minister, have made it difficult for the Committee to access documents the Government relied on to make the decision to demolish the public housing towers.

Finding 10 of the report says:

> Without access to documents the Victorian Government has used to justify the demolition of the public housing towers, it is extremely difficult for the Committee to assess if demolishing the towers was the best option available.

That is directly from the report – a multiparty report, actually, that members of this chamber from the opposition, from the government and from the crossbench were all a part of. The reason why that is important is because during the inquiry there were discussions too about – and it was certainly a term that I had not really heard much about before – planned decline. Essentially, what that means is that it was purported to be a deliberate program of undermaintenance to ensure the towers were not in good

condition, and therefore that would justify closing them down. Multiple witnesses gave evidence to that effect, and it is on page 50 of the report. It says:

> They have deliberately tried to create ghettos. Then they use the seemingly dilapidated state of the public housing stock, which they have deliberately allowed to deteriorate, as a rationale for dismantling the communities …

Another person said:

> The Government has engaged in a managed decline 'waiting for the places to deteriorate to justify demolition' …

We also heard from witnesses, including architect professionals, that retrofitting was a viable option. Unfortunately, the committee did not get a chance to look at that because we did not have documents come forth telling us why the government made those decisions – or why not. We did not have the documents there to justify them. The crux of the issue is that it was very difficult to understand why the Victorian government did what they did because we could not see the documents that they relied upon, as opposed to considering other options.

A referral to the Ombudsman to look at the issues identified in this motion might help shine some light on the many issues raised, and indeed it might give some hope to the residents of the towers on their valid concerns that they are valued members of the Victorian community and they matter. I know that some members of the committee – I can certainly talk on my own behalf – were extremely frustrated because it did not appear as though the government were wanting to be transparent in providing information to the committee. If this does get through, I hope that the Ombudsman can find more answers to help piece more of the puzzle together so we can get a clear picture of why this is all here in the first place.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:22): I would also like to speak on motion 1485, put forward by Ms Gray-Barberio and the Greens, on the housing towers relocation. There is a long history of this Parliament looking at the housing towers and things that have happened there, and I would say from the outset I think it is a bit cheeky of the Greens to talk about the housing towers and the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman doing reports on this considering the Greens' history on this.

What happened during the last term of Parliament was a number of housing towers were locked down in July 2020 at very, very short notice. It was very distressing and traumatic for everyone that was involved in that. People were locked down for an extended period in those towers, and that was later investigated by the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman's report, which came out in late 2020, found that the human rights of the housing tower residents were breached, for a number of reasons, and the Ombudsman came up with a number of recommendations that this Parliament should consider. Despite this report and these powers that were used at the time during the pandemic – I called for many investigations into human rights breaches during the pandemic; very few of them actually went forward. But Deborah Glass, the Ombudsman at the time, I think was very courageous and did an excellent job of investigating what actually happened there, and she did determine that there were human rights breaches – that the human rights aspects were not considered properly. In fact she determined that not only was there not proper consideration, the human rights charter assessments were in many cases nothing more than a 'mental process'. And a mental process it was indeed.

Despite this report coming out, on every occasion the Greens proceeded to give the government extensions of these powers, where human rights had clearly been breached – at every opportunity. The Greens were a deciding vote on this; it was not like their vote did not matter. The government relied on three crossbenchers to get through this. Everyone else voted against it. I know the opposition voted against it. I voted against it. Mr Bourman voted against it. We did not think that the government was using these powers well. We were concerned about the chief health officer's actions, and we were concerned about human rights abuses that were happening in the towers and in other places throughout the state. But as I said, the housing towers were one of the few instances when it was actually investigated. During the pandemic the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 was updated many times

for all sorts of reasons. Of course the primary reason was to extend the powers, which were never meant to go for longer than six months, but there were many other additions.

The Libertarian Party put forward an amendment which was to implement one of the Ombudsman's recommendations from the housing tower lockdown, which was to guarantee meaningful fresh air and exercise for people that are detained under public health and wellbeing orders, and the Greens voted against that. They voted against the Ombudsman's recommendation from the report. They voted against housing tower residents being given fresh air and exercise if they were detained under those public health and wellbeing orders. So I do not believe for a second the Greens when they say they care about what is happening in these housing towers or that they care about these people. Even after the Ombudsman came out with a report stating very clearly and in exacting detail how their rights were taken away, how their rights were abused, the Greens nevertheless continued support for the emergency powers right up until the pandemic bill came in, in late 2021, I think, from memory. So I do not take it seriously. The Greens did not support a recommendation from the Ombudsman, a very sensible recommendation that frankly I was shocked that anyone would oppose. The opposition, to their credit, did support that amendment, but the Greens did not support it. The government did not support it. I do not know why. Maybe they can explain now why they opposed fresh air and exercise for people detained under public health and wellbeing orders. Nevertheless that was a recommendation of the Ombudsman, and to say now, 'We want the Ombudsman to do another report, and maybe we'll listen to the Ombudsman or maybe we won't this time' – I do not know, but I do not take it seriously. Therefore the Libertarian Party will not be supporting this referral.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:27): I am pleased to rise to speak on motion 1485, which has been brought to us by Ms Gray-Barberio today, and welcome the opportunity to speak on it. This is something that we have canvassed many times in this place. I will probably not be able to get through everything I wish to say, but I will be able to share some brief comments and at the outset also acknowledge the very powerful remarks of my colleague Ms Watt and her very detailed contribution as to exactly why the government is making the most significant investment in our social housing sector in our state's history. It is because of the state of these towers – because of the evidence that our committee, the Legal and Social Issues Committee, saw of concrete cancer causing parts of the building to literally fall off the walls, of showers that are raised too high and are inaccessible to anyone who is in a wheelchair, of the doors that are too narrow and of the lifts that are simply not capable of fitting in stretchers. These are but a few –

Ann-Marie Hermans interjected.

Michael GALEA: We saw it. We saw this.

Ann-Marie Hermans interjected.

Michael GALEA: I am not sure if you were there at the site visit, Ann-Marie, on the day that we saw that, certainly in the red brick towers.

Ann-Marie Hermans interjected.

Michael GALEA: If you were there, you would have seen the narrow doors and the lifts that do not fit stretchers, you would have seen the shower basins that were several centimetres high off the ground, already with a low ceiling, and you would have seen the fact that people with a wheelchair would not have been able to access them. If you have seen this with your own eyes, it is all the more staggering that you come into this place and you deny the rights of all Victorians to live in housing that is safe and secure, and it is a shocking indictment on your party, frankly.

Ann-Marie Hermans interjected.

Michael GALEA: It is literally what we saw. We had the opportunity to visit these towers. We visited multiple towers and the red brick tower on Elgin Street. You would have seen it. We did not go into the room where there was a major sewer fault that caused a whole floor to be flooded with

sewage. We did not see that, but we walked past the door. We walked up the narrow staircase and down the narrow staircase that is not compliant, that in an emergency would potentially cause an issue. Those are the things that we did see. If you were there, Mrs Hermans – I do not recall you being there on that day, but I will take your word for it that you were there – you would have seen the same things that we saw. It makes it all the more extraordinary that you did not take that opportunity – I was not going to dwell on this point – to look at something and say, 'That's fine. We could just renovate that or paint that. That'll be fine.' It is a complete, chronic misunderstanding of the state of these towers. Even those in the Greens who are opposed to the approach that we are taking want the towers –

Ann-Marie Hermans interjected.

Michael GALEA: You would live in one? Well, the overwhelming majority of these residents have made very clear that they do not wish to live in these towers, which is why the new-build accommodation and the new housing that are being provided to them have been so enthusiastically taken up – not by all but by the majority. The majority have, as Ms Watt said in her contribution. If you think that is an acceptable way for any Victorian to live, then I have even graver fears about what it might look like if your lot are ever allowed the chance to be in government, because the conditions that we saw were in many cases deplorable. The faults and issues are structural; these are not things that we can just renovate. You cannot make floors higher. You cannot rebuild the whole building from the inside out without impacting the residents that are there. That goes to the other point that Ms Watt was making: to keep residents in these towers, if you were to try and do some alternative solution and rebuild them, would be so extraordinarily disruptive – and I do not know how it would be actually possible to do that without having a dramatic effect – not just on the amenity but on the health and safety of those residents living in the towers.

We heard lots of evidence in this inquiry from many people with many different views, and I acknowledge that and I appreciate everyone who came and spoke to us. I do want to share one piece of evidence that we received from the South Yarra Public Tenants Association in a hearing. This hearing, mind you, for the committee's benefit was held not in the lavish surroundings of this chamber or in one of the many committee rooms on this precinct; this was held on the ground floor of one of the housing towers in Malvern Road in South Yarra. We were very grateful to have people come and speak to us, including the head of the South Yarra Public Tenants Association. It was put to the witness by a Greens member: 'Have you got evidence that they are structurally unsound?' The answer was: 'Yes.' 'Evidence that you can provide to the committee?' The witness responded by pointing at the ceiling right above our heads. It was not this beautiful, elaborate ceiling that we are privileged to be standing under today; it was the ceiling in this tower, the ceiling that residents of these towers are having as their lived reality every day. She said, 'If you look just at the back in that square little tower on the ceiling, it is all the things from the water from the pipes – all the things. That is something coming from the sewerage and from other places. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing have tried to fix that hundreds of times, and sometimes the water keeps on running.' So I do understand that they cannot keep on fixing that when it is infeasible. They need to go.

In terms of the approach that the government is taking, there are teams deployed. We did hear evidence from Homes Victoria about the way in which they are engaging with the residents, trying to be responsive in different languages and meeting people where they are. They acknowledged to us that they learned lessons from the first tranche, and they will be deploying those lessons in ongoing tranches, too.

I do have some issue with the commentary that has been put forward by a couple of members already with their critique of the initial announcement, specifically to the point of attacking the government for not speaking to these residents individually first. I do not know how you can realistically do that. I do not know how you could realistically go door to door and talk to every person, knowing that some will not be home and knowing that you will not get everyone at once. If you do that before any major announcement, what is going to happen is that people are going to talk. Naturally, it is what we do. Then people are going to hear things and are going to say, 'Well, why has that person been spoken to

and not me?' even though they might be next. Members who have brought this forward as a complaint have not been able to actually answer how they would do that differently and how they would engage the residents in a different way. I just make that point, because if you are saying that the best way to go is to start door to door and talk to people one on one, yes, those are important things to do. But if that is the first point of contact, you would be just creating an environment where rumours spread and people are scared. The government acknowledged in the inquiry – that is, Homes Victoria acknowledged – that there were lessons that they learned from that. But to suggest that it is just fine and how dare we do this without talking to every single person first – how? Tell us how.

Recommendations in this report have also been referred to by Ms Gray-Barberio. I would also draw the chamber's attention to some recommendations that were put forward by Mr Batchelor and me that were actually rejected by the committee. The question was being put by many witnesses as to why this mix and why the emphasis on community housing as opposed to public housing. Putting aside the argument for a moment and the demonisation that has occurred against many in the non-profit community housing sector, there was very, very clear evidence to the committee of one reason why governments across the nation may wish to prioritise community housing over public housing, and that is the GST penalty. The federal government charges GST on public housing new builds. It does not charge that on community building. That is a 10 per cent penalty on any public housing project – a 10 per cent difference in fact in the amount of housing that you can build with the same amount of money. This was a relatively straightforward point, I would have thought. It is not a statement saying that this explains it and this is all okay. It is just saying that this is a finding. It was put forward by the Labor members of the committee, as can be seen in the evidence of proceedings. It was supported indeed by Labor members, by the Legalise Cannabis Victoria member and by two of the Liberal members, but astoundingly, two members, Ms Gray-Barberio and Mrs Hermans, saw fit to deny that.

Ann-Marie Hermans interjected.

Michael GALEA: You denied the fact that there is a GST disparity. It is taxation law. I do not know how you can deny that. It is a finding that we proposed. I am not sure if you are listening to me, but I would encourage you, if you are going to shout out in the chamber, to actually follow the conversation on the debate that we are having. It is a simple fact of GST law. But even that fact – one clue as to how we might actually address this, how we might actually talk to the Commonwealth about the structural changes that we might need to make – for some who are so blinkered as to go into a tower and see all those issues and say 'It's fine; I would live in there' is the epitome of ignorance, and it is – *(Time expired)*

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:37): Melbourne's public housing towers were built in the Bolte era, but they are going to be demolished in the Allan–Carroll era. Isn't that ironic when just today the former minister for housing Minister Shing said that they build and we destroy? That is what she was saying; however, her statements do not seem to be evidence based. When the Allan Labor government made the decision to retire the 45 housing towers across Victoria, the smallest amount that they can do for the taxpayers is –

Harriet Shing interjected.

Renee HEATH: Did I say 45? My apologies. It is 44; I have got written here '44'. That is a win for you there, Ms Shing – well done. So if they are going to do that, the least they can do is explain to the community why, and the easiest, most straightforward way, the most transparent way, is by providing documents. Yet what they have failed to do, and you will see it in the report, is regardless of the fact that this house ordered those documents – and we have a right to do that under constitutional law – they did not do that. They provided 12 documents and they withheld 146. Then we saw a good snapshot today of what it is like when the first speaker from the government, Ms Watt, got up and straightaway started saying how Ms Gray-Barberio is just peddling misinformation. Our same argument stands that there would not be any misinformation if you did what you were meant to do and you provided the 146 documents that you were withholding. Regardless, you have not.

Then we went and spent a lot of taxpayer dollars and more time, more resources and more energy on an inquiry. Once again, the inquiry, which I was on, requested documents, and once again they were denied by the Allan Labor government. This was extremely frustrating, because for me it was in that moment in the committee that I realised how fragile democracy is. When a government think they are so above the law that they can just withhold what they want and tell us what they want – and in the process accuse other people of misinformation when there is information that they are sitting on and refusing to release – it is unbelievable.

There is another thing they should have done. They should have actually acknowledged the people that lived there. I have got a few things to read from people that did live in these public housing towers. One wrote:

> Having lived in many suburbs of Melbourne, Flemington is by far the place with the most community spirit of anywhere I have experienced. It is a place where you know your neighbours and feel safe to talk to people on the street. The residents of the housing towers are an integral part of our close-knit, multicultural community in Flemington. I often walk through the park and community areas surrounding the towers and it is always full of families, kids playing sport, and neighbours catching up with one another.

There are plenty of these sorts of testimonials about how much this is part of their community. This is what they were told. They are not my words; these are words of witnesses. But there was a significant amount of evidence to suggest that there was not effective consultation with the residents of the public housing towers. Here is a quote:

> A piece of paper under the door. You go there and there is no interpreter. They just say, 'Oh, this is where you're going to move. This is where you're going to – you have two choices. If you don't do it, then we're going to evict you in some way.'

That was a witness telling us that. Those are not our words, not the words of the Greens and not the words, like I said, of a think tank but a witness. Here is another one:

> … when they first moved people over to Bangs Street, people from non-English-speaking backgrounds did not know they were going to community housing, did not know it was a three-year contract. They were not told anything, because that was very early on.

There have been a few failures here from the government in how this has been handled, but central to our inquiry was the question: is demolition the only option or can there be other options? We all have our individual perceptions, I guess. I think it is obvious to see that these towers are not in the best condition, but what I also want to know is why, if the 146 documents back up what the government are pushing, they do not just show them to us. I went in very ambivalent to the inquiry. I just thought, 'Well, you know what, I actually don't have an opinion on this – I really don't. I'm here to learn. I'm here to listen.'

What was staggering was the way that we were treated, particularly by the former minister for housing. I am just going to give you a few examples from there. The first one was when she was questioned by Ms Gray-Barberio:

> **Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO**: … How can the public believe the government, Minister, has made the best economical decision with taxpayer money and public land if the government only released 12 of the 158 documents it has detailing this plan?
>
> **Minister SHING**: The best use of taxpayer money, Ms Gray-Barberio, relates to meeting our obligations to providing people with safe, secure and dignified housing.
>
> **Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO**: Minister, would you agree that involves transparency?
>
> **Harriet SHING**: I might just continue my answer, if I may.

She just completely dismissed it every time. Here is another example at a different time:

> **The CHAIR**: I will say this again, Minister: we do not have that evidence.
>
> **Harriet SHING**: It is constant, Mr McCracken.

> **The CHAIR**: You talk about going through the building, but I am looking for an engineer's report that justifies your government's decision …

It goes on – again blocked. Then there is a third example:

> **The CHAIR**: You have asserted that the towers have exceeded their operational life, but we are lacking evidence of that. So we would like something for you to justify that that is actually the case.
>
> **Harriet SHING**: They were built between 68 and 75.
>
> **The CHAIR**: I know when they were built. I am asking for an engineer's report.
>
> **Renee HEATH**: Not your opinion.
>
> **Harriet SHING**: They had a lifespan of 50 years. These are not opinions; they are facts.

It was just staggering that we were blocked every step of the way. It was entirely frustrating. I found it so hard that when we were on a committee we were not given the information that the government was sitting on. So you make your own conclusions, and from that you are accused of misinformation. Section 19 of the Constitution Act 1975 affirms this house's authority to request documents, but no, the government still would not provide them. The committee asked for them again – again refused. I was really staggered by the arrogance of this government that thinks they are above the law and above any standing order. For this reason, I am very happy to see it referred to the Ombudsman.

What I hope is that this government holds some regard somewhere within themselves for an authority other than their own. That is what I hope we will see. This is what it needs: it needs to be referred to the Ombudsman. A committee was not enough. A committee would have been enough if they had had enough respect for democracy and the process – if they came to it with integrity and with openness and provided the information that these documents contain. I do not know what is in them that is so secretive. I have no idea what it could be. I see that these towers have some serious issues – I absolutely see that. But what is in those documents? What is it that you are withholding from us? So we are left to go with either the words of the former minister Ms Shing or a gut feel. I tell you what, when a government shouts you down, when department heads are sent in and say, 'You do know that I'm not allowed to answer your questions' and read a statement rather than answering questions – this happened; you can go and look at the transcripts – you realise that this government is not legitimate. They are not transparent, and I hope they can respect some higher authority.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (16:48): I would like to make a contribution on this item. I am a bit betwixt and between, to be frank. When I heard that these buildings were going to be demolished, it was not yea and it was not nay; it was 'Oh no, not again.' I am old enough to remember when Jeff Kennett announced that the then Liberal government would knock down all the towers, and of course they ended up knocking down I think two. If I hark back to those days – and I have been a resident in Kensington for 30 years now – I spent 8½ years on the community reference group for the Kensington estate redevelopment, including pretty much fortnightly meetings for most of that time on the design review committee. So I know those buildings pretty well, at least the ones that are still standing. That was a massive redevelopment. It was also the first public–private partnership where this had been done. It was started under the Liberals with Kennett, and then we had the very good fortune to have Bronwyn Pike, who was also the Minister for Housing prior to becoming also the health minister, as our local member. She took a very personal view of it, as did Glenyys Romanes, who was in this house, who was the chair of that committee. We had a very, very good group – very thoughtful, very progressive and committed to public housing, and I want to come back to that in a minute. We also had an agreement that, given it was the first PPP, there should be a rigorous analysis done of that process, and accordingly a tender was let and Swinburne University did a progressive study of that redevelopment over the course of it. It produced a very comprehensive report with a range of recommendations, including how you do community engagement, how you do relocations, what decanting and rescheduling looks like and how you live in a construction site – and of course this government has ignored all of it. It is as though it never happened.

It staggers me that we are having this discussion on some levels. I perhaps should have been involved earlier in this in terms of the committee – I did not get involved, and I think I am still a bit PTSD post the Kensington estate redevelopment – but I would like to make a couple of points. One, we are talking about two different types of buildings. There are the red bricks. They are of a particular genre and particular age, and yes, they have had the gong. They are also fairly intermediate construction weight, and they do not lend themselves to easy retrofitting. The majority of these buildings are not, though. The majority of these came well after the red bricks.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David ETTERSHANK: Sorry, I am enjoying your contribution there, Mr Batchelor. These are preformed concrete buildings, and they are what we would say today are hugely overengineered buildings. You would never build them today. They are far more robust in their construction than just about anything you will see on the skyline here in the city. The argument that has been put up about a 50-year life is spurious. If you were doing that, if you were running the targeted building life of a high-rise building, you would have to knock down most of the CBD. I hate to say that, but they are all past the notional thing, because what that says is you come to that point and then you are either up for demolition or up for a major retrofit, a major refurbishment. So this is a self-serving argument. When we hear this argument about the plumbing going –

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David ETTERSHANK: I will just let that pass. I do not even know what you are talking about. If we talk about things like the plumbing, yes, if you go into these buildings – and I have been through these buildings, floor by bloody floor, apartment by apartment – they have huge risers. They are designed to be retrofitted. That is what the architects are telling you.

One of the buildings that is to be demolished is 94 Ormond Street in Kensington, which was specifically gutted, retrofitted and designed for ageing in place, to the point where it has an elevator attached to the external surface of the building specifically so that it would be disability- and ambulance-accessible. What we have seen is that this government – and it is not just this government, it is the prior government – spent absolutely nothing on maintenance. You have a situation now where you have got one housing officer per 800 units. Is it any surprise you cannot maintain these properties?

The fact of the matter is that when you talk about things like ceiling heights, can I suggest to you, with the greatest respect: go down to one of the Assemble buildings and have a look in them, because you certainly have plenty of photo ops out the front of them. I think you will find they are all 2.6 or 2.8, which is exactly what is in most of the preformed towers. I know that is a downer. It is not convenient, but it happens to be a fact.

Harriet Shing interjected.

David ETTERSHANK: In the Assemble buildings? Oh, absolutely. You have actually got ceilings. Okay, thank you for that wonderful contribution from the minister. We are making it up. it is all a conspiracy. Well, the point is, perhaps, Minister: if we are making it up, perhaps if you wanted to make sure that we were not –

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, Acting President, I know Mr Ettershank does not seem to feel like he needs to respect other people in this chamber and has been pulled up on this before. I would ask that he not point at members while he is making his various contributions.

Renee Heath: Further to the point of order, Acting President, I think Mr Ettershank was provoked by Minister Shing.

David ETTERSHANK: I will desist from pointing at all.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Thank you, Mr Ettershank. Continue with your contribution.

David ETTERSHANK: I apologise for that, and I apologise, Minister.

If this government is saying that the committee is wrong, that we are all wrong in what we are asserting, release the information. One of the first things I did in here was a documents motion asking for a simple cost plan, a building condition report and a business case, and it has still not been released two years later. You could not bring yourself to put the truth in. It was doubly embarrassing when you said you would not release a business case here on the basis of executive privilege, cabinet in confidence and commercial in confidence, but then when you went to the court and you were asked by the judge to show that business case, you had to confess that there in fact was not a business case.

These are buildings that have a long life still in them. I live in a house that is 140 years old. It has been retrofitted; it has been maintained. You do not maintain, you do not retrofit, you do not respect these buildings and you do not respect these residents. I live in this community – I am a couple of hundred metres from the flats – and the reality is those people are terrified and those people are being pressured. I know you love to sit in this place and pontificate, but I am actually living in that area, as I know Ms Gray-Barberio is as well.

The reality is you do not have the budget to actually rebuild these things, so what we are effectively seeing is an exit via this charade and this conflation of social housing with community housing with public housing. What we are seeing is this government exiting public housing and basically privatising through not-for-profits and through community housing. I am not against community housing; I love community housing. But you are withdrawing from public housing. You are so good at this, Minister, in terms of conflating and confusing. But the reality is that if you are not going to put the information out, if you are not going to make it clear to people what we are dealing with, then why wouldn't we draw these conclusions?

Be honest; be transparent. You would not release the documents that we requested previously. I know it takes two years maybe to do some photocopying, but anyway, you would not release information to the committee. The time has come: if you cannot be honest, if you cannot be straight up, then this needs to go somewhere else. Whether it is the Victorian Auditor-General's Office or whether it is the Ombudsman, I do not know. But in the case that Ms Gray-Barberio has brought this here, I congratulate her, and we will certainly be supporting this motion.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (16:58): I have only got 10 minutes. I am going to try and be quick; there is a lot that I have got to cover. The inquiry that the Parliament's Legal and Social Issues Committee did receive a lot of evidence about the current condition of these towers. Mr Ettershank in his contribution said that there was no evidence provided that there is a problem with the condition of these towers.

A few key facts: the first two towers to be demolished, the red-brick towers on Elgin Street in Carlton, had to be evacuated in 2022 because of a catastrophic failure of the sewerage stacks that saw raw sewage running down the walls of the places that people lived and flooding the basements that housed the electricals, shutting entire buildings down and rendering them uninhabitable. Mr Ettershank in his contribution said that those towers were somehow different, but that is not the evidence from the experts that the parliamentary committee received. The evidence from the experts that the parliamentary committee received was basically that the built-form typology of those towers and the other 42 towers across Melbourne is basically the same.

Also, what sets these towers apart from every office building in Melbourne, as Mr Ettershank talked about, is their construction methodology. They are precast built form, where all of the walls are structural, and this renders them completely different to every office building in the city. They are unique. Mr Ettershank says that they are made from solid concrete and therefore they will not come down. Let us have a detour into concrete facts. The appendix to the independent report commissioned and funded by organisations including the Greens details the compressive strength of the concrete panels used to construct these buildings. The Australian standard for concrete is 40 megapascals.

These panels are built to a compressive strength of 20 megapascals. They are half as strong as the Australian standard says the concrete should be – concrete fact 1.

Concrete fact 2: according to that independent report, cutting holes in the walls to make the doors wide enough for wheelchairs to fit through creates structural problems in the buildings themselves that you have to fix by constructing a steel exoskeleton around the building with 17 drill holes per floor – and they said that people should not move out whilst they drilled through that concrete.

Concrete fact 3 – and this is evidence that was given to the parliamentary inquiry; I am sorry that Mr Ettershank does not listen to evidence, and I am sorry that the Greens do not listen to evidence – is that when those concrete panels were being cast in the 1950s in Melbourne, they applied a calcium substrate to the outside of the concrete to help them dry faster. What has happened over 60 years is that that calcium has slowly been absorbed into that half-as-strong-as-it-should-be concrete that has less aggregate in it. What has that done? It has started rusting the reinforcing steel that sits inside those concrete panels. What we have right now in these towers is increasing instances of concrete spalling, and that means the concrete is literally falling off the sides of the towers, and the insides as well, even in areas that are not exposed to the weather. The Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee members witnessed with their own eyes concrete that had fallen off the walls, and the reinforcing steel inside that concrete was rusting. We held it with our own fingers.

We also held in our own hands the copper piping that is the basis of the sewerage, and it was so degraded that you could bend it with your fingers just like this because of the accumulated acid built up over the course of its 50-year, 60-year life span. They are the real facts that exist in this debate that you cannot ignore. When we were in South Yarra at a public hearing, when Ms Gray-Barberio asked a resident for evidence of the structural problems with the towers, that resident invited the committee to turn around and look at the ceiling, and there was discolouration in the ceiling. What was that discolouration from? Sewage. And where was the sewage coming from? Failing pipes. Then Ms Gray-Barberio asked that resident if anyone had come and tried to fix it, and that resident said, 'Yes, hundreds of times.'

These towers are at the end of their intended life. Trying to retrofit them, the independent analysis shows, would be hugely costly and leave you with buildings that do not meet current design and accessibility standards, let alone energy efficiency standards. It is there, in black and white, in the evidence that was provided to the parliamentary committee. It was also provided in black and white to the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal, both of whom, at first instance and on appeal, held that the government's actions were justified under law.

The last thing I want to say is that we the Parliament, through this motion, are making a very detailed referral to the Ombudsman, and I think it is important just to put on record the evidence that the Ombudsman has given to the Parliament both through their annual report and to the Integrity and Oversight Committee (IOC) about the impact of very detailed referrals from the Parliament to the Ombudsman. We are obviously within our rights to refer matters. I think this motion is very, very detailed and is seeking a range of things that is going to present the Ombudsman with a significant resourcing challenge to deliver. And I say this because –

David Ettershank: You could fund them properly.

Ryan BATCHELOR: The Ombudsman is funded by way of a Treasurer's advance for any additional – parliamentary referrals are provided additional funding, basically. But the effect of parliamentary referrals has been in 2024–25, according to their annual report, a 38 per cent reduction in the number of investigations closed. In the evidence that the Ombudsman gave to the IOC a couple of months ago there were no new investigations from public complaints made last year as a result of both referrals from the Parliament and public interest disclosures having legislative precedence over complaints from the general public. So I think we are going to see another annual report, another reporting cycle, where the Ombudsman will be telling us that she cannot investigate the complaints

from Victorian citizens because we are seeing these referrals which receive additional funding to deliver. That is the result, that is the effect and those are the facts.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:08): It is actually painful to sit through this debate. As a member of the Legal and Social Issues Committee and a person who personally visited these sites, took keen interest in the situation of public housing and listened attentively to the trauma that had been caused by this government, I would say, first of all, it is a great shame that a bunch of politicians are gathering together to discuss structural things which clearly are outside the realms of their expertise. But having said that, here we are, and I rise to show my support for documents motion 1485 about social housing.

I noticed that Mr Batchelor asked, 'Where is the proof of people wanting to complain?' et cetera et cetera. Well, if we go to page 102 of the actual report that came out of the public hearing on social housing, Mr Batchelor asked this particular question:

> It is one thing to talk about fear of retribution. Have you got any examples of where people have actually felt or seen retribution?

This is just one example that was put into the report. And this particular person in the inquiry on social housing said:

> For me personally, I know that my mum would be very afraid to come to a [public hearing], because she would be afraid that her tenancy could be at risk, and she has told me this. She does not want to rock the boat.

So much did they love their homes and where they lived but also fear this government, they were not willing, in many cases, to come forward even though they had tremendous concerns and wanted their voices to be heard. So it is not simply something to brag about and say, 'Oh, we haven't heard a complaint.' How do we know that these people had not been intimidated to the point of fear, to where they did not feel they could come forward, or did not have – as we know from the report as well and from the inquiry – language interpreters provided in many cases for even the relocation.

In fact if I look at the some of the comments that were made regarding the lack of communication – and again I am just going to quote from the actual report itself – a piece of paper was put under the door. It says:

> You go there and there is no interpreter. They just say, 'Oh, this is where you're going to move. This is where you're going to – you have two choices. If you don't do it, then we're going to evict you in some way.' That is what they told me …

That was one of the residents. The point is that people were being intimidated. People were afraid, and they needed their homes. So it is not a matter of 'Oh, nobody made a complaint.' There would have been a lot of complaints and a lot of people who were too afraid to come forward and actually say what the issue was.

I went and saw these housing towers, and I could see tremendous potential in so many of them – a bit of paint, new carpet, maybe a refresher of the kitchen. I am telling you, there are so many people in my region –

John Berger interjected.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Yes, I would have been prepared to live there in a renovation if I needed to. And let me tell you, there are so many people sleeping out in cardboard boxes in the south-east, which I represent, people sleeping in little humpies that they are making out of rubbish right near my office and Gabrielle Williams's office. Across the road from her office people make –

Sonja Terpstra interjected.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: I am not making it up, and you are doing a disservice to that person who is living in this thing made out of rubbish, which they are having to live in. They would much rather live in one of these beautiful places that could have been done up – several bedrooms, fresh paint.

There were some that required additional attention, but I guarantee that we were being shown the worst rooms and the worst apartments in order to justify the government's decisions. Long term, were they going to have to be rebuilt? Yes. But in a housing crisis, when people are sleeping in cardboard boxes and in their cars, when they have nowhere to go, it was irresponsible. It remains irresponsible. This government has done the people of Victoria a total disservice, because they had built community. In fact I will go on here to say what this did to some of these people. I am quoting from page 94 of the report that came out of this inquiry:

> One older woman ended up in hospital following her relocation as she was so traumatised by having to sever the ties with her home of many years.
>
> Another older woman died due to health complications, most likely brought on by the sudden announcement and then the relocation stress.

These were people that had lived in these areas for a long time. They had a wonderful sense of community. Many of them were long-term residents. It says here, for instance, that in the housing towers – I am now quoting from page 92 – they were long-term residents and:

> … nearly half of public housing households have lived in public housing for more than 10 years … Many residents have formed deep roots in Flemington, with over half (57%) having lived there for six or more years.

Then it goes on to say how we in the committee:

> … heard concerns from residents and organisations that relocation risks fracturing these networks and community support.

I felt when I went through that I could see that there were things that needed to be changed. I myself have had to raise four kids, and I know what it is like to have to live on one income with four little children in this country. That is what spurred me into politics in the first place. I did not have a dream or a desire or a sense of entitlement to become a politician. I had a family, and I can tell you that when you struggle with your family in a nation like this, you pay attention to the laws that are having an impact on your family and your ability to raise them and to feed them. I can tell you that I have had to renovate many places in order to live in them. I looked at those towers and those apartments, and I knew, with a coat of paint and some new carpet, they would be nice. I am sorry, some of you are used to much better places, but people would be thinking, 'Where am I going to raise my family? What am I going to do?' When I sit and talk to the people that live in the south-east who are struggling and have nowhere, these towers provided homes and community for people who needed them.

I understand that if you are going to build something better, eventually there is a moment where things are uncomfortable, where people have to adjust. But the reality is you are ripping out and gutting a whole lot of places with a whole lot of people. We have such a huge need, and you have not met that need. When you have people sleeping in their cars with their families or people that are sleeping in cardboard boxes or permanently couch-surfing because they have nowhere else to go, it is simply irresponsible what this government did. The fact that they cannot be transparent about the cost-effectiveness of this and whether they could really justify what they were doing and the fact that we are taking public housing and public land and somehow turning them into privatised situations or public/private situations but we do not have any transparency on what is taking place to know whether the numbers stack up or the situation stacks up – well, I support a motion like this that says there needs to be more information and that the people deserve to have more information and that this needs to go to the Ombudsman and we need to have more done, because these people deserve better. Every single one of those people who were displaced and that are having a hard time now deserves better, and all those people sleeping in their cars and on the beaches and on the streets deserve better. This government has failed the people of Victoria.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (17:17): I would like to thank all members for contributing on the motion this afternoon, in particular Mr McCracken, Dr Heath, Mr Ettershank and Mrs Hermans. But let us talk about the government's contribution to this motion today. It is

absolutely astounding, the level of obfuscation from this government to try and water down and diminish the experiences of the public housing residents.

We had one of these residents on the first day of the hearing come to us and say to all of us in the committee that day that they came in like Willy Wonka with golden tickets. How dare they treat public housing residents as if they are less than. Good governments would be making every effort to reach out to those on the margins of society and making every genuine attempt to bring them in and be inclusive and ensure that their experiences are centred in the government's decision-making, but what has been absolutely clear throughout the process of hearings, submissions and evidence is that this government does not care. It is putting the interests of property developers before the health and wellbeing of public housing residents. We would never see this government treat any other Victorian like they have treated the residents of the public housing towers. We would never see them turn up in Toorak or Brighton and make announcements that are just so horrible or treat people as less than, in inhumane ways.

The former housing minister went on and on about person-centred community engagement. We heard loud and clear throughout this inquiry clear evidence of coercion and pressure being put on residents to sign relocation documents. We know this because we had community legal centres provide evidence of where they had to help people that wanted to rescind their consent to these coercive relocation forms. Why – because they did not understand what they were signing. And why didn't they understand? Because this government did not make the effort to ensure that the information that was being given to public housing residents was accurate and that it was well understood. Instead they have the audacity to stand up here in this chamber and harp on about misinformation. If there is anyone that should be charged with misinformation, it is this government. How dare they treat public housing residents like this. Not only are these residents having to face racial profiling, stigma, prejudice, discrimination and racism; on top of that, they have a government that comes in, swoops in as if pretending to care about them. Then you have government members in their contributions having the temerity to stand here and act like they are engineers and give us expert advice. No, we were all there. We were all there, Mr Batchelor. We heard the same intel that you heard. But let me be clear: you are not an engineer, so you cannot speak to that. You can have your understanding and interpretation of that, but you will not stand here and base your contribution as if you are an engineer. No, you are a politician just like me, and our job is to ensure that the public housing residents' experiences are centred. They deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

We heard time and time again about the trauma and the fact that these public housing towers to them – this is what they told us – are a sanctuary. They are more than just addresses; they are communities. The government harps on about social cohesion. Guess what, nobody knows more about social cohesion than public housing residents. Instead this government wants to talk down to them, wants to only drip-feed information to this community – all for what? All for property developers, all for profits and who knows whatever else, because guess what, we are not given the information to justify the demolition of all 44 public housing towers. How unfair this is on public housing residents. Isn't our job in this chamber to ensure that there is equality in the rights and distribution of power? No, this government is all about maintenance of power. Public housing residents deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and I commend this motion to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:22): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Statements on tabled papers and petitions

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Free TAFE

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:23): I rise to make a contribution on one of the proudest and most impactful achievements of this government, and that is free TAFE. The Victorian Auditor-General's Office have tabled their report seven years after its introduction and have delivered the verdict that free TAFE is providing training for priority skills and delivering real, tangible benefits to our state. The numbers speak for themselves. Since 2019 free TAFE opened its doors to over 245,000 students to the end of 2024, and with $816 million worth of fees remaining in the pockets of hardworking Victorians, that is real cost-of-living relief. Every working parent, every jobseeker, every new arrival and every person who dared to dream of a different career walked through those TAFE doors without the fear of a bill at the end of it. More than 80 qualifications and short courses are now fee-free and enshrined in law in the industries our state needs most, including building and construction, education, clean energy, the care economy, hospitality and the digital economy. In 2024 alone there were 35,000 enrolments. Of these students, 11 per cent were identified as people living with a disability, 20 per cent were experiencing unemployment and 59 per cent were women. These are not just statistics; these are Victorians who needed a hand up, and this government gave them one.

Here are four examples of lives that were changed by a government who wants to see everyone given a chance. Joseph came to Australia from the Philippines with nothing but determination. He had lost everything to Typhoon Haiyan. He enrolled at the Chisholm Institute and threw himself into commercial cookery. Today he works in some of the most prestigious kitchens in this country, including at the MCG and the Emirates Lounge. He says some days he walks out after a shift, looks back and has to remind himself that he works there. Joseph is what free TAFE looks like in the real world.

Guinny walked out of an all-girls school and straight into an electrotechnology electrician course in one of the most male-dominated trades in the country, with no experience and no connections – just ambition. Free TAFE gave her the entry point, and when male colleagues have suggested she gets special treatment, she has a simple answer: she is recognised for her skills because she is a good electrician, not because she is a woman. With electricians paid higher-than-average earnings and a high number of job openings coming over the next five years, Guinny has chosen the right path for her.

Bradley is an Indigenous man who had to walk away from university when his partner suffered a cardiac arrest. He had a young family to support and hold together and a degree that he had to abandon. He could have stopped there, but he did not. He found vocational training and earned his qualification, and in 2025 Melbourne Polytechnic named him their Outstanding Indigenous Student of the Year. Now he is on his way to a bachelor of social work. Bradley is a person determined to give other young people the same chance that he found.

Mahnaz arrived from Iran two years ago to a new country, a new language and a new life to build from scratch. She started with a short English course at Melbourne Polytechnic and found her passion, which was working with children. She completed her certificate III in early childhood education, secured her first ever job at the same service where she did her placement and is already enrolled in her diploma. She put it best herself: this is her first time earning money, and now she can be independent.

This is exactly what this government sets out to do. The list goes on and on. More than 190,000 lives have been changed for the better through free TAFE. This is what this government does: we do not just talk about opportunity, we fund it. We are proud to provide an opportunity for people to access training and a meaningful career. We are proud to support people to build a better future for themselves, their families and their communities. Free TAFE is here, it is working under the Allan Labor government, and it is here to stay.

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2026–27

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:27): I rise today to speak on the budget papers 2026–27 and particularly page 100, which talks about youth crime prevention programs. I was very encouraged at first when I saw that over 2026–27 there will be $19.9 million invested into crime prevention for youth, until I looked a bit deeper and saw the number of young people who will be supported by the youth crime prevention program. You would think for $20 million or thereabouts it would be quite a number. No, it is 330 people – 330 people are covered by $19.9 million. This is important because that means that if 330 people get to go through this crime prevention program, that is going to help, well, 330 kids, but at a cost of $60,000 per person. I thought, 'Maybe it's an investment that is somehow worth it. Of course any crime prevention is.' Then I dug down deeper to the proportion of young people that exit the crime prevention program and achieve successful completion of the program. It is paying for 330 people – $20 million, so $60,000 a person. But then the number of people expected to actually go through this, be successful and complete it is 45, which means that that would cost $420,000 per person. This was staggering to me. I thought, 'Wow, 13 per cent of participants are actually then expected to complete it and get something out of it.'

However, this is what the statistics say is happening. We are in one of the worst crime crises that this state has seen. Crime Statistics Agency figures from 2025 show that youth crime rose by 2.3 per cent in Victoria last year, with minors completing 57.6 per cent of carjackings, 52.6 per cent of home invasions, 47.8 per cent of ag burgs and 62.4 per cent of robberies. Overall, police arrested 1223 children a combined 6997 times in that time, yet our whole budget is going to helping 45 of them. The crime statistics show that every single day in Victoria 750 people become victims of crime, yet this program, if every single person was to complete it and be successful, would only reach half that amount of children per day over a year. There are 750 new victims of crime in the state of Victoria every day – that is over 270,000 victims per year, and our whole budget is going to, hopefully, helping 45 of them.

I have some more statistics. Victoria is not doing well in this regard. In terms of kids that return to crime, 56.6 per cent of young people released from sentence supervision in Victoria returned to crime within 12 months. You might say that could be normal. It is not normal. In New South Wales it is under 40 per cent, so we are well above that average. Not only that, we are spending so much more on youth detention per day than any other state. In Victoria per day it costs over $7000 for one youth to be detained, as opposed to around $2000 in New South Wales and $2700 in Queensland, the national average being $3600. I tell you what, we are in the middle of a crime crisis, and we need to address it. We need to think bigger than just reaching 45 children, because it is the community that is unsafe and it is their lives that are going down the drain.

Wodonga Golf Club

Petition

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:32): I rise to speak on a petition that I tabled yesterday, petition 755. This petition calls on the government to reject any proposals to rezone the Wodonga golf course for non-recreational use and ensure the long-term protection of this land under its current zoning for community recreation and environmental benefit. The online petition was signed by 5160 people, and I hope to table a paper petition with around 3000 signatures tomorrow. That is over 8000 people from Wodonga and the region who strongly oppose the misguided plan to convert Wodonga golf course from a large open green space into rows of housing. The community's campaign has been backed by none other than Golf Australia, the peak body for golf in our country.

This is not a campaign against new housing. We all know that Victoria needs to increase its housing supply, and in fact Wodonga City Council has already identified 30 years worth of land supply for future housing. This is a campaign to save a precious recreational space that cannot be replaced. While

there are many parcels of land already available for housing development, there are no suitable alternative sites for a golf course of this size within the region. Once it is gone, it is gone forever.

As this petition notes, Wodonga golf course is a vital part of the community, providing recreational, social and health benefits to a wide cross-section of the community, including families, junior golfers, walkers and local residents. Golf Australia agreed and said that Wodonga golf course is more than just a place to play golf; it is a community space that brings people together and supports local sport.

How did we reach this point where the state government is considering paving over acres of green space specifically set aside for sport and recreation in order to build more houses? The Labor government claims that councils are too slow to approve housing projects, sometimes taking two years or more. That is a bit rich coming from a Minister for Planning that has had planning schemes for the Macedon Ranges sitting on her desk for two years but still has not approved the plans that would release more land for housing in the Macedon Ranges. Labor is now expanding its development facilitation program, which allows housing developers to completely bypass local councils and ignore local voices and go straight to the planning minister for approval. This is supposed to speed up approvals. It is actually a recipe for disaster, as planning decisions are made in Melbourne by ministers and bureaucrats who never visit and know little about the regional and rural towns they change forever.

Wodonga golf course was one of seven sites chosen by the Labor government for the first phase of its unlocking strategic sites program, but the selection was made without anyone even seeing the playing greens, let alone teeing off for a round of golf. According to the government's media release, the purpose of the program is to fast-track the rezoning of underutilised land, like former industrial land, golf courses, racetracks and surplus university sites, to build new homes sooner – sounds great. The problem is that Wodonga golf course is not underutilised: 45,000 rounds of golf were played at the course in the last 12 months. This clearly demonstrates that the site is not underutilised, nor is it unused.

A further 8000 signatures on this petition show how much the local community care about preserving this valuable asset and how strongly they reject the proposal to rezone the land. The eligibility guidelines for the unlocking strategic sites program say that proposals must demonstrate the delivery of significant and meaningful public benefits, including public open space. But instead of providing public benefits and open space, this proposal will reduce open space and take away a key community sport facility that is close to the hearts of locals. Even according to the government's own guidelines, the Wodonga golf course is simply not an appropriate site for a fast-tracked housing project. In conclusion, this plan is a double bogey. There is simply no need to turn Wodonga golf course into rows of houses, since other land for housing has already been identified by the municipality.

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Out-of-Home Care Services

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:37): I rise to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report on out-of-home-care services from June 2026. The recently released VAGO report on out-of-home-care services paints a deeply concerning picture of Victoria's out-of-home-care system. The department cannot demonstrate that it is consistently achieving safe, stable and positive outcomes for children and young people in care.

If we look at finding 1, which has to do with kinship and foster care, I think we need to remember that children and young people who enter out-of-home-care are among the most vulnerable members of our community. The government has a huge responsibility to do the right thing by these children. Many of these children come from homes or situations where they have experienced trauma, abuse or neglect. They need carers who can support them during this difficult time in their early life, yet the report finds that kinship and foster carers are being short-changed by this government. It is only a very general report, this one. It is a beginning report, because allegedly there are more to come, and I do hope more does come from further research.

Despite kinship care being proven to be a good option for children – in fact often one of the best to keep children within their family network and have that support from family members – we find that it is common for kinship carers to get the lowest care allowance amount. In fact this government is continually short-changing kinship carers. Victoria's base allowance for kinship carers for children aged zero to 7, so the youngest and the most vulnerable, is the lowest in the country. That is right: Victoria pays its kinship carers the least amount of money out of every state in Australia. The report also finds that kinship carers need additional allowances, and they are forced to navigate bureaucratic red tape and complex processes to try to get anything extra at all.

Next in line, let us consider the foster care system. It has declined dramatically under this government. It is to no-one's surprise that the low care allowances are a central factor contributing to the drastically decreasing number of foster carers in Victoria. Foster carers play a critical role in the out-of-home care system, and when children do not have a suitable relative to go to, being looked after by a foster carer is another option. But without foster carers – and there has been a huge decline in them – children in out-of-home care would have to be placed in residential care. Research shows that bringing up children in a home environment is best for them. That is why so many orphanages were closed many, many years ago, to allow children to grow up in a home environment. But if we look at residential care, it is a real issue. As we all know – I hope we know – residential care in this state is a less than ideal option for vulnerable children. At the grassroots my constituents have confided to me that residential care is now a place where young people and children become victims of sexual abuse and various other forms of abuse, and it is in these settings that children become involved with drugs, alcohol and crime. Without these places, quite frankly, we find that children might be able to thrive. Children might be taken out of a neglectful situation and put into residential care where they are sexually abused, and that has a huge impact on their lives and can cause so much trauma that it can be very difficult for them to turn around from that. So it can end up being one of the worst places.

This is an area where we need to have more research done, and I think it is important for us to follow the Auditor-General's recommendations to strengthen foster care capacity. There obviously needs to be rigorous understanding of what a good foster care home looks like, but we need to increase the capacity. Finding 2: there are cohorts of children who systematically have poorer experiences in out-of-home care – *(Time expired)*

The PRESIDENT: I just want to acknowledge in the gallery the federal member for Perth Patrick Gorman. Welcome.

Petitions

Writers Victoria

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (17:43): I move:

> That the petition be taken into consideration.

It was with shock that as Shadow Minister for Arts and Creative Industries I learned that a series of organisations have had their funding sliced by this government. This occurred largely in the week before Christmas. The announcement was made quietly, through phone calls in most cases. One of the key organisations that had its funding sliced, reduced by 100 per cent as of 30 June this year, is Writers Victoria. Victoria will now be the only mainland state without funding for a writers organisation to support writers, and the move will threaten jobs, programs, access to opportunities and indeed, in my view, the very survival of Writers Victoria in the longer term. These cuts, these decisions are harsh and unjustified. They are inconsistent with Melbourne's position as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO, City of Literature.

What has happened here is a series of cuts that have been implemented by this government without a proper process. We have asked to see the process. We have asked through an FOI. The government is fighting that FOI. There will be a hearing on 17 August, but the government has refused to process the FOI until the court meets. I say they have got a lot to hide and that is why they will not come clean on

what has happened here. It is not clear whether the orders came from above. It is not clear whether this was Claire Febey and the decision-makers at Creative Victoria, but what I would say is Creative Victoria is in chaos. It is making a series of unsatisfactory decisions. The decision to cut regional galleries, in my view, is a big mistake too. And both of the two reviews that have been ordered – one for peak bodies and the other for regional funding – are secretive and not clear in their objectives and in my view also unfortunate, because in a number of cases the cuts have already started with those organisations. In the case of galleries, McClelland, Shepparton, Castlemaine, the Jewish gallery, Linden – all of these galleries have had their funding sliced, and others are apparently on the block too.

Writers Victoria is an exemplary organisation with a history dating back to the 1980s that assists so many people across Victoria to lift their capacity to become writers and actually professionalises people and enables people to have the skill set to contribute artistically and creatively in a way that we should all be proud of. It is just bizarre that the government would cut an organisation like this. When we asked questions at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee – and Mr Puglielli also asked questions – there were no good or satisfactory answers: 'Oh, there are a lot of applications.' Organisations like Writers Victoria have been faithfully and sensibly funded for decades now, and the idea that you would, without proper process, without proper assessment, actually just slice the funding I think is completely and utterly unacceptable.

This is a nasty government. It is a harsh government. It is a government that is actually making these cuts without proper process. I say it is time we stood up, and I am certainly prepared to stand up and fight. I hope the new minister looks more carefully at this than the previous minister. I hope she looks at this and says, 'Actually, this is wrong. It is a mistake. It is an error, and it ought to be corrected.' There is no reason why the new minister could not correct this. There is no reason. There is enough waste and incompetence that is visited in Creative Victoria for her to find some of these costs to actually make sure that funding is restored for a number of organisations. Why is it that Victoria will be the only state without its peak writers body being funded in some modest way? Some of these cuts just have a very harsh and unsatisfactory feel and ring to them.

I do not know what the government is trying to achieve. That is why we have FOI-ed them on this set of funding decisions. What was the matrix that they looked at? Which groups of advice did they accept? Who decided that organisations like Writers Victoria would be defunded? There is no line of sight of this. There is no logic. It is a harsh decision. It should be reversed, and it is a decision that does us no credit given the cultural and economic significance of writing in our state.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (17:48): It is very interesting that Mr Davis stands here and talks about cuts when we know the Liberals have $40 billion of cuts planned should they have the opportunity in this state. We have seen it before when they have been in government. A Labor government will always support the arts, and we will always support those that work within them. We think of the cuts that you have committed to, the cuts to the public servants. And what would that mean, Mr Davis? What would that mean for the Wheeler Centre? What would that mean for ACMI? What would it mean for VicScreen, for the Geelong performing arts centre, for Melbourne Recital Centre, for Museums Victoria, for the NGV, for the state library or for the arts centre? I think Victorians know what that would mean should a Liberal government have the opportunity.

David Davis interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: We have had a competitive process, Mr Davis. I think it does not matter what part of society we look at over time, whether it is in tourism or whether it is in other sections, we have different parts of our community from populations of community that have different ideas, new ideas and new emerging people, and the government should look at different people with different ideas and give those people a go. You talk about how it was done by phone calls. A phone call is probably the most respectful way that a message can be communicated – not just leaving it out. The fact is that an extra six months of funding was provided to recognise the contribution Writers Victoria has made over a number of decades and the role it has played in the careers of Victorian writers and to recognise and

value the contribution writers make to Victoria. Whilst Writers Victoria were unsuccessful in the latest round of the open and competitive creative enterprises program, we acknowledged this was a challenging outcome for them and provided an additional six months of funding to help them plan their next steps.

Now through the latest round of the creative enterprises program we are investing in a range of organisations with a focus on literature, including the Melbourne Writers Festival, Emerging Writers' Festival, Kids' Own Publishing and Express Media. Beyond this program, we provide ongoing investment, as I mentioned before, with the Wheeler Centre and the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, including with the most valuable writers prize in the country, and we support a range of writers and literary projects through the Creative Projects Fund. We have also funded Blak & Bright, Australia's leading First Peoples literature organisation.

In our *Creative State 2028* strategy we have committed to developing a statewide Victorian literature strategy in partnership with the Wheeler Centre. This will include consultation with the sector to understand and address opportunities, challenges and the best ways we can support a thriving literary scene and the careers of writers across the state into the future. We know the Wheeler Centre plays a unique role in providing support and opportunities for our literature sector. Other states do not have a Wheeler Centre, meaning interstate peak bodies need to play more of a role in filling the gaps in support. We fund the Wheeler Centre, the home of books, writing and ideas. It is the only place in Australia like it, providing comprehensive services and leadership for the literature sector, including professional and creative development programs like the Hot Desk fellowships and Next Chapter fellowships, and providing advocacy for promoting the literature sector.

I spoke with my colleagues this morning just about how valued the arts and the arts community are to all of us in the Labor Party and the Labor government and how that is expressed within community. I remember, Mr Davis, there was an Economy and Infrastructure Committee inquiry into the arts. My colleagues and I attended all the hearings and heard all the evidence, and my recollection is it was members from your side that failed to turn up and avail themselves of the evidence and the information that we heard. So I am very confident in the fact that members of the Labor government –

David Davis interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): I heard that one clearly, Mr Davis. I think you had better retract that.

David Davis: I retract that he is a goose.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): No, Mr Davis.

David Davis: I retract.

Tom McINTOSH: I am glad that after three decades in this place Mr Davis's biggest contribution is to make commentary like that.

The Labor government and the Labor Party, through their decades of commitment to the arts community and artists within our community, will stand by them going forward.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:53): I rise on behalf of my Greens colleagues to speak with respect to this petition that has been brought before us today. I want to acknowledge from the outset the importance of petitions like this for community members to put matters on the public record, to speak truth to power and to call out things that have happened in the community. In this case it is with respect to Writers Victoria, and I want to acknowledge them for the role they have played over many years in mentoring and supporting emerging writers across our community.

As Mr Davis earlier highlighted, during the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee budget estimates process recently, there was the opportunity to ask questions of the minister and department officials with respect to these matters, and on behalf of my Greens colleagues that was my role. I have

actually brought some of the transcript here with me today. There really was quite a telling exchange with respect to what has happened with Writers Victoria. I asked about this creative enterprises program under which Writers Victoria has received funding and I asked about the rationale for reduction in duration of agreements that were reached within that program, and I was told that that was due to increasing flexibility – to make it more flexible to fund people for less duration of time. We were told that there was an increase on previous years in applications and that it is a competitive process. We are talking about Writers Victoria, an arts organisation that has been funded since the 1980s, an absolute institution of our community, having to compete for funding against other organisations.

Really, as a former artist before being a politician, one of the worst things about the way that we do funding in these areas in this state is that you are having to go into a bloodbath just to secure funding for a future period of time to do the work that you do, which should be respected by all members of our community – or a lesser period of time in this particular case. We heard about the competitiveness of that grant round and that that was the reason Writers Victoria did not receive funding. We were told about the absence of a CEO. We were told about membership decline of Writers Victoria. But what we absolutely did not hear is that this is an arrangement under which the government can keep a lid on how much they spend on the arts. It is a refusal to fund the arts with the amount that is actually needed to ensure that every organisation that is doing that hard work in our community, telling Australian stories, gets funded the amount that they truly deserve. We actually also heard that having been previously funded is not a consideration in terms of who receives support under this program, which is devastating, actually, when you think about it. These are quite telling statements from the government about how they approach funding the arts.

Arts funding – the stability of that funding, the long-term nature of that funding – is core to ensuring that the programs that are delivered by groups like Writers Victoria are viable. If they cannot plan for the future when they are going to have that funding coming through, then how can we expect them to live up to the promise of what they hope to present to the Victorian people, just as they have done for decades, since the 1980s? The stories that we tell each other and that we tell the world say who we are as a people, who we are as a state, and these exchanges through the accounts and estimates hearing proceedings really demonstrate a loss of soul in our community. I think we all have pride as Melburnians that this is a city of the arts. We all celebrate it. But we heard government members stand up here today and rattle off other programs, other organisations that are receiving funding, not this one, as though that is an adequate response to cuts to groups like Writers Victoria. It is galling, and if you say it to any artist, they will appreciate you cannot point to another organisation that is getting funding, not yours, as if that is an adequate response.

Writers Victoria should be getting absolutely every cent that it deserves, and it is really sad if we are in an environment where we are having to claw back funds from the arts due to the state of our budget circumstances or whatever it is. The stories that we tell do not get told if you do not fund them, so I truly hope that the government takes heed of this petition that is brought before us. I hope in taking note of it tonight that that makes the message resoundingly clear to members of the government that they need to restore funding to Writers Victoria so they can do the important work that they do, so that these stories can be told. With that, I commend the petition to the house.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:58): I also rise to support this petition to restore funding for Writers Victoria. I think that getting nearly 11,000 signatures is a huge achievement. It is a big effort, and it deserves the attention of the government – not just some backbenchers but actually government ministers. The Allan Labor government, through Creative Victoria, announced that instead of having $600,000 over four years it is going to take it to zero overnight – nothing. We have heard from the Greens the story of how this has happened, but it simply does not justify it. I think the fact that a petition can come forward with so many signatures speaks volumes. But we know that this Labor government is all about the cuts. That is what they are all about. They talk about cuts all the time. They try to project it onto other people, but the reality is that is what

they are all about: 'Let's just cut all the services. We've got no money. We're going to have a $200 billion deficit that we are heading towards, and yes, we're just going to keep cutting everything.'

Things like writing are an opportunity for people to express themselves in difficult times. What else is really concerning is that it is really inconsistent, given that Melbourne's position is that it is a UNESCO City of Literature. I just do not see how we are really supporting literature if we are going to make this cut to Writers Victoria, and I do think that we should be reversing this decision.

As a former VCE English teacher, I am proud to support and advocate for writers in Victoria today and to fight for the funding that supports writing and literature developed in Victoria through Writers Victoria. I would like to acknowledge the current CEO Jill Brown of Writers Victoria for her advocacy and work on this petition and all those who have got alongside her to make this happen. I think it was a great effort by Victorian writers, English teachers, potentially, and anyone else who supports developing literature and literary skills in this state.

What is a writer? We could be just talking about career or professional writers, and we know that Writers Victoria does a lot to support these people who are professional, who are making a living as career writers, and they are certainly supported through Writers Victoria. But in the words of the CEO Jill Brown, as noted in the *Conversation* on 23 January this year – and I appreciate her definition – a writer is 'someone who feels passionately about writing and words'. As a former teacher, I know that words matter. As a result of the world's longest accumulative lockdowns in the City of Melbourne, primary writing instruction of course was negatively impacted. Thanks to parents, though, who worked diligently with their children in some of the homes of Victoria and the schools that also found ways to support students, particularly through devices for those that had them, some of our literary skills have remained somewhat resilient.

Literary skills are very important, and if the Labor government made a commitment to being a literary city with UNESCO, it now needs to back its words with action. But this is what we get with the Labor government that failed to deliver the Commonwealth Games and failed to deliver a single Big Build within its budget. This is a government that is simply an embarrassment around the world. Writers centres go beyond their 10,000 nationwide memberships. Victorians know we need to support our writers. We need to support writers and writing programs.

Writers Victoria supports the disabled writers in Victoria as well with the Writeability program. In fact they won an accolade in Victoria for this, and yet we have cut their funding. I had the privilege once of teaching a particular student who stood out to me who was severely disabled and blind and struggled to speak. Her condition was deteriorating, but she found a way through means of support to write some of her story. Her writing and communication helped to develop empathy and human understanding and to create an environment for genuine inclusivity, and I remember Zoe today.

Writing has the power to create; it has the power to destroy. We know that sticks and stones can break our bones, but let me say that words really can hurt someone. As a relatively new member of Parliament, I say that words and writing are here in this chamber, and that is what drives our system. We know it is important, and we need to support groups like Writers Victoria. There are many private organisations that have sprung up, but this one needs to continue.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:03): I rise to support Mr Davis's petition – a petition that opposes the cuts to Writers Victoria's funding that has been signed by around 11,000 Victorians. That is why it qualifies for debate in this house, because it has been signed by so many Victorians. That support for this petition shows how much support there is for Writers Victoria and for the arts in in Victoria.

Last week, together with Mr Davis, I actually attended the Public Galleries Association of Victoria AGM, which was held at the Shepparton Art Museum in Greater Shepparton. What we know is that the arts industry is a sector that defines Victoria's cultural identity and contributes more than $40 billion to the Victorian economy. So it beggars belief that this government has made such deep,

mean and targeted cuts to the arts industry. The public galleries association is a critical body that supports our public galleries with training and specialist knowledge, but it has been defunded entirely. All of its funding has been cut by this government under their deep, mean and targeted cuts. It goes further than that in regional Victoria. We have galleries that really contribute to our local communities and to the culture in country Victoria. The Shepparton Art Museum, where we were last week, is a magnificent facility. It currently has on display the Degas to Picasso exhibition, which is filling the gallery. It is at capacity every weekend. Later in the year the Archibald will be displayed at the Shepparton Art Museum. This is a building that has had $50 million of public funds – local government, state government and federal government contributions – contributed to it in just the last few years, yet it is on the list of public galleries that are going to have their funding cut.

There are six public galleries that once received four-year funding from the creative enterprises program that have had their funding slashed to two years. There is no certainty for these galleries going forward. Those six galleries are the Castlemaine Art Museum, East Gippsland Art Gallery, Jewish Museum of Australia, Linden New Art, McClelland sculpture park and the Shepparton Art Museum. Two of those are in my electorate: the Castlemaine Art Museum and the Shepparton Art Museum. These are important facilities in regional towns that not only contribute to the culture of those towns but bring an enormous amount of visitation to our area and provide jobs and contributions to our economy. They fill our motel rooms on the weekend when people come up to visit these magnificent exhibitions that they put on.

This is just a really short-sighted cut by this government. In the scheme of government funding it is a small cut and it is a small thing to fund. I would urge the minister to take another look, to reverse her deep, mean and targeted cuts and to re-fund these galleries, Writers Victoria, the public galleries association and anyone else who she has cut funding to in the arts community.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:07): I thank all of those who have spoken. I do not think Mr McIntosh really came to grips with what has happened here, and I think that he has not understood the impact of the cuts that are happening across the arts sector. Writers Victoria is an exemplary body. It is a body that actually has huge impact. It is life changing for many people, and its contribution to the broader community is very significant. There is an economic side to that, but it has a social and cultural side as well. It is time the government recognise that these modest amounts of money ought not to have been cut from these organisations. They ought to be restored. I urge the new minister to have a new and genuine look at this situation and to say, 'Can I find a way to restore the funding to these organisations?' I think she can and I think she should, and I think this chamber as a whole thinks she should. 11,000 people is not a small number of people to sign a petition, and it would have gone on to much greater numbers if we had not closed it off to give it its chance on the list here. That is why it was closed off – to give it a chance to come onto the floor here. I think that that is a very important signal. If the government thinks that these kinds of cuts are not important, if they think that they can just brush them under the carpet, that is a mistake. As I said, the creative enterprises program is something we are looking at very closely, and the government's decision-making. The FOI is there. We in fact received a section 49 statement today for the 17 August hearing at VCAT. The government said they are processing it. Well, they have had this FOI going back to January. Why on earth can't they just come forward with the information now? You would have to think they have got something to hide.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:10): I move:

> That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 1483, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Harriet Shing:

> That the bill be now read a second time.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:10): I am pleased to rise today to speak on the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026 and, in doing so, state that this bill has been a little while in the train. It was first read in the lower house on 1 April, second read on 2 April and then sat for some weeks and indeed months until June, when it passed through the lower house and we find it here today. Now, just to put it on the record, the Liberals and Nationals do not oppose this bill, but we do seek to amend and strengthen and ensure for stakeholders who feel aggrieved at the lack of consultation that their concerns are addressed and that this bill is strengthened.

Let me say from the outset that if more people go outside, get in the car, get on the bus, get on the horse, get in the four-wheel drive, get on the pushbike, get on their motorbike and go out into the regions, go out into our outdoor spaces and our public spaces, and they do those traditional pastimes such as recreational fishing and hunting, which have been around for as long as *Homo sapiens* have been around, then I am of the firm belief and the Liberals and Nationals are of the firm belief that there will be less machetes on our streets and less people lining up with severe mental difficulties and seeking mental health services, and we believe that more families and communities will be strengthened and stay together.

Just by way of a little bit of background on this, there was a gentleman who worked very hard and was told that he had six months to live. He was a light smoker and he had had two strokes, and he was told by his doctor, 'You have six months to live.' So at 60 years old he retired on the spot. He packed up and, with six months to live, he went to live in a little fishing village in Gippsland. Every day thereafter, or almost every day, he surf-fished. He made his own rods using bamboo, he made his own lead weight sinkers in his garage and he fished. That man also, when he was young, used to fly fish. He used to fly fish up on the Mitta Mitta and on the Mitchell River, take his young family and his German shepherds, go up on those rivers and fly fish. He had had a love of fishing all his life, and that man who was given six months at 60 lasted 19 years. I believe that the likes of recreational fishing, recreational hunting and other pastimes that get people out in nature and experiencing all the amazing sensations and understanding of what the outdoors really means actually support longevity. And we saw that man, who was my grandfather, last until he was 79 years old and get to know his granddaughter. That is what our recreational pursuits can do for people.

Also, last month, I upheld a commitment both to myself and to the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria. The president of the mountain cattlemen is a woman, and she is a dynamic woman. I made a commitment and I went up Mount Stirling with the mountain cattlemen. We parked down near Mansfield, and then we drove up a little way and rode our horses up to what is now famously known as Craig's Hut at the top of Mount Stirling. When we were halfway up, with the horses in the back and ready to go, we passed hunters with deer on board their vehicles. They were incredibly polite to

us as we passed. They had all the equipment. They had walkie-talkies – and there is probably a far more technical name than that. They were communicating with each other, but they were also behaving in an incredibly respectful and safe manner. These were hunters. When we got a bit further up and got the horses out, we then worked our way through the most magnificent scenery up to the top of Mount Stirling. We passed hikers. We got up there, and there is a car park, so you can drive your Tesla up near the top of Mount Stirling and near to Craig's Hut, the very famous place from *The Man from Snowy River*. The people who know the bush, who live in the bush and who understand it – the mountain cattlemen, for example – know that we should never have put Craig's Hut where it is, because it does not serve. It is actually a really windy place. But what we know is there were campers out hiking and school groups out hiking, and there were hunters as well as horseriders, all on Mount Stirling, enjoying the great outdoors.

That is what the Liberals and Nationals want to encourage more of, and this is why this sector is a really, really important one. Not only that, it is vastly important, significantly important, for the regional economies that it stimulates and it creates vibrancy and those regions thrive. I could speak to that at great detail, but just know that the local service station, the local pub, the local IGA, the local camping and outdoor shop and the fish and chip shop along the way – all of these places thrive during duck-hunting season, which I am very passionate about and have gone on record in relation to, and in hunting season, which is more in the winter, and also certainly for recreational fishing. My electorate – and I know that Acting President Bourman is from the same electorate, Eastern Victoria Region – has an amazing array of recreational fishing opportunities. The Liberals and Nationals want to see these opportunities grow and develop.

Speaking specifically to this bill, it amalgamates or merges the Game Management Authority (GMA) and the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA). It consolidates them into one entity, and it also establishes a thing called the Land Access Panel and makes a whole lot of consequential amendments. This consolidates regulation, promotion, compliance and access to functions within one centralised body. Where has this idea come from for the government? It has come from the Silver review, which says to:

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

That is a big mouthful; that is an aspirational piece. Various elements within that seem not only reasonable but, as I said, aspirational.

But there is a little bit of devil in the detail that I do want to go into in relation to the bill itself. As I said, it repeals the GMA and the VFA. It defines outdoor recreation as some specific activities, and I want to move some amendments later on to expand that. It also creates a corporate body with full powers. It provides ministerial directions, and I am also foreshadowing that I want to look at some amendments to that just to provide some better governance, as we see it. I also would like to look at, as I said, board governance and conflicts of interest. The bill also talks about reporting standards and creates this Land Access Panel.

Some of the areas of concern that we hold relate to outdoor recreational interests. I might just put on record that there are people out there in Victoria who were very frustrated, first of all when the Minister for Environment was Lily D'Ambrosio. There are people that feel very aggrieved about her quite leftist stance. I have had over my time in this place many hundreds of emails in relation to the closure of the Wombat State Forest, now a national park, and the exclusion of prospectors and miners. Both from my personal experience and anecdotally and through reading and understanding the work that they did and how they left the places that they have fossicked and prospected in over decades – indeed for 100 or more years – in Australia, they are very frustrated that they have been locked out. They feel that they have been overlooked in this piece of legislation, and I want to make some remedies to that. As I said, they have been a very important group that want to leave that place, their outdoors, in a

better place than when they found it. They have certainly over time removed a lot of debris and rubbish and, on occasion, some nice little nuggets of gold, which under licence they are quite entitled to do.

I have made significant inroads into consultation. I put on record that up until mid-April it was Minister Dimopoulos and now we have Minister Erdogan. So Minister Erdogan has inherited this, as it were, and I am sure he will speak to how delighted he is that he has inherited it. But there has been a significant issue with the lack of consultation with the commercial fishing industry, a very significant industry in our very wonderful state. They feel quite aggrieved that they have not been consulted, even indeed with the name of this bill. We see it is 'outdoor recreation'. It is the merging of fisheries and the GMA, but there is no reference in the title. Where do they sit in all of this? They feel quite aggrieved by that, but they have been constructive. They have spoken at length with me, and I thank them for that, and I am happy to go into the detail. They have been constructive in their conversation, and I know that they have reached out to the minister in relation to the concerns that they have in the bill. That is one avenue.

I have also heard back from a variety of people. Indeed recreational fishers have said overwhelmingly that they are quite pleased. There are a few who are concerned and have some specific issues, but they are quite pleased with the change. Commercial fishers, not so; they feel aggrieved. There are some environmentalists who of course – as we have all been, I would say – deluge me with a flood of anti everything basically: anti hunting, anti fishing, anti eating fish and specifically anti duck hunting. There was a bit of a flood coming into my inbox and I am assuming others' inboxes, and when I looked at it, it was generated from members of the Animal Justice Party. Well, there are no surprises there. Certainly people, if they are going to make a protest, can make a comment. I read the first one and then I read the second one, and then I realised that the rest of them were all the same. They should at least take the opportunity to be creative and think of their own comments.

Anyway, having said that, I want to go into the importance of our seafood industry. I really want to thank Seafood Industry Victoria and Matt Wassnig and also, from my electorate, but not because it is in my electorate, Wolfgang from the San Remo Fisherman's Co-op, a really important group of people down there creating the most amazing product fresh from our Gippsland shores to San Remo and then dealt with and transferred to your pub – a fantastic opportunity to eat local fish. Let me just give you some detail around this, because I think it is important. The studies show that most Victorians consume it regularly, about 90 per cent believing that seafood should be produced locally – so overwhelmingly we want to eat local fish.

This provides an opportunity here, but what we see is that unfortunately the volume of seafood caught has dropped. Wild seafood has dropped from 40 per cent in 2015–16 down to I think only 5 per cent, and overwhelmingly it comes in from overseas. We have got an industry that has few miles, by comparison. It is caught offshore – it is caught out in Bass Strait – and whether it be from the Corner Inlet, Lakes Entrance or further round in the west, fresh fish carved up on ice in the local shops is the most beautiful, sweet, locally grown, healthy product, and Victorians should be eating more of it. We should be supporting that industry to the nth degree. The Victorian seafood industry has the potential to play a greater role in strengthening regional communities, providing local, healthy alternatives to overseas and sustainable protein. These are some of the communities that are there creating local jobs, and we support them in their entirety.

Some of the other comments that I think are really important in this relate to duck hunting. We know that there has been a significant campaign against duck hunting. In 2022 and the beginning of 2023 there was a select committee inquiry into duck hunting. Indeed Mr Bourman was on it and Mrs McArthur, Mr Mulholland and I, and then we had a Green and we had three Labor members, from my recollection. We heard very wideranging advice. We heard from hunting organisations – the Sporting Shooters Association Victoria and Field & Game Australia – and even ADA, the Australian Deer Association, put in their view on hunting and the importance of it. We heard from a broad range of people, but we also heard, very importantly, from one professor. His name is Brian Hiller. He is a

professor of wildlife ecology at a state university in Minnesota. He is a professor. He understands ecology. His words were:

> Habitat is key. If you have habitat, you have birds.

It is about water in the landscape and healthy landscapes. At that time it was the interim harvest model. Now the government has the harvest model, and this is a really important model that hunters and particularly some ecologists agree on. It was designed by ecologists. During one of the hearings we heard from a particular professor, Marcel Klaassen, and I asked him this question about the then interim harvest model he had both worked on and formatted:

> … how robust is the science and are you convinced of the sustainability of this model …

And he said:

> Yes … Regarding robustness, I think it is robust …we did a good job there.

He then went on in quite some detail to explain that, in short, hunting does not make a dent in populations. It is all about water in the landscape and making sure that the assessment that goes through to the minister from this adaptive harvest model provides the context by which the minister can then endorse and open up a harvest season.

Speaking of duck hunting, in my electorate of Eastern Victoria Region we have a thing called Heart Morass. Twenty years ago it was a wasteland pan. It had been overgrazed. It was unhealthy – a salt pan. Moving forward, after hundreds of thousands of hours by volunteers and hunter–conservationists – I repeat, hunter–conservationists – it is now recognised around the world, and scientists come and assess the biodiversity, from the bugs to the birds to aquatic life. It is a very special place, and lo and behold, annually it provides opportunities for duck hunters to enjoy a recreational pastime that has been there for many, many years.

In relation to some of the parts of the bill that the Liberals and Nationals would like to improve, it is a targeted package. There have been some in the industry that have said that they are do not want this to occur. Many do. Many of the recreational fishers, the GMA and the hunters are quite happy with this being merged and the opportunities that it provides. We have listened to and spoken with those commercial fishers, and they feel that 'outdoor recreation' does not provide the context in which a very important industry operates. They would like to see a name change that includes something with fishing in it. I have spoken to other hunters, and they would really like to see the word 'hunting'. We know that in New Zealand there is an example where that exists: fishing, hunting but also outdoors and making sure that you can walk and chew gum at the same time. These elements can be incorporated and provide that confidence, that certainty, that no-one is getting left behind in this merger.

Other parts that I would like to improve are the protection and acknowledgement of the commercial fishing sector: licences, quotas and management entitlements that exist under the Fisheries Act 1995. I also particularly want to recognise in the bill – and it starts in the definitions – outdoor recreational activities. It puts some in but leaves some out, and when you start to do that, people start to get concerned that they will be left out. The government will probably say to me that this is part of the first tranche. I understand that, but why not put them in at the same time? If you have got a vision, if you have got an aspiration, why not put in trail bike riding, prospecting, fossicking, horseriding and the like? So I am seeking to make some amendments that improve that, to say, if this is going to be a new vision, we keep the mature industries and pastimes and make sure that no-one is left behind.

I also want to look at ensuring that the Land Access Panel covers land and water where it is on land. That would be rivers and streams and lakes and the like – dams. But what about coastal areas and marine aquatic areas? How is that being addressed? An access panel, if it works well, and here is part of my concern, can be a huge asset to the minister of the day, providing localised and important information – and the minister can speak to the terms of reference – but also really digging deep and

seeing what some of the key issues are that may need altering and tweaking and enhancing. They are some of the parts that I would like to look at.

The other part that I would like to look at is ministerial operations and ensuring that any minister, whoever that may be in the future, cannot drill down and make interventions in terms of specific licences, specific people and specific enforcement matters. I want to just make sure that there are policy and direction but individuals are not being targeted or changed in any way. That needs to sit above the structure of that new entity to let it do its work. Also, we heard last year there was a cut of 44 per cent of fisheries enforcement officers and it was quite a big issue, without a doubt. I want to make sure that we talk about the importance of our environment and we talk about the importance of access by Victorians and international and interstate travellers to experience these things. But we want to ensure that there are adequate numbers of authorised officers and that they are doing compliance work and education work and that they are really doing that on-the-ground work to stamp out any illegal harvesting – I am thinking of pipis or abalone or the like, for example – to ensure that there is adequate coverage to protect biodiversity and protect the honest people who are doing the right thing but not those people who are acting outside the law.

I also want to ensure that the board has real-world experience, and I think this is really, really important. Some of the feedback we heard in relation to that was that as it is written – and I will ask this in the committee stage of the bill – the board could technically have, as a reference, somebody who is a hiker, for example. I am a hiker, so it is no disrespect to hikers. But they could acquit the element of the board that has outdoor recreation, commercial industry or aquaculture. They could acquit that. The Liberals and Nationals believe that there need to be assurances that there will be greater real-world, practical representation, ensuring that commercial and recreational sectors are included in that. These are some of the changes that we have been talking about.

I want to acknowledge that we have been having conversations today with the minister to see a way forward in enhancing the bill. Ultimately, the role of the opposition and the role of members of Parliament not in government and of this house specifically is to strengthen a bill, to tease out elements that stakeholders, real Victorians, feel are not being addressed and to ensure that there is far more rigour and that it does what it is designed to do.

In relation to the recreational fishers, there are almost a million – 900,000 licences. I have got my licence for three years. I very much enjoyed going out from San Remo the other day, and I caught some flatties. It is a fantastic pastime. As I said, there are 400 licence holders. We could go into great depth about the Silver review. We could go into great depth about the Ken Lay review. I think I will park that there. There might be some questions, because that is a significant body of work. I have been travelling around, visiting and speaking at a variety of forums on firearms used by farmers, used by pest controllers, used by clay target shooters, used by outdoor rec, used by deer hunters, used by wild dog hunters, as I said, in pest control and used by a variety of hunters, and they have been feeling very nervous about the government. I will say that there is a smidgen more relief that the government – indeed, probably the Premier – came to their senses and rejected the cap, and that has to stay, that rejection of the cap. Even in the report there is no quantifiable evidence – and it was stated – that caps have any material action to stop criminals and stop tragedies like we saw in December.

As I said, I am foreshadowing some amendments. They will appear tomorrow if we debate the bill tomorrow. The Liberals and Nationals are very passionate about seeing more outdoor recreational pursuits, seeing more families get together and more individuals get out there to throw a line in and to enjoy that part, seeing more hunters and creating safe hunting environments, seeing that commercial fishing groups and aquaculture groups are able to do the work they do to provide beautiful food for our tables and enhance our lives and seeing a vision come through where land access continues and is not further shut down by a government that is dealing with ideology. I hope that ideology is gone, but also the Liberals and Nationals certainly commit to open access, good governance and outdoor recreation where people are out enjoying themselves. With that, I end my comments there, but we will have much more to say when the amendments come through tomorrow morning.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (18:40): Many Victorians want more opportunities to get outdoors and enjoy our natural environment. The bill before us this evening makes that easier, and that is something that is very much supported by many Victorians. The bill establishes Outdoor Recreation Victoria as a new statutory authority and the sole regulator for fishing and game hunting, and I will go into that in a bit more detail in a minute. It does so by consolidating the Victorian Fisheries Authority and the Game Management Authority into a single streamlined body, repealing the separate acts that established each of those.

The scope that Outdoor Recreation Victoria, or ORV, will support is broad: fishing, hunting, camping, boating, bushwalking, hiking, mountain bike riding and four-wheel driving. The new authority will be governed by a board appointed by the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, with members bringing relevant expertise, including knowledge of First Peoples' culture, community leadership and a broad range of other perspectives. This reform has been carefully designed to ensure continuity from day one. All staff, with the exception of the current CEOs, transfer to ORV on their existing terms and conditions. There are no job losses. Powers, assets and legal arrangements transfer seamlessly into the new authority. This is not a disruption; it is a sensible consolidation that makes the system work better.

The bill also establishes a Land Access Panel to identify new opportunities for community access across public land and waterways, with six to 12 members representing traditional owners, public land managers, ORV and external stakeholders. The panel will advise government on how to open up more of Victoria's extraordinary natural environment for outdoor recreation. I must admit I was inquiring as to how mountain bike tracks would be expanded under this model, and I am assured that that is possible. The Minister for Outdoor Recreation will be required to share the panel's advice with all ministers responsible for public land. This will embed a whole-of-government approach to these decisions.

Importantly, the bill does not start from scratch. It builds on more than a decade of genuine investment in outdoor recreation. Since 2014 more than $226 million has been invested into fishing and boating infrastructure, habitat and participation across Victoria. In fact anywhere you go where there is a waterway or an ocean you will come across those grey floating or fixed pontoons that allow people to fish and recreate on waterways. Recreational fishing alone supports close to 20,000 jobs and contributes $2.3 billion to the Victorian economy. More than 1 million Victorians go fishing every year. In my region stocking the Merri River from Grassmere to Wollaston Bridge and then below the old weir to Dennington has resulted in thousands more estuary perch and brown trout inhabiting our waters, providing increased fishing opportunities and improving the general health of the river. This is perfect for children participating in our little anglers program. This program has brought fishing into schools, and 95,000 free fishing rods have been delivered to Victorian primary students. It has been an absolute delight visiting schools to give kids their rods previously. When I asked classes, 'Have you ever been fishing before?' I was very surprised to see more than half often put their hands up – incredible. It takes them away from screens, it takes them outdoors and it encourages that enduring love of fishing and the natural environment. In addition, $1.6 million has supported Victoria's 330 angling clubs to modernise and attract new members, ensuring that the community infrastructure remains strong.

For people in western Victoria, outdoor recreation is part of life. Families spend their weekends outdoors. It draws visitors to our region and helps sustain local economies. The Better Boating Fund, established in 2020, has committed more than $170 million to boating projects across the state, and 415 public boat ramps, as I mentioned, are now free to launch and retrieve in parks.

Another example of the commitments made to outdoor rec has been substantial investment in mountain biking. It has grown into one of Victoria's most popular outdoor pursuits, and I must admit, I am a mountain bike tragic, although I do not get on my bike as often as I would like. It gets me and many other Victorians into the bush, building fitness and mental health and wellbeing. For families it is something that everyone can do together. The trail network near Forrest in the Otway Ranges – certainly my patch – is a perfect example of what this kind of investment does for small towns like

Forrest that used to live off logging revenue but where the logging has now stopped. Funding from the Victorian government alongside investment from Colac Otway shire has extended and improved the trail network, and the economic flow-on for Forrest has been remarkable – accommodation, cafes, bike hire and guided tours, not to mention the brewery and the pub. So outdoor recreation done well is also regional economic development done well.

Just to mention some of the towns that also have mountain bike trails in western Victoria – and I am systematically trying to get around them, and I am mortally disappointed in myself that I have not yet been to Creswick – Forrest, Creswick, Castlemaine, Harcourt, Narrawong, Warrnambool, Anglesea, You Yangs, Ballarat and Buninyong all have mountain bike trails. Outdoor Recreation Victoria, or the establishment thereof, will play an important role in supporting further trail development across the state, identifying opportunities on public land, coordinating access and ensuring that communities like Forrest are not the exception but the model.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that outdoor recreation contributes enormously to this state economically, socially and for the wellbeing of Victorians who simply need time outside. This bill consolidates where consolidation makes sense, protects the environment where it needs to protect the environment and opens up new doors for community access to public land, which, after all, is Labor's commitment. Victorians are heading outdoors more than ever, and this legislation helps make that possible. I commend the bill.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:48): I move:

> That debate on this bill be adjourned until the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until next day of meeting.

Adjournment

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (18:48): I move:

> That the house do now adjourn.

Organised crime

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (18:49): (2591) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Attorney-General regarding recent arson attacks across Victoria. These abhorrent crimes are being orchestrated by gutless thugs who exploit children to carry out dangerous offending, putting communities at risk. The action I seek is an update on measures to hold organisers accountable and strengthen sentencing laws to reflect community expectations.

Road tolls

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:49): (2592) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek, Minister, is that you urgently review Transurban, Citylink and West Gate Tunnel toll administration fees, seek parity with the reforms now being pursued in New South Wales and establish a service level fairness mechanism for motorists when toll roads fail to deliver the service for which commuters are paying a high price. This issue has been raised with me by constituents in western Victoria, including commuters from Geelong and Waurn Ponds who travel into Melbourne and rely on CityLink as part of a long, expensive daily journey. For them tolls are not an occasional inconvenience on an annual holiday trip. They are daily recurring costs deducted from their wages before the day has even begun.

What makes this especially galling is not just the toll itself; it is the administration fee regime that sits on top of it. In Victoria a missed CityLink toll of only a few dollars can attract an administration fee of $16.13 on a first notice and $31.49 on a further notice. If left unpaid, these matters can then escalate into state-enforced fines. That is very difficult to defend as simple cost recovery. In fact it simply is

not cost recovery; it is another fee, another charge, disproportionate and unfair, particularly when working Victorians are facing serious cost-of-living pressures.

New South Wales has acted. Following its independent toll review Transurban will cut toll notice administration fees there entirely. So the question for Victoria is obvious: why is this Labor government letting Transurban get away with charging our commuters substantially more for literally the same action? It is the same company, the same systems, yet Victorians pay so much more. This is not a new concern. The Liberals and Nationals have warned for years that Labor's Transurban deal was a bad deal for motorists. We warned against the extension of CityLink tolls to fund the West Gate Tunnel. We warned motorists would pay more for longer, and now we see the same pattern again – Victorian drivers paying the price while Labor refuses to stand up to Transurban. Minister, commuters in western Victoria deserve better. The action I seek, again, is that you review these excessive administration fees, bring Victoria into line with New South Wales's reform and develop a toll rebate or waiver mechanism when toll roads operate materially below standard.

Foster carers

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (18:52): (2593) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Children, and the action I seek is an increase in care allowances for foster carers. Two harrowing reports were recently released on the state of Victoria's out-of-home care system: the Commission for Children and Young People's report *Left Behind* and the Victorian Auditor-General's report *Out-of-Home Care Services*. These two reports paint a deeply concerning picture of systems that are failing some of Victoria's most vulnerable children. The Auditor-General's report found that Victoria's 9353 children in out-of-home care are not having their needs fully met by the government. This Allan Labor government is failing to meet legislative requirements to keep siblings together and minimise children moving around frequently. For some cohorts the risk of this is much higher, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children with disability facing higher rates of sibling separation and older children being more likely to have placements changed multiple times. Victoria is not on track to meet Closing the Gap targets, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in care, with almost one in 10 children placed in out-of-home care being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

At the same time, fewer people are putting their hands up to become foster carers, because care allowances do not reflect the real cost of raising a child. Victoria provides the lowest allowance in the country for the youngest children. Most kinship carers are older women, often grandmothers, who are already facing financial and health challenges. This is a gendered issue that this government needs to address and can no longer ignore. The Auditor-General's report also finds that the department had repeatedly advised the government of critical system constraints and had sought funding to address them. Despite these warnings the Allan Labor government failed to provide the funding required, leaving known risks unresolved. The Commission for Children and Young People described a system that too often refers families elsewhere and closes their cases, even when the challenges they face remain unresolved. Families are left navigating fragmented and overstretched services, while children continue to live with significant risk.

We know what helps keep children safe: secure housing, family violence prevention, mental health support, alcohol and other drug services, financial security and strong community-led services. Yet too many families are unable to access that support until circumstances have deteriorated to the point where child protection intervention becomes necessary. The findings in these reports should be a wake-up call. Our child protection system is not working. It is fragmented, underfunded and failing Victorian children. A system that responds after harm has occurred is not good enough. The Greens call on the government to do better.

Public transport fares

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:55): (2594) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to

update me on ridership levels and the uptake of this impactful cost-of-living measure. From 1 June this year every Victorian, whether they are a student catching the train to TAFE, a worker commuting into the CBD or a family travelling across the regions, has been paying half-price to travel on public transport – that is trains, trams, buses and regional coaches – right across the state. The numbers speak for themselves: a full daily fare cap that was $11.40 is now $5.70. Concession holders who were already paying $5.70 now pay just $2.85. For a regular commuter that adds up to savings of more than $850 between now and the end of the year. For families and low-income earners who rely on public transport, this is real money in their pockets at a time when they need it the most. This follows two months of free public transport, a measure that helped hundreds of thousands of Victorians while fuel prices remained high. Half-price fares continue that commitment through to 1 January 2027 as part of a broader package that includes a 20 per cent rebate on vehicle registration. I look forward to the minister's response.

Youth crime

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:57): (2595) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Youth Justice, and the action that I seek is for the minister to outline why, in the middle of a youth crime crisis, youth crime prevention and early intervention projects have seen a $1.3 million cut and why the funding has been rephased into the 2028–29 period. Minister, we are experiencing a youth crime crisis now. The budget papers show that almost $20 million is going to be invested into youth crime prevention programs but that that is only expected to, first of all, service 330 kids and that only 13 per cent of those are expected to finish the program. I am going to give a few statistics just to explain why this is absolutely unacceptable. First of all, even the Chief Commissioner of Police, Commissioner Bush, has said this:

> If a young person commits a serious crime, three hours later they're back out on the street with their peer group and their mates, already to go and do it again, what has been achieved?

He went on to say:

> That's really destructive and we've missed the opportunity to announce consequence, to provide the opportunity for reflection and intervention, all missed opportunities.

This week a young guy, Judo, who was a criminal himself – locked up for six years – added to that. He said it is simply not working. He credits the Youth Activating Youth program for beginning to turn his life around – something that helped him take responsibility and something that a Liberals and Nationals government would commit to funding to reach a generation of young people.

This is quite serious because, Minister, our communities are not safe. Not only that, we are losing a generation to crime. A generation that could be contributing and having a meaningful life are walking down a path that could see them locked up for life when the government is failing to provide programs that can help them turn it around. I hope that the minister can explain to me why this is being done, why money is being redirected, when right now we could be reaching a generation of kids. I believe that it is shooting far too low when there are 750 new victims of crime every single day. If you add those up over a year, that is over 270,000 new victims of crime – and this government thinks it is acceptable to reach 45 young kids to turn them around and get them out of the justice system. That is unbelievable, and you need to do better.

Casey Hospital

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:00): (2596) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure, whose company I was delighted to have out in the south-east over the weekend, along with Mr Tarlamis, the member for Narre Warren North, the member for Monbulk and others to check out the ongoing works to upgrade the Casey Hospital emergency department. This terrific new expanded ED will provide capacity for an additional thousand patients per week and is a critical part of expanding our local health network as our south-east community grows. I ask the minister for an update on these very important works.

Vandalism

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (19:00): (2597) My matter is for the Attorney-General's attention tonight, and it concerns yet another day when prominence has come to those who would defile and deface our Anzacs, our RSLs and the legacy that we have of those who fought and died and protected our country. Today there has been a court hearing. Edith Pope and Charlie Tidmarsh have won the right to keep their faces hidden, but I do hope that they eventually face a very clear set of penalties. On Anzac Day they were arrested spray-painting the words 'Fuck the Anzacs' – excuse me, President – 'Kill the troops', 'Courts have no jurisdiction on stolen land'. These are extraordinary things that they would say. Further, 'Death to the ADF', 'Gallipoli – do it again', 'Death to Australia' were sprayed in red across multiple external walls at the Reservoir and Heidelberg RSLs. This is just extraordinary.

Some of them have been here as well. It is them, and there should be no mercy shown with these people. We have seen it also at places that I am very familiar with. At Prahran in the City of Stonington this Anzac Day it was discovered that in fact a number of plaques and bronze parts of the cenotaph had been jemmied off and broken by vandals, and indeed some in Victoria Gardens, which is a very nice park where the cenotaph is and the Anzac celebrations are held by the Prahran RSL. The bronze urns were also cut off, clearly with very sophisticated equipment. This is tremendous damage. It is a direct attack on our history. It is a direct attack on those who have served and given their lives, and I, for one, say it has got to stop.

There are not many things I think the City of Melbourne do well, but I notice that recently they have taken the step of saying that they will pursue people who attack signs and monuments, pursue them to recover the money and pursue them as long as they need. These examples that I am giving here are many, many thousands of dollars of cost, and they ought to pursue these sorts of people. They ought to pursue them to the end of the earth, frankly. I am asking the Attorney-General to come forward with some proposals to deal with what is an epidemic of attacks on our Gallipoli and Anzac history. Enough is enough. We need to protect our servicemen and their heritage and their records. It is time that the Attorney-General came forward with some positive steps to deal with this.

Family violence

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (19:03): (2598) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence. One of the first actions the Labor government took on coming into office in 2014 was to establish a Royal Commission into Family Violence. Since then the royal commission handed down its report in 2016, and as of 2023 all recommendations of the report have been implemented. This is an effort to be commended, but unfortunately, as we know, family violence is an issue that affects an unacceptable number of Victorians every year. The action I seek is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence to provide an update on what the Allan Labor government has done to combat family violence and ensure the recommendations of the royal commission are successfully upheld.

Community safety

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:04): (2599) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is for the minister to outline what steps the government is taking to genuinely address failing bail laws, rising crime – especially youth crime – and to get machetes off the streets in this state. Last sitting week I spoke about a terrifying brawl that had broken out in a shopping centre in Clyde North. It involved four teenage boys who brandished weapons, including a hockey stick, a baseball bat, an ASP baton and a machete. Two of these boys were seriously injured, one of whom was left with a fractured skull, bleeding in his brain and blindness in his left eye. Doctors say he will be lucky if he regains even 20 per cent of his vision. He is left with a lifelong disability. This is a horrific outcome for anyone, let alone a teenager with their whole life ahead of them. Yet how is this life-altering crime dealt with under the Allan–Carroll–Williams Labor government? That is right: by granting the perpetrators bail, and sometimes bail is granted within hours

or even the next day. Even the magistrate who presided over the boys' hearing was in shock over their actions, labelling it as an outrageous conduct. He said:

> Who would have thought that would occur in modern society?
>
> That is no longer an isolated incident. It's no longer exceptional. What was unusual, exceptional, and isolated has now become commonplace and prevalent.

He could not be more right. Just last month in my area, two teenage boys were granted bail after firebombing a Keysborough factory. Grassroots rumours suggest these youths are being paid large sums of money to burn down buildings. Barely a week later one of them was back in custody after assaulting an off-duty police officer.

It is the same story over and over and over again, and Victorians, quite frankly, are sick of it. Minister, how would you feel if it was your livelihood that was firebombed? How about if it was your child that was left with injuries after being attacked – permanent injuries? I am fairly certain that you would not even be able to sleep knowing that the offender is out there walking free. Yet this Labor government has made it clear that under their governance Victorians can never be safe. Only a Wilson-led Liberal government will strengthen bail laws to put victims ahead of criminals and ensure that when young offenders commit serious crimes they face real consequences that match community expectations and the opportunity to reform.

Wildlife protection

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (19:07): (2600) My matter is for the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing. I would like to begin with the wise words of the great Nelly Furtado: 'I'm like a bird, I'll only fly away'. Those words are fitting because I want to speak about the corellas currently residing at the Hill Top Golf & Country Club in Tatura and the Kilmore Golf Club and the permanent ethical management solutions proposed by the Bird Advocacy Foundation. The action that I seek from the minister is to support the Bird Advocacy Foundation's ethical wildlife management project in the Greater Shepparton and Mitchell shires as a pilot for future ethical wildlife management projects throughout Victoria.

As many Victorians have become increasingly aware through social media following the publication of last year's authority-to-control-wildlife permits, native birds and other wildlife across our state are being subjected to increasingly aggressive lethal control measures. This is occurring despite mounting evidence that lethal control rarely provides a lasting solution. Time and time again animals are removed only for new wildlife to return, creating a costly and ineffective cycle that fails to deliver the desired outcomes for either the people or the wildlife. Right now one of the greatest challenges in wildlife management is habituation. Traditional deterrent methods often lose effectiveness as animals become accustomed to them. This is precisely the challenge currently being experienced at the Hill Top Golf & Country Club and the Kilmore Golf Club, where large flocks of corellas continue to frequent the greens.

What is particularly encouraging is that my colleague from the Nationals Mrs Cleeland has also been seeking solutions to the issues faced at Kilmore. This presents us with a scenario where we can join unlikely forces on this issue to achieve an outcome that benefits everyone and is actually effective. The Bird Advocacy Foundation has proposed a permanent ethical management solution tailored specifically to these sites. With government support, this project could become a leading example of humane evidence-based wildlife management in Victoria.

The Bird Advocacy Foundation team includes Emeritus Professor Gisela Kaplan and Mark Jurisevic, both internationally recognised experts in bird behaviour and wildlife management. They were the architects of the ethical permanent bird management solution scientific trials, which were conducted under commercial conditions across a range of settings including almond orchards, vineyards, grain storage facilities and local government sites. The trial reports demonstrate that effective long-term alternatives to lethal control exist when we invest in innovation rather than destruction. This is an

opportunity for Victoria to adopt a different approach, one that is kinder, smarter and effective in the long term.

Be Bold Be Heard

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria) (19:10): (2601) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Education. Victoria's schools are more than just places where young people get a great education; they are places where they build confidence and respect, and of course that leads to inclusive communities. I am proud that Geelong is leading the way in empowering teenage girls to speak up and influence decisions that affect them. The Deputy Premier and Minister for Education, the Labor candidate for South Barwon Rebecca Thistleton and I visited the Oberon High School recently. We met with students participating in the Be Bold Be Heard initiative and heard about the impact that Be Bold Be Heard has had on them and their schools. We heard from students Hope, Kobi, Evie and Ruby about the Be Bold Be Heard program and what it has meant to them. They spoke with honesty, courage and maturity about leadership, respect, inclusion and creating positive change in their local school community. It was also wonderful to hear from a former participant, Annabelle, about how the program has helped her build her confidence and has given her the tools to create change. I am really optimistic that through initiatives like Be Bold Be Heard younger people will teach others how to be respectful while advocating for change. The action I am seeking from the minister is an update on the rollout of the Be Bold Be Heard program across western Victoria and beyond.

Suburban Rail Loop

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:12): (2602) My adjournment is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Ask anyone who lives, dines or runs a business in Glen Waverley, and they will tell you the same thing: parking near Kingsway is now a nightmare. At the last election the Glen Waverley Traders Association was given a clear commitment that a multilevel car park would be built on the Euneva West site bounded by O'Sullivan Road, Euneva Avenue and Railway Parade and that it would be delivered before major Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) construction began and before the Glendale Street car parks were closed. It was put to traders on numerous occasions that this was the key measure to offset the parking that was lost to the precinct. To this day, that has not been done. Traders are now being advised that construction will not even commence until 2029, so I need to be plain about what the delay means on the ground.

Glen Waverley is already losing parking. The Montclair Avenue closures are being felt now, and the replacement spaces in Myrtle Street sit well away from Kingsway and do little for the heart of the precinct. In late 2026 the central car park closes, taking a further 263 spaces with it. All the other car parks are already at capacity. This is an inconvenience that is now hitting the trade directly along Kingsway. The evening traffic is at near standstill. The businesses tell me that diners are ringing ahead to cancel bookings because they have spent 20 or 30 minutes just searching for a space and have simply given up. The revenue is walking out the door in a precinct that was promised additional capacity precisely so it could survive the decade of SRL build disruption. The car park was meant to be in place before the losses arrived. Instead the losses are arriving, the promises have been broken and the traders are right to fear the project may never be built at all.

The state Labor government, including the local member of Parliament, and the Suburban Rail Loop Authority have repeatedly made promises to these businesses that they will be considered and protected. These are all broken promises. The action I seek from the minister is a straight answer to the traders of Glen Waverley: will this car park be built, yes or no, and on what date? The businesses along Kingsway, whose livelihoods depend on it, deserve better than a promise quietly pushed out to 2029.

Triple Zero Victoria

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (19:15): (2603) I rise to raise a matter with the Minister for Emergency Services, and I am loath to do this, but I feel I have no other avenue. The action I seek is for the minister to finally approve a site visit to the Triple Zero Victoria call-taking

centre at Burwood. It was eight weeks ago when I first asked the minister to approve a site visit to Triple Zero Victoria. Since then my office has made repeated phone calls, sent multiple emails and sought every reasonable avenue to facilitate what should be an entirely routine request. The response: not a visit, not a briefing on site, not an opportunity to observe operations firsthand. Instead, after weeks of delay, we were offered a Teams meeting. What exactly is the government trying to hide? This is not a political stunt. It is not an attempt to interfere with operations. It is a straightforward fact-finding exercise. Other MPs have requested visits, so I do not see why I should be excluded. Understanding how the system works, where the pressure exists and what challenges staff face should be encouraged, not obstructed, yet that is all I have got from the minister's office, and I think it is a disgrace.

Labor's press release of 29 April said only 20 per cent of Triple Zero ambulance calls are currently referred to a secondary triage service. We also know that the Allan government has announced a further $28 million investment, intended to increase the use of secondary triage. What the government has not been willing to clearly explain is what success looks like. If 20 per cent of calls are currently diverted, what proportion is the government aiming for? How will that change demand for ambulances? How will outcomes be actually measured? That is the critical point here. These are entirely legitimate questions. We also know from the Legislative Council's inquiry into Ambulance Victoria, which I sat on, that some emergency calls have been misallocated or incorrectly categorised with serious consequences. The Victorian Ambulance Union said only 20 per cent, or one in five, matched the allocation when paramedics arrived on the scene. Understanding how call-taking decisions are made, how staff are trained and what safeguards exist should not be controversial.

Equally concerning are workforce questions. Data from the latest federal government Productivity Commission report shows Victoria operates its emergency call-taking service with significantly fewer staff than comparable services in New South Wales and Queensland. That raises important questions about workload, staffing levels, retention and system resilience. A Teams meeting cannot answer those questions. We are not in COVID now. It cannot provide the same insight as seeing operations firsthand, speaking with staff and understanding the realities of a service relied upon by millions of Victorians.

Triple Zero Victoria staff perform an extraordinary role under immense pressure. They deserve recognition, support and scrutiny that leads to improvement. They also deserve to understand that the opposition is interested in what they are doing. So I ask the minister: why has a simple site visit been blocked for eight weeks? Why the secrecy? Why the resistance? What is it that the government does not want us to see? I therefore ask the Minister for Emergency Services to approve without further delay a visit to the Triple Zero Victoria call centre in Burwood.

Disability services

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (19:18): (2604) My matter is for the Minister for Disability regarding the closure of supported independent living group homes across Victoria and the devastating impact this has on people with disabilities and their families. The action I seek is for the minister to urgently review the state government's decision to withdraw transition funding from the independent living scheme and reinstate this funding as a matter of priority to ensure the continuation of care, protection, health and stability and uphold the wellbeing and dignity of those affected.

I was recently contacted by constituents who raised deeply distressing concerns about the state of disability services in Victoria. They described families at breaking point, overwhelmed by fear, anxiety and uncertainty as they face the real prospect of their loved ones being displaced from homes that they rely on for daily care and stability. For many of these people, supported living arrangements are not simply accommodation. It is a safe environment designed for individuals with complex needs to live with dignity.

This crisis has been triggered by the Allan government's decision to withdraw transition funding that has long supported the operation of group homes under the NDIS framework. Nearly 2000 Victorians with significant disabilities are now at risk of losing access to these services, with multiple providers

warning that they cannot continue operating under this uncertain funding arrangement. Some homes have already flagged their closure, and more are expected to if urgent action is not taken. While these broader challenges linked to the transition to the NDIS include a funding model that does not fully cover the cost of high-needs care, the immediate pressure is being driven by the state government stepping back from its role. For years this top-up funding has been critical in ensuring these homes remain viable. Their removal without a long-term solution in place has created a dangerous gap – one which is now placing residents, family and workers in impossible situations. So I urgently request the state government to review their decision.

Epsom Primary School

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (19:20): (2605) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to immediately fund upgrades to the drop-off and pick-up points at Epsom Primary School and to also install a pedestrian crossing to connect with the car park across the road. I was pleased to see that my sustained advocacy for a safety upgrade to the intersection of Howard Street and Midland Highway has resulted in the 2026–27 state budget finally allocating funding for the project. However, the announcement fell short of addressing all of the safety issues on Howard Street and completely ignored the need to upgrade safety at the Epsom Primary School. I brought attention to the danger at the Howard Street intersection back in 2021 and have raised the matter in Parliament about a dozen times over the years, while the government failed to do anything about it. I have also continually noted that the danger at the intersection was linked to the high volume of car traffic on Howard Street as parents drop off and pick up their children who attend Epsom Primary School.

The Premier herself knows very well about the dangers along Howard Street, because Epsom Primary School is in Bendigo East, the Premier's own electorate. Shortly after her election in 1999 the Premier visited the school, and in April 2000 the Premier actually spoke in Parliament about traffic safety issues outside the school. She noted that there was only one main entry and exit point and there were high volumes of traffic at drop-off and pick-up times. The Premier also recounted how she personally witnessed a number of illegal U-turns across double lines while parents were trying to cross the road. The speech was 26 years ago, and in the whole time since then the member for Bendigo East has never secured funding to improve the drop-off and pick-up points at the school or to build a safe pedestrian crossing outside the entrance.

In a recent letter to the editor of the *Bendigo Advertiser*, a local said that she drove past Epsom Primary School one morning and saw several people lined up on the road opposite the primary school waiting to cross Howard Street to reach the main gate of the school. She wrote it was disturbing that there was no pedestrian crossing in evidence nor a crossing supervisor to assist these parents to get their children safely across the road to the school gates. This urgently needs to be addressed for the safety of our most vulnerable.

In 2024 the Premier said that the Victorian School Building Authority was investigating how the pick-up and drop-off zone at Epsom Primary School could be improved and was working closely with the school on a solution. What was the outcome of that investigation? It is now two years later. Nothing has been done, and the budget has no money for pedestrian traffic safety improvements at Epsom Primary. I hope the Premier has the decency to do the right thing by her constituents and actually fund and implement these vital road safety upgrades at the school before she is rolled by her party room and forced to retire entirely.

Family violence

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) incorporated the following (2606):

My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister Horne.

The NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team (DVDRT) has just launched a new website that provides detailed insight into homicides in NSW.

This is an independent group led by the State Coroner and made up of government representatives, community sector experts, and frontline workers who respond to family violence.

This dashboard is the first platform of its kind in Australia.

It provides easy access to specialist information about domestic violence-related deaths, including where these deaths most often occur, and the people most likely to be responsible for them.

An Australian-born, non-Indigenous man in his early 30s armed with a knife is the average type of domestic violence (DV) homicide offender, according to data released on this platform.

Cases reviewed by the DVDRT show that, over the past 26 years, nearly 300 women have been killed by a current or former intimate partner in relationships with a known history of domestic violence.

Of these women, **99 per cent** were the primary domestic violence victims throughout their relationship.

Since 2000, 134 children and young people, and 208 other individuals have been killed in a DV-related death in NSW.

Preventing domestic and family violence depends on **having strong and reliable data**. Every piece of information helps us understand where action is needed most to stop violence before it happens.

By collecting and sharing data, evidence and information, we can help improve responses to violence and support efforts to prevent the deaths of women and children.

Family violence in Victoria is increasing and **directly effects one in five Victorian women** over the course of their lifetime.

It is the leading contributor to preventable death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44 years.

We must strengthen our understanding of family violence to ensure that the safety, needs and experience of victims remain at the centre of our response.

Better data can help us to identify patterns, warning signs and identify risk factors associated with serious harm or fatalities.

No loss of life is acceptable, and every death must prompt our attention and commitment to change.

So, the action I seek is for the Minister to establish a publicly accessible data dashboard, similar to that developed by the NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team, to provide detailed information and insights into homicides occurring in the context of an identifiable history of family violence in Victoria.

Responses

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (19:23): Ms Ermacora raised a matter for the Attorney-General. Mrs McArthur raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety.

Ms Gray-Barberio raised a matter for me as Minister for Children in relation to the care allowance. This is an important issue, and that is why we acted on that in this budget to increase the rate of indexation for the care allowance. I refer her to the budget for further details on this.

Ms Terpstra raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, Dr Heath for the Minister for Youth Justice, Mr Galea for the Minister for Health Infrastructure, Mr Davis for the Attorney-General, Mr Berger for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Mrs Hermans for the Minister for Police, Ms Purcell for the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Ms Tierney for the Minister for Education, Mr Welch for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop and Ms Crozier for the Minister for Emergency Services.

Mr Luu raised a matter for me as Minister for Disability. It is a matter that has been raised with me a number of times in this chamber, and it remains a matter for the Commonwealth government and the National Disability Insurance Agency. Ms Lovell raised a matter for the Premier. I will refer those other matters accordingly.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (19:25): I committed to Ms Crozier to reviewing Minister Shing's answers to her at question time. I have reviewed the answers and I believe Minister Shing was relevant and did respond to the question, so I will not be asking for a written answer.

The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7:25 pm.