



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Tuesday 28 July 2026

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, Gaele	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira ²	Western Metropolitan	FFV	Ratnam, Samantha ⁵	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem ⁶	Northern Metropolitan	Ind
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Gray-Barberio, Anasina ³	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee ⁸	Northern Victoria	ON
Limbrick, David ⁴	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Welch, Richard ⁷	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

¹ Resigned 7 Dec 2023

² Lib from 26 Nov 2022 until 28 Mar 2023;

IndLib from 28 Mar 2023 until 27 Dec 2024;

Lib from 27 Dec 2024 until 28 Jul 2026;

Ind from 28 Jul 2026 until 6 Sep 2026

³ Appointed 14 Nov 2024

⁴ LDP until 26 Jul 2023

⁵ Resigned 8 Nov 2024

⁶ DLP until 25 Mar 2024

⁷ Appointed 7 Feb 2024

⁸ PHON until 3 Aug 2026

Party abbreviations

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

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Tuesday 28 July 2026

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

Bills

Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026

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

Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026

Royal assent

The PRESIDENT (12:04): I have a message from the Governor, dated 23 June:

The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Act of the present Session presented to her by the Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly:

21/2026 Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Act 2026

I have another message, dated 23 June:

The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Acts of the present Session presented to her by the Clerk of the Parliaments:

22/2026 Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Act 2026

23/2026 Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Act 2026

Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026

Clerk's corrections

The PRESIDENT (12:05): I have received a report from the Clerk of the Legislative Council informing the house that he has made a correction in the schedule of amendments made by the house to the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026. The letter reads:

Under Standing Order 14.34, I have made a correction in the Schedule of amendments made by the Legislative Council to the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026, listed as follows:

Original Amendment 10 in the Schedule of amendments has been moved to before original Amendment 5 and I have changed the insertion reference in the Amendment from "Clause 3, page 4, after line 27 insert –" to "Clause 3, after line 32 insert –".

This change ensures that the new definition being inserted will appear alphabetically in the definitions list, as opposed to at the end of the definitions list.

Announcements

Ombudsman referral

The PRESIDENT (12:06): I advise of an update from the Ombudsman. I have received a letter from the Ombudsman dated 3 July 2026 advising that the investigation into matters referred by the Legislative Council on 30 July 2025 relating to the performance of the quality assessment and regulation division of the Department of Education in monitoring and investigating enforcement compliance with Victoria's Child Safe Standards and the national quality framework is progressing well. However, it appears unlikely that they will be in a position to report to the Parliament during the parliamentary term. The Ombudsman will keep the house apprised of any further developments and table the investigation report in both houses when it is complete.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:07): I move:

That the Ombudsman's letter be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Political debate

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:07): (1373) My question is to member for Western Victoria Jacinta Ermacora. In relation to motion 1509 on the notice paper, do you intend to bring forward this motion on misogynistic behaviour in Victorian politics today given you and your colleagues have just been party to bringing down a female Premier?

The PRESIDENT: In line with the standing orders I will call Ms Ermacora, but she needs to confine her remarks to actually when she may plan to bring on this particular motion –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Mr McIntosh, I am sharing some wisdom here – rather than going into any context.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (12:08): I thank Mrs McArthur for asking about when the government will bring forward this very, very important motion. That is a matter for our parliamentary processes, and I will confine my answer to that.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:09): Ms Ermacora, given that you and your colleagues have just dumped a female Premier in spectacular style, sending the state into chaos, will you now be withdrawing the motion?

The PRESIDENT: It is hard to find that to be supplementary to the substantive answer. Ms Ermacora can reply if she wants, as she sees fit, or not.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (12:10): The irony is not lost on me, coming from that side. I reiterate my previous answer, but misogynistic behaviour is an extremely important issue and should not be used as a joke in this chamber.

Albert Park advisory committee

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:10): (1374) My question is to the Minister for Environment. On 14 October 2025 the government, through Minister Gayle Tierney, who was representing Steve Dimopoulos, the Minister for Environment at the time, in this chamber gave an explicit commitment that Parks Victoria would establish a new Albert Park advisory committee to improve engagement with the park's stakeholders, such as local sporting clubs, park users and environmental advocates. The chamber was told that Parks Victoria had already begun drafting the process, but nearly 10 months later stakeholders have seen no committee, no terms of reference and no public process for appointing members. In a functioning government establishing one local consultative committee should not be so hard. Minister, why has Labor failed to deliver this commitment?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:11): I thank Ms Copsy for her question and her interest in this matter. I understand these concerns have been raised a number of times not only in this place but broadly in the community, especially across Southern Metropolitan – in your electorate, Mr Batchelor's electorate, Mr Berger's electorate and that of others in this chamber, Ms Crozier and Mr Davis. They all work hard across the Southern Metropolitan Region. I do understand that, in relation to the specifics of that matter, Parks Victoria are working towards a resolution and setting up a committee. There are a number of entities, and that is a quite a specific question you have asked me today, so I will take guidance. I manage over a hundred committees – almost a thousand committees in fact. I think with that level of specificity I am happy to take it on notice and give you a written response in due course.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:12): Thank you, Minister. I look forward to that response. If you could also let me know, I understand there is a requirement and a commitment to compensate the Albert Park sporting clubs for losses sustained through the extended disruption caused by this government's grand prix. My question is: why have you as minister not executed this following this year's grand prix? And when should the sporting clubs expect this commitment to be actioned?

The PRESIDENT: I do not know if that was supplementary to the substantive.

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:13): I am happy to take it. I thank Ms Copsey for her supplementary question. I understand there are a range of concerns around Albert Park, especially about the use by and the effects of the grand prix. I know Mr Dimopoulos is proud of the record of our world-class event, the grand prix. I was fortunate enough to be there this year and see the hundreds of thousands of Victorians that attended that fantastic event, which is crucial to our visitor economy and our hospitality sector, but really across the board it is a world-class event. In relation to the concerns about Albert Park, I think, as I answered to the substantive, I will take that on notice. It is very specific. As the environment minister, I have about a thousand land management groups that report to me. I would not be able to give you a detailed response without notice that would do it justice, so I will take that on notice and respond in due course.

Ministers statements: ambulance services

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:13): Victoria has some of the best and most highly skilled paramedics in Australia and around the world.

Members interjecting.

Harriet SHING: President, can I take this from the top?

The PRESIDENT: Reset the clock. I ask all sides of the chamber to let the minister do her statement in silence.

Harriet SHING: As I was saying, Victoria has got some of the best and brightest and most dedicated paramedics in Australia and indeed around the world, and we are so proud of them. Everyone deserves access to life-saving care when and as they need it. That takes a variety of forms, and our paramedics are right there at the heart of the delivery of that care. That is why I was so proud to join with the CEO of Ambulance Victoria and so many others to welcome the 53 newest paramedics to induction before they hit the road on 17 August. They will learn clinical education, the way in which they engage with people, de-escalation and the sorts of things that will help people when they most need care, comfort and expertise. These paramedics have chosen to be with Victorians on their days of greatest need, and they join more than 5600 paramedics across the board.

Last week it was Thank a Paramedic Day. It was really wonderful to head to another ambulance station to talk with paramedics, but more importantly, to hear their experiences and to extend gratitude and respect to them for everything that they do. I have already visited more than eight ambulance branches and spoken with paramedics about the things that matter most to them, including the care, the resources and the support they get and the importance of a safe working environment.

Only Labor has invested more than \$2 billion in paramedics across the board. We have increased the workforce by 53 per cent, and we are building and upgrading more than 51 ambulance stations. Under a Liberal–One Nation coalition we will see that slashed, because the Liberals and One Nation, last time they were in government, went to war with paramedics and were very happy to make sure that paramedics were labelled as militants and stooges – that was at the same time that services were being slashed. Make no mistake: if they are given the chance, they will do it again, so which initiative are they going to cut first?

Construction industry

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:16): (1375) My question is to the Treasurer. Former IBAC Commissioner Robert Redlich recently said of Big Build corruption that a royal commission is:

... the only mechanism for properly investigating ... 10 years of rotten culture.

... I know of no scandal that has involved the sort of public wastage that has occurred here ... it's only a royal commission that can root out all of the ... reasons why the checks and balances that are in place have failed.

Mr Redlich also said the Big Build provided an environment in which bikie gangs and criminal organisations have been able to flourish and Victorian taxpayers are not getting value for money because some contractors had to pay an extortion fee to be able to survive the Big Build. Given that Mr Redlich is one of the most distinguished integrity figures in the state and that now the government has shown Jacinta Allan the door, will you now support a royal commission?

The PRESIDENT: I would have thought that was a question for one of the justice portfolios rather than the Treasurer. If you want to rephrase it so it has something to do with the Treasurer, you can.

Bev McARTHUR: I am very happy to direct it to the Minister for Industrial Relations.

The PRESIDENT: I think the Treasurer is prepared to assist the chamber, so I will call the Treasurer to answer as she sees fit.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:18): Mrs McArthur, whilst I believe that you have not directed a question relevant to the Treasurer or the Minister for Industrial Relations in the way you framed your question, I am more than happy to respond in a similar way to comments that I am well on the record for in this place. We have no tolerance for criminal behaviour, intimidatory behaviour and any –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The Treasurer could have not responded whatsoever because it is not in her remit, but she is assisting the chamber, so she should be heard in silence.

Jaclyn SYMES: As I was saying, we have a zero-tolerance approach to these allegations, which is why we acted swiftly. It is why we have implemented all of the recommendations from the Wilson report. It is why we have taken action and strengthened the powers of the Labour Hire Authority. It is why we have broadened the definition in relation to the fit and proper person test; if you go and check the *Hansard*, Mr Welch was very, very concerned about the people that might be caught up in an expanded program that was designed to make sure that we identified and weeded out poor behaviour. I would point to the support for Victoria Police. In their taskforce they have made arrests and there are charges, and that should continue for any further allegations. There is a complaint line that is under the WIV, and I would encourage anybody who has any bit of information, whether it is an allegation or just something that they might be aware of, that this is a safe place to go. You can do it anonymously, and obviously, as Minister for Industrial Relations, it is an agency that I am very proud of. They are working hand in glove with a range of other agencies to make sure that people can be supported if they have got issues to raise. That work is underway.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:20): Former Ombudsman Deborah Glass has said this about the government's attitude to major projects:

... it doesn't care what it costs ... It doesn't care what else is involved. It just keeps on digging

There seems to be no desire to expose where those public funds have gone. Treasurer, now that Jacinta Allan has gone, will you show more interest in finding out where those public funds have gone?

The PRESIDENT: The Treasurer can answer as she sees fit.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:21): I refer to my answer that I provided Mrs McArthur to her substantive question.

Forest management

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:21): (1376) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Two years after the cessation of native timber harvesting in Victoria, environmental organisations such as the Victorian Forest Alliance continue to express concerns that logging is effectively continuing via the back door through so-called forest management practices. These include a minimum of 10 full logging trucks per day for the last five years in the Lerderderg national park. Native forests provide essential habitat for threatened and endangered species, and their loss has significant impacts on biodiversity. While I acknowledge that logging is sometimes legitimately used to reduce fire risk, this must not be at the cost of our native forests. The system is failing. The current Forests Act 1958 and licensing framework still allows timber harvesting through forest produce licensing. My question is: why does the Forests Act 1958 and the current licensing framework continue to permit timber harvesting through forest produce licences?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:22): I thank Ms Payne for her question and her interest in this really important matter. I do think it is important to bust myth from fact as well because what I am hearing is this allegation of logging by stealth. It seems to be coming through, I am not saying that you are alleging that, some of the email campaigns that I have experienced as the Minister for Environment – that there is some logging going on. But our land management priorities are clear. We want to reduce fire risk, protect communities and improve the public's and the forest's health, so essential forest and fire management activities, as you acknowledge, are needed. From time to time fuel breaks and removing hazardous trees are required to not only protect communities but to protect, to be honest, the biodiversity of areas and the animals that they sustain. There is a reason for that work, and the reason is where possible woody debris, retaining forests that support habitat and biodiversity. We will not take out necessarily all the debris. The supply of by-products is always limited but necessary at times.

We made a tough decision as a Labor government to end and bring forward the end of the native timber harvesting industry in January 2024. It was the Labor government that did that. Victoria's native forests deliver far greater value when they are protected for biodiversity, for climate resilience and for community safety and not used for commercial timber production. I do not necessarily accept the premise in terms of the act failing; I think it is working as intended. We did have a by-products auction recently. At the first trial of the storm debris from the Wombat State Forest it was demonstrated that where materials need to be removed for safety, bushfire risk or forest health reasons, they can be put to productive use instead of wasted, and the value generated is a by-product of storm recovery and forest management works, not from commercial timber harvesting. That ended in January 2024.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:24): I thank the minister for his response. The Australian government set a national target to protect and conserve 30 per cent of Australia's landmass and 30 per cent of Australia's marine areas by 2030 – the 30–30 target. By October 2022 environment ministers across all states and territories had agreed to this target. To reach the 30 per cent land target, we need to protect or conserve another 34.3 million hectares. For context, Victoria itself is around 22 million hectares. By way of supplementary, can the minister advise how the government is progressing toward its goal to protect 30 per cent of land and water as committed to in the 2022 meeting of environment ministers?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:25): I thank Ms Payne for her supplementary question. It is a really good question, because it gives me the opportunity to talk about our government's commitment to progressing healthy forest planning and to determining the most

appropriate long-term management arrangements that are based on science, based on community consultation and based on working with our traditional owners. That is a commitment that I am committed to and that the Labor government is committed to. We are committed to contributing to Australia's biodiversity, including 30 by 30, for effective conservation outcomes; we are working with states and territories and the Commonwealth to bring that to fruition. This is about conservation outcomes, not simply changing the label on land. We will continue to do that work, and that is a national commitment to be reached by 2030. That is being implemented through nationally agreed frameworks and state biodiversity and public land management policies rather than through a separate Victorian statutory target. The international framework recognises that conservation can be achieved through protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures where appropriate, and our priority will always be to ensure our forests are managed to deliver biodiversity outcomes.

Ministers statements: kindergarten funding

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:26): I rise to update the house on how the Labor government is helping local kinders across Victoria to upgrade, refurbish and renovate. I recently visited Keon Park Kindergarten with the member for Preston in the other place to announce that our government is delivering \$12.3 million across 63 kinders through the Building Blocks improvement grants. It was an absolute pleasure to join Popi and the team to speak about the important works that that kinder will be able to complete because of funding from this government. While I was there I had the opportunity to recognise the incredible 38-year contribution of Pat Sebben and her late husband Stephen. Pat first joined the management committee in 1978 and between 1985 and 2020 worked as an educator at the kinder, watching both her children and her grandchildren attend, while her husband Stephen generously volunteered his time over many years to maintain the kindergarten building. Their contributions reflect the deep connection that so many communities have with their local kinder. That is why our government is proud to be backing these kinders, funding improvements to their facilities so they can support generations of children for years to come. We are doing this because we believe that every child deserves the best start in life. Every child, no matter their background, ability or postcode, deserves the chance to learn, play and grow in a great local kinder; every parent and every carer deserves to know their child is receiving a quality early years education in an environment designed to help them thrive; and every kinder teacher, educator and member of staff deserves to have a workplace that reflects their dedication, professionalism and care.

When it comes to investing directly in kinder facilities, the contrast between our government and those opposite could not be clearer. While we have invested in kinder infrastructure in every single state budget, delivering more than \$3.8 billion to build, expand and upgrade hundreds of kinders right across the state, when you look at the budget papers from those opposite, in their time there was no asset funding allocated for kinders in their whole four years – none. Only a Labor government can be trusted to deliver kindergarten facilities for children and for families.

Maroondah Hospital

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:28): (1377) My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, when will the Faraday cage be replaced at Maroondah Hospital?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:28): Thank you, Mr McGowan, and thank you for that question. I just want to perhaps take people through the question you have asked as it relates to the Faraday cage, because –

Nick McGowan interjected.

Harriet SHING: Mr McGowan, image quality – and I will perhaps give some context for other people in the chamber – is something which is secured at its highest by the way in which we can have MRI services operating. Eastern Health, in relation to the MRI facility at the Maroondah Hospital, has undertaken a really significant investigation on an intermittent image artefact that was affecting the

MRI service. What that translates to is a degradation of the MRI room's radio frequency shield; that is the Faraday cage, just for anybody else who is interested in what this means. That degradation was in fact the cause of the issue. But I also want to be really clear: the MRI scanner is actually continuing to operate normally, so I want to allay any concerns that might be promulgated by people for perhaps improper purposes. Eastern Health has been very clear: patient safety has not been compromised. The artefact is actually predictable. We can readily identify through established clinical review processes what those impacts look like, and that includes review by MRI technologists and reporting radiologists. The vast majority of scans have been unaffected. To date, five women required repeat breast imaging because the image quality was not considered adequate for diagnosis. But rescans have occurred at Box Hill Hospital, and all scans that were not recalled were considered diagnostically –

Nick McGowan: On a point of order, President, on relevance, the question was very, very limited. The question was simply: when will the cage be replaced? I appreciate the minister's background, but I do not need the background. What the people of Maroondah and what the people of Ringwood, Blackburn and Vermont need is a working Faraday cage. We have asked when it will be replaced.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister has been relevant to the question.

Harriet SHING: Well, you say you do not need background, Mr McGowan, but you have emailed indicating that several women had been turned away from Maroondah Hospital. The Department of Health investigated those claims, and so far they have not been able to find any evidence to support that claim. I understand your concern around this being a known issue in early 2025. Again, Eastern Health has advised that it has no visibility of concerns having been raised in relation to this matter at that time and that once concerns were raised, they were responded to swiftly and there was an investigation that commenced.

Eastern Health is progressing at pace replacement plans for the Faraday cage. It is not an uncomplicated process, Mr McGowan, as I would hope you would respect, whilst also maintaining continuity of the MRI processes that are being undertaken. That includes establishing alternate access arrangements for patients during that remediation period, and the department will continue to monitor Eastern Health's progress toward remediation of that office.

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:32): Minister, that really is quite breathtaking and very sad for the people of my community, because if you cannot answer the basic question of when a simple Faraday cage will be replaced –

Harriet Shing interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: It is a simple question. On 28 January 2026 the test engineer David Burgess from Faraday Pty Ltd conducted exhaustive tests. Laugh all you want, Minister, but this is an engineer who conducted exhaustive tests –

A member interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: she was laughing – at Maroondah Hospital on the Faraday cage. Do you know, Minister, that on 28 January 2026 that cage failed 69 of its 72 tests? To stand in this place and tell this place that Eastern Health did not know that that cage was failing and that it produced images of lesser quality is an outright lie. It is an absolute lie, and it does no service to this place, nor to Eastern Health, who should be replacing it immediately. Minister, when will you replace not only the Faraday cage but also the MRI, which is at the end of its life? It either needs magnets replaced or the machine – you cannot even buy it online anymore.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:33): Thanks, Mr McGowan. Well, we know who will not be investing in medical and health infrastructure, and that is you lot. As I said earlier –

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

The PRESIDENT: My crystal ball tells me she was about to address the question.

Harriet SHING: You could not help yourself in the preamble, Mr McGowan. Just to be really clear: when you refer to the repair of a Faraday cage as a simple process, you fundamentally misunderstand the nature of MRI imaging and what needs to be done to understand the impact of scans and of radio technology.

Nick McGowan: On a point of order, President, the minister has verballed me; I never said it was a simple process. I simply asked the question: when will it be replaced? I never said 'simple'. It is a simple question without an answer.

The PRESIDENT: There is no point of order.

Harriet SHING: Again, Eastern Health implemented risk controls following confirmation of the issue in February 2026. We have got hundreds of MRIs around the state – hundreds of them – and we want to continue to invest in that technology. It is very hard –

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn Symes: On a point of order, President, whilst I have some respect for Mr McGowan's passion about issues in his electorate, literally yelling at the minister in such a badgering manner while she is attempting to provide him an answer is very unparliamentary. The minister is attempting to answer his question, and I think he should pay the respect of listening to the answer.

The PRESIDENT: I uphold the point of order.

Nick McGowan: On a point of order, President, if we want to characterise the way in which everyone speaks in this place, the fact that the minister is standing up and we are speaking about 900 breast exams for women over two years, some of which the minister has today conceded they have had to do twice in different procedures, is not a fair point of order.

The PRESIDENT: It is not a point of order. Members that ask a question, if they want to hear the answer, should not repeatedly shout at the minister, and that is the point of order I upheld.

Harriet SHING: Once concerns were raised with the medical imaging program leadership, they began that response to the comprehensive investigation that was kicked off. Now, there was appropriate risk management put in place, and plans are continuing at pace to replace the Faraday cage – no simple exercise, as I am sure you would agree.

Patient transport

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:36): (1378) My question is to the Minister for Health. Alison lives in regional Victoria and is currently undergoing specialist treatment for cervical cancer. She has travelled from Mildura to Melbourne 14 times in the last 16 months. Recent changes to eligibility for air travel from Mildura under the VPTAS place an additional burden on patients and specialists. I spoke to Alison after she wrote to me:

Living in regional Victoria should never mean receiving less equitable access to healthcare. Yet the current VPTAS policy requires many patients to obtain additional medical certification simply to demonstrate that a one-hour flight is more appropriate than travelling six hours by road or nine hours by public transport.

Minister, why is the government making it harder for regional Victorians to get the support they need to access specialist care?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:37): Thanks, Ms Crozier, and thank you for raising this issue today. Cervical cancer is a really difficult process to live through and to get treatment for, and so I do hope that the

person you have spoken with and her family have got the support around them as she continues with that path, hopefully, to remission and to an all clear.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Harriet SHING: Ms Crozier, I am trying to begin my comments by acknowledging just how tough it is to manage a cancer diagnosis, and for people in rural and regional Victoria this is something which is compounded by the tyranny of distance. That is where the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme is so important. This is VPTAS's work – to make sure that we can ensure that rural and regional Victorians are not left out of pocket for essential travel and are accessing the health services that they need. So from earlier this year we implemented some changes to the VPTAS to make things easier for Victorians who access the scheme, and that includes a new online claims portal, which is about reducing the challenges and administrative burdens on families and streamlining applications, expanded eligibility to clinical trials and specialist dental and updated travel rules and clearer guidelines for consistency.

In addition to that, we have also trained additional staff, who have been allocated to process those VPTAS claims. That is already leading to significant improvement in processing times. The department is also working really closely alongside claimants who are experiencing hardship to ensure that they have got the support they need while they are awaiting assessment. Again, we want to make sure that we are continuing to support people with access to VPTAS, and where there are individual cases, Ms Crozier, as I have indicated to you on a number of occasions, please have a conversation with me, with the office, around any issues that we can assist with on a case-by-case basis to ensure we do have equitable outcomes. We want to make sure that those conversations can continue in good faith and for the purpose of providing better outcomes for patients, irrespective of where they live.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:40): The minister might want to spin her way out of this, but the facts are the facts, and Alison's case is just one of many. She referenced clinical trials. The facts are that clinical trials are being cut in regional Victoria, and regional Victorians are not getting access to those clinical trials. Minister, isn't it a fact that you have cut this critical support for vulnerable Victorian patients like Alison because of the state's dire financial position after years of mismanagement under this government?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:40): Ms Crozier, again I will come back to where I started in the answer to your substantive question and to extending my empathy and sympathy to Alison and to her family. I do not want to diminish in any way her experience of a cancer diagnosis, of treatment and of what is all too often a really, really difficult path. The answer to your supplementary question is no.

Ministers statements: vehicle registration rebate

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) (12:41): With just three days remaining until applications close, I would encourage every eligible Victorian to make sure they do not miss out on the Victorian government's 20 per cent vehicle registration rebate. The rebate has been one of the most popular cost-of-living initiatives delivered by the Labor government, helping families, workers and communities right across the state with the cost of owning and running a vehicle. More than 3.5 million applications have already been received, with hundreds of millions of dollars being returned directly to Victorians. For many households every dollar counts. Whether it is helping cover the weekly grocery bill, school expenses, fuel costs or other everyday essentials, this rebate is putting money back where it belongs: in the pockets of Victorians. Eligible Victorians can claim the rebate for up to two privately registered light vehicles, providing savings of up to \$372 for many households. We have worked hard to make the application process simple and accessible, with most eligible Victorians able to complete their application online in just a few minutes. On Friday it was great to visit the Petrucci family, who have benefited from the rebate, assisting with paying for fuel in order to visit and care for their grandson. Applications close at

11:59 pm this Thursday. Do not miss out, anyone who is eligible, simply because you left it too late. We do not want that. I encourage everyone who thinks they may be eligible to check the requirements and submit their application before the deadline. The Labor government is focused on delivering practical support that makes a real difference, and this rebate is doing exactly that by easing the cost-of-living pressures for millions of Victorians across the state.

Construction industry

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:43): (1379) My question is for the Treasurer. I refer to the cabinet submission dated June 2023 from key infrastructure agencies that was provided to cabinet, warning of rampant systemic corruption on Big Build sites. Treasurer, I ask: what decisive action did you take to stop dead the corruption on these sites, still running into the billions of dollars?

The PRESIDENT: June 2023 seems a long time ago, and I am really unsure what portfolio responsibilities the Treasurer had, so it is –

David Davis: On a point of order, President, all cabinet members received this submission, and she could have taken action or not. My question is: what decisive action did she take? The answer could be none.

The PRESIDENT: I would imagine cabinet submissions on all sorts of items are presented to the cabinet and, getting back to the portfolio responsibilities at the time or even now, I am confused where you are going from –

David Davis: On a point of order, President, questions can be asked about matters of portfolio responsibilities or with which ministers are connected. She is a member of cabinet and received that submission. Others received it too, but she received that submission. ‘Did she take an action?’ is my simple question – or not?

Sonja Terpstra: On a further point of order, President, Mr Davis is debating the point. It is not a point of order. He should not use points of order as points of debate. It is not a point of order to debate the point.

The PRESIDENT: I will uphold Ms Terpstra’s point of order. The Treasurer is always willing, if she can, to help the chamber. I will call the Treasurer and she can answer as she sees fit.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:45): Mr Davis, it is difficult for me to respond other than in a similar manner to which I did to Mrs McArthur, because again you have not made an appropriate nexus between a cabinet submission, I think you referred to, from some time ago – the crux of your question was about action in relation to allegations of –

David Davis interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: We can all go back and look at Mr Davis’s exact words. I am sorry, Mr Davis; I am paraphrasing. Your question was asking exactly what action was taken in response to allegations of inappropriate behaviour on construction worksites. They are the measures that I just outlined to Mrs McArthur.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:46): It is a wishy-washy, limp response. I ask therefore, Treasurer: why did you not support a royal commission when this smouldering evidence was presented to you and the whole of cabinet, including Gabrielle Williams and Ben Carroll?

The PRESIDENT: I am not sure what time zone we are in now.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: The Treasurer has indicated she is happy to respond.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:47): I will not be discussing matters that are discussed in cabinet.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, I am not asking about the cabinet discussion. I am asking about the actions. ‘Why did you not support a royal commission?’ is a very simple question. It is outside of cabinet. She could have supported it outside of cabinet.

The PRESIDENT: That is not a point of order. In your question you did refer to a cabinet process which the Treasurer responded to.

David Davis: I certainly did in the document, but nonetheless it is a simple question. Did she support a royal commission? Why not?

The PRESIDENT: She has answered the question.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:48): I move:

That the minister’s failure to answer the question be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

The PRESIDENT: I am happy if you want to rephrase it. I cannot put that question.

David DAVIS: I move:

That the minister’s answers be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Melbourne Water

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1380) My question is for the Minister for Water. There have been recent reports that the Victorian Labor government has commissioned consultancy firm EY to examine future options for Melbourne Water, including options that could involve selling, leasing or otherwise monetising some or all of its assets. Minister, will you rule out selling off, leasing, privatising or otherwise monetising Melbourne Water?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:49): Thank you, Ms Gray-Barberio, for this question, and thank you for the opportunity to talk to the importance of water and natural resource infrastructure investment, which we have delivered time and time again not alongside the cooperation and support of those opposite but despite it. We are not the ones who need to explain our plans for Melbourne Water. In fact it was actually the Liberals who took a plan to privatise Melbourne Water to the 2018 and 2022 elections.

Aiv Puglielli: On a point of order, President, I am not seeking to interrupt, however, the question was asked to the government, not to the opposition. The minister should return to the question.

The PRESIDENT: Yes. I will ask the minister to continue.

Harriet SHING: With the benefit of 2 minutes and 25 seconds, I do just want to provide a little bit of context here, because this is a big issue, and I think it warrants some further detail in the way in which we talk about it. Why don’t I start with the end point that I suspect might provide you with comfort in the same way that I have provided comfort to people in recent days following random media speculation? We do not have any plans to privatise Melbourne Water, but what I can tell you is that those opposite had plans to privatise Melbourne Water, because they took that as a promise –

David Davis: On a point of order, President, question time is not an opportunity to attack the opposition, nor is it an opportunity to tell rampant and blatant lies.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I call the chamber to order. The minister was responding to Ms Gray-Barberio's question. If we could keep the noise down, then Ms Gray-Barberio would be able to hear the answer to her question.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, the minister did attack the opposition, and she is not to do that in question time. I am therefore asking: will you –

Members interjecting.

David Davis: No, it is not part of question time for the minister to attack the opposition, and I am asking for a ruling on that.

The PRESIDENT: The point of order is correct, and there are a number of previous rulings that question time is not an opportunity for a minister to attack the opposition. I would ask, though, too, that people not interject, particularly when a member of a different party is asking a question and the opposition are yelling. I ask for respect from everyone.

Harriet SHING: It is a great shame that in making his point of order Mr Davis referred to an attack when I referred to privatisation, because privatisation was exactly the playbook that was taken to the 2018 and 2022 elections. In particular in discussions while Victorians were battling floods that covered much of the state, they were proposing to sell off –

Members interjecting.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, not only is it an attack on the opposition, it is also a lie, and it is not open to the minister to lie or to attack the opposition.

The PRESIDENT: There is a difference between attacking the opposition and comparing previous policies, and I believe the minister was comparing previous policies. Mr Davis, I ask you to refrain from stating that members have lied.

Harriet SHING: What we have just heard from Mr Davis is that they are ruling out any privatisation of water assets. That then is the statement of fact that I think we can extrapolate from today's interjections from those opposite. I am not sure how they are going to pay for their \$40 billion in cuts, but we have no plans to privatise Melbourne Water. That is not what we do –

Renee Heath: On a point of order, President, question time is not a time to attack the opposition, and I ask you to bring her back to the question.

The PRESIDENT: I am not too sure whether that was an attack or whether that was picking up an interjection which was unruly. I ask the minister to ignore interjections.

Harriet SHING: It will be a delight to ignore those opposite. What I will say is that we invest in water infrastructure, we do not privatise it. The reason that we invest in it is because Victorians need it and they deserve it. Even when you across the way turn on the tap here in Melbourne, a quarter of the water that comes out of that tap is from the desalination plant that you opposed year on year and that you have had howls of protest on. We have now placed the largest order available for the desalination plant: two-thirds of a trillion litres of water are coming to a drought-affected state as the population grows and the seasonal rainfall continues to reduce. We do not privatise, we invest. We do not turn our backs on the needs of a growing state – unlike you. The only way you can pay for \$40 billion in cuts is to privatise whatever you can find. We know that that is what you will do. You have done it before, and if given half the chance, you will do it again, and Victorians will be the ones who pay.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:55): Thank you, Minister. You may have ruled it out – you are not going to privatise Melbourne Water – but my question also involves selling, leasing or monetising Melbourne Water. In England and Wales privatisation of water has been a total disaster, with people seeing skyrocketing water bills, while waterways have been used to

discharge sewage, causing rivers, lakes and seas to have negative environmental and health impacts, and investment in critical water infrastructure has fallen behind demand. With an unmet demand needed to source an additional 5 billion litres of water a day by 2050, giving our public assets to private corporations to make private profit means Victorians will pay more and get worse services. Minister, how can Victorians be confident that your Labor government will not lease Melbourne Water to a private corporation when that has been done with the land titles office, the port, public housing and VicRoads?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:56): I will reject the last statement you made about public housing. Again, two-thirds of the housing in Victoria that is social housing is public, it remains public and we continue to invest in partnerships. Again, unfounded media speculation causes a great deal of concern and uncertainty for people. I have ruled out that speculation. I have been very, very clear, including with people who represent those who work across the sector, unlike what we saw in 2022 when sewage works leases were part of the coalition's manifesto before the election. In fact they put it in their books because that was the only way that they could meet their promises. What we know is, with a \$40 billion promise for cuts, we are now seeing here today that there will be an announcement from the Liberals, from the One Nation coalition, that they will not privatise any kind of water infrastructure, but who knows, because they have done it before, they will do it again, and that is the only way that they can actually meet their commitments. We do not do that. We will not do that.

Ministers statements: United States wildfires

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:57): I rise to inform the house that Victoria is once again supporting our international partners in responding to significant wildfire activity in the west of the United States. Following two formal requests, Australia and New Zealand are deploying 70 highly skilled incident management and field operations specialists to assist with wildfire response efforts in the Pacific Northwest. The United States is currently at national preparedness level 5, their highest level of wildfire readiness, with 78 large fires burning across the US. In response, Victoria is proud to answer the call for assistance as part of our longstanding partnership with the United States in wildfire and emergency management.

Since 2000 Victoria and our North American partners have supported one another through numerous deployments, reflecting a strong tradition of cooperation and sharing of expertise during periods of heightened fire activity. Victoria is contributing 29 personnel to this deployment, including 24 personnel from Forest Fire Management Victoria and five members from the Country Fire Authority. Together they bring internationally recognised expertise in incident management and field operations and will play an important role in supporting the response. The Victorian contingent departed last week for a single 36-day deployment, including travel, operational duties, rest and demobilisation, before returning home to undertake a mandatory rest period. This deployment has been carefully planned to ensure Victoria maintains its emergency preparedness while supporting our international partners. International solidarity is very important for our government.

Nick McGowan interjected.

Enver ERDOGAN: On behalf of the Victorian government and on behalf of I would assume everyone in this chamber, Mr McGowan, I thank these dedicated personnel and their families for their commitment and service to not only our state but also our US allies.

Nick McGowan interjected.

Enver ERDOGAN: We wish them a safe deployment, and I look forward to welcoming them home after another successful contribution to international wildfire response.

Nick McGowan interjected.

Enver ERDOGAN: That is disgraceful, Mr McGowan.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Mr McGowan, you are about to be tipped out. I think the minister was talking up good people that do good things. As I have said before, it is really ordinary when someone is doing a members statement or similar and talking up good people doing good things that they get yelled at, and ministers statements are the same. I just ask people: if you do not respect the person across the chamber, respect the people that they are talking about.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (13:00): Minister Erdogan committed to Ms Copsey to get her responses, and he will do that in line with the standing orders.

Constituency questions

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (13:01): (2426) In the Latrobe Valley crime has risen in the last four years 30 per cent, and it has lost eight full-time Victoria Police positions. My constituent Nathan Theissling is a small business owner, and he has witnessed much crime on our streets. He has witnessed a violent carjacking, a ramraid, violent assaults and rampant youth crime, and all the while we see the current Victorian government mention a police academy. A police academy in the near future is not good enough. I call on the Minister for Police and ask: what is he going to do to stop this 30 per cent increase in crime on our streets?

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (13:02): (2427) My question is for the Minister for Planning. Last week alongside the Animal Justice Party's candidate for Benambra Mike Fuery I visited the Leneva Valley, which is currently slated for urban development. Centred on Middle Creek and bordered by Baranduda Regional Park, Bears Hill reserve and Castle Creek reserve, the valley provides ideal habitat for eastern grey kangaroos. Separate mobs inhabit each side of the valley, with Middle Creek connecting this important wildlife corridor. Baranduda Boulevard runs through the centre of the valley and already poses a significant threat to wildlife. In fact a local rescuer from Kangaloola Wildlife Shelter has responded to 350 kangaroo road strikes along just a 7-kilometre stretch of road over the past seven years. As development progresses, additional threats such as fencing, companion animal attacks and increased human interaction will place even greater pressure on these populations. Will the minister commit to putting effective wildlife protection measures in place before further development proceeds in Wodonga?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (13:03): (2428) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education, whoever it might be. Winchelsea Primary School faces deteriorating facilities, inadequate secure fencing and enrolments exceeding capacity in 2027. Around 10 per cent of students are neurodiverse. Yet repeated capital bids have failed, leaving parents to fundraise for government-owned buildings. On 24 July, more than two months after she wrote to the then education minister, now Premier, he replied to school council president Megan Morris. He pointed to a \$10 million planning allocation shared between 20 schools and said Winchelsea's master plan would proceed only if funding was provided in a future state budget. He also expected the school to fund priority 3, 4 and 5 maintenance itself. Minister, whoever you may be, will the government fund Winchelsea's master plan in the next budget, including secure fencing and urgently needed capacity?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (13:05): (2429) Residents in the over-55s public housing on Inkerman Street, St Kilda, have been bugging out over Labor's inaction on pest control in their homes. Residents in the tower were concerned about bedbugs, cockroaches and mice. On 3 June they sent a letter to Homes Victoria demanding action on the bug infestations. They say the agency initially stonewalled their request, but they are undeterred. They were not content to be ignored, so these residents, who are in their 80s and 90s, donned hazmat suits and helped their affected neighbours with cockroach spray, sealant and mouse traps. Only then did the department reach out to offer pest control actions. Chair of the residents committee Tom said:

If the ALP-led Homes Victoria responded to our reports of infestations and issues with maintenance, this building would be a fine place to live ...

Minister, why were the Inkerman Street residents' requests for pest control actions ignored until they took matters into their own hands?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:06): (2430) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning and is in relation to the Labor government's decision not to extend significant landscape overlay 9 within Whitehorse. For the past eight years SLO9 has not only preserved but enhanced canopy coverage across Whitehorse, growing canopy coverage by 4.2 per cent over that period. On 16 June the government chose not to extend the overlay protection, and this coincided with the announcement of the finalisation of the Blackburn activity centre, which has removed essential planning controls across the area. It is completely at odds with the desires of the local community. A constituent of mine Ms Yvonne Bowyer has said that she is incredibly disappointed by this decision. The Whitehorse council have made it clear that they have rightfully argued that the government's statewide canopy tree provisions do not achieve comparable canopy targets. Minister, will you reverse your decision to not extend SLO9 and return protections to the Whitehorse community?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:07): (2431) My question is for the Minister for Local Government. I have previously questioned the minister about the justification for the municipal monitors that have been installed at Kingston council. On 30 June it was announced by Kingston council that the monitors would be extended until 14 August. My question to the minister is: what is the justification for this further expense for the ratepayers of Kingston to extend this until August?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:08): (2432) My question is for the Minister for Health. Minister, for over a year and a half I have supported the local Springvale community in its advocacy to remove a needle/syringe machine. My constituents are horrified that this government has tried to deceive them by relocating the syringe dispenser to the other side of the Monash Health Community building, just metres away from its previous location. It is still across the road from a Catholic primary school and next to a busy shopping precinct. The syringe dispenser is encouraging drug use and increasing crime and homelessness in Springvale, and people are moving out of the area for safety reasons. Small business owners report drug users injecting themselves in public toilets; rubbish being set alight; human faeces and syringes on footpaths, even around the schools; rough sleepers; assaults and robberies; and brazen drug dealers. Minister, enough is enough. When are you going to remove this needle dispenser and put the community's safety first?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:09): (2433) My question today is for the Minister for Education, and it relates to supports for children in my electorate who are twice-

exceptional learners. I have been contacted by a parent of two school-aged children who are twice-exceptional learners, meaning that they are intellectually gifted and have one or more learning or developmental challenges like ADHD, autism and dyslexia. The parent is concerned that the current Victorian high-ability program does not properly cover gifted students as many may be underachieving due to educational disengagement, social isolation, anxiety and behavioural challenges, for example. Minister, what will you do to improve identification, support and educational outcomes for gifted students, particularly twice-exceptional students from the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region and beyond?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (13:09): (2434) My constituency question is to the Minister for Community Safety, whoever that might be in the near future, and it concerns violent crime in the northern suburbs. Local families and constituents are deeply shaken following the tragic murder of a 15-year-old boy, who was stabbed to death and dumped out the front of the Craigieburn Community Hospital. This sort of violence is unfortunately not isolated but reflects broader issues with community safety in the northern suburbs. Many constituents continue to raise concerns with me over community safety, and those fears are made worse by the fact that Craigieburn police station, just 3 minutes drive from where it happened, has quietly closed its doors and is shut to the community. I therefore ask the minister: will you take action to ensure police stations in the north are reopened and police officers are given the resources they need to protect the Craigieburn community and the community in the northern suburbs?

Western Metropolitan Region

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (13:10): (2435) My constituency question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. My constituent has lived in Rockbank for many years and recalls Labor's election promise in 2014 to electrify the Melton line. Over a decade later the government proudly boast that they are now finalising the design, scope and planning to inform future delivery. That future delivery is, according to Jeroen Weimar, premised upon commencing construction in 2030, 16 years after it was first promised. Meanwhile NEXTDC's Geelong data centre in Corio secured state planning approval in just 28 days and their Fishermans Bend centre in 75 days. My constituent asks: how can huge data centres that are environmental vampires receive rapid planning approvals while major transport infrastructure such as the Melton electrification keeps getting delayed and delayed and delayed?

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:12): (2436) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police, whoever that currently might be. In my electorate of Southern Metro, in the Bentleigh area, there has been an incident; it appears to me to be a racist incident, but obviously that is a matter for close police investigation. A teen was visiting homes and businesses when he approached another man and asked if he happened to be Jewish. He said at first he was told, 'Eff off and stop bothering me,' and the man continued to watch him from a distance. He then alleged the man returned holding a knife and told him he was – I will not repeat the words – bothering people and he was going to kill him. This is clearly completely unacceptable, racially based violence, and I ask the Minister for Police to give a report to the chamber so that we know exactly what happened here. Will charges be laid?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (13:13): (2437) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing and Building. My constituent Hodan lives in a public housing tower in Flemington. According to Hodan, maintenance issues in the building caused her apartment and the entire floor to flood with sewage water, leaving it uninhabitable and unsafe. Through no fault of her own Hodan and her children have been forced into crisis accommodation and remain without a suitable

long-term home. Hodan's son is disabled, and on advice from medical professionals she submitted a special accommodation requirements form stating that any property offered must not contain balconies or multiple flights of stairs due to significant safety concerns. Despite this, her housing office has only offered homes with balconies, overcrowding and multiple flights of stairs, while pressuring her to accept them or be moved off the priority housing list. Minister, you have failed to keep this family safe. Will you find them a suitable home urgently?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (13:14): (2438) My question is to the Minister for Health. In November 2025 the Commonwealth minister for health confirmed that \$14.5 million had been committed under the community health and hospitals program towards a mental health rehabilitation unit and expanded consulting clinical suites at Wodonga Hospital. The federation funding agreement, signed by the then Victorian health minister, shows that the Commonwealth funding has already been fully expended as part of the 2020–25 funding schedule. The agreement also required Victoria to provide regular progress reports on the project. However, local health advocates advise that no mental health rehabilitation unit has been delivered. At the same time, community consultation has commenced on redeveloping a mental health facility in Beechworth, which was news to the Indigo Shire Council. Can the minister explain what happened to the \$14.5 million in Commonwealth funding allocated for the mental health rehabilitation unit at Wodonga Hospital, confirm whether that project has been abandoned and advise what mental health infrastructure will now be delivered in its place and when?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (13:15): (2439) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Why has the Labor government failed to make progress on the safety upgrades to the Heygarth Street and Hare Street intersection in Echuca? In June 2024 the federal black spot program provided \$435,000 to the Victorian government to implement safety upgrades, including a wombat crossing at the intersection of Heygarth Street and Hare Street in Echuca's historic tourist district. Program guidelines require that works are physically completed within the two financial years after the funding approval. It is now two years since the funding was awarded, but nothing has been done other than the installation of new streetlights. The state Labor government's delay in getting work started means funding is now at risk of being withdrawn, leaving pedestrians to face heightened risk at this black spot. The minister for roads must order upgrade works to start immediately while the funds are still available.

Western Metropolitan Region

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (13:16): (2440) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police and is about the recent spike in organised criminal activities in Melbourne's west, particularly in Hobsons Bay, and the impact this has on community safety and business confidence. The mayor of Hobsons Bay has raised serious concern about recent incidents, including suspected arson and a shooting occurring across local shopping centre strips in Williamstown, Altona, Altona North and Spotswood. These incidents are taking place in highly visible community areas such as Pier Street, Borrack Square, Hudsons Road and Nelson Place and are contributing to the increase in fear and anxiety among residents and local traders. Could the minister please update my constituents on what Victoria Police are doing in response to ensure the community and businesses in Melbourne's west, in my electorate, feel safe?

Petitions

Public transport accessibility

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 11 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that with ageing infrastructure in Victoria and lack of funding to fix this issue, many stations have become inaccessible for those with movement impairments.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to increase funding for public transport accessibility, construct compliant ramps and employ additional staff to aid disabled commuters.

Electricity infrastructure

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 10,460 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the Victorian Government's proposal to include in the final version of the 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan (VTP) a new eastern section of the Central North Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), between Shepparton and Glenrowan, without proper consultation. While there is a need for renewable energy, landowners and local communities who will be affected were not informed before the decision was made and were not given an opportunity to respond before the VTP was made public.

VicGrid's retrospective six-week consultation is clearly deficient in contrast to the consultation and evidence gathering of over a year for stakeholders in every other REZ in the VTP. There is great concern that the inclusion of the new eastern section of the Central North REZ has failed to consider all the evidence for the importance of existing highly productive agricultural land use, landscape and tourism values, and Aboriginal cultural heritage sites.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council calls on the Minister for Energy and Resources and VicGrid to remove the eastern section of the Central North Renewable Energy Zone from the 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan until proper consultation with affected landowners and community is undertaken.

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

Agriculture legislation

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 5786 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the need to amend the relevant agriculture legislation to include the right of all farm title owners to veto any proposed farm entry and/or land access arrangement where they reasonably believe the proposed land access activities would adversely affect food and fibre production, pose a safety or biosecurity risk or reduce their financial return from their farm land. This should include the right to veto to not only protect agricultural land, but also where it facilitates growth in production through support of farming systems and agricultural development. We must ensure farmers have the right to farm and that this is not eroded by secondary uses which create land use conflict.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to amend the relevant agriculture legislation to include the right for all Victorian farmers to veto any proposed land access where they believe access activities would adversely affect their farm.

Harold Freedman mosaic

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) presented a petition bearing 1975 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the current removal from public display the Harold Freedman OAM's Geelong regional history mosaic mural at 30 Little Malop Street, Geelong. The mural has been hidden by an opaque screen for the last 15 months. The heritage listed mural is the second largest after the Australian War Memorial mural. Created during Harold Freedman's tenure as the Official State Artist of Victoria, it's the only work of its kind incorporated into a government building. The mosaic took many talented artists three years to complete. The distinguished

Scientist and Historian, Dr Roy Lang, oversaw the content. No one has ever contested the historical accuracy or integrity of the work. It traces a cavalcade of people and important events in the Geelong region and Western District. It is visual history and aimed to be as inclusive as possible. It has an immediacy not possible with other mediums and speaks directly to all who have the opportunity to view it. It is an iconic and much loved unique work of art serving as a tourist magnet and educational asset for the people of Victoria and tourists to Geelong.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to return the Harold Freedman Geelong regional history mosaic mural to unimpeded public display as soon as possible.

Pakenham road maintenance

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 2018 signatures:

The chaos and consequences of the Victorian State Government's roadworks in Pakenham, particularly Bald Hill Road, which has all but crippled the flow of customers to local businesses. The road closures and diversions discourage foot and vehicular traffic, leaving this once-bustling street eerily quiet; a stark contrast to the thriving community it once was.

We call upon local authorities, government officials, and relevant stakeholders to recognize the urgency of this issue. It is vital that financial assistance programs be established to support businesses affected by these roadworks. Compensation for loss of revenue, grants, or low-interest loans could provide the lifeline so many of us desperately need until the roadworks are complete.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Victorian State Government to take immediate steps to lay out specific criteria and timelines for financial assistance, and open channels of communication so that business owners are informed and supported throughout the process.

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

Bills

Cannabis Legalisation Plebiscite Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (13:21): I introduce a bill for an act to provide for the conduct of a plebiscite about the legalisation of cannabis. I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

David ETTERS HANK: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Forests Legislation Amendment (Closing Logging Loopholes) Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (13:21): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Forests Act 1958, the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987 and the Planning and Environment Act 1987, and to repeal the Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996 and for other purposes. I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 9

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:22): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest* No. 9 of 2026, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Ethics Committee

Inquiry into the Review of the Members Code of Conduct

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (13:22): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table a report on the inquiry into the review of the members code of conduct, including appendices, from the Parliamentary Ethics Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Tom McINTOSH: I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

I want to thank the secretariat, and I want to thank them for all their work, particularly in engaging with MPs right around the Parliament. I think the engagement, the surveys that were done – and when I say engagement, there was active engagement, stepping out, meeting with MPs, hearing what they thought. This has not been active in the Parliament for a long time, so a takeaway from the committee with the report is that we do need more time in operation. But one thing that was heard back clearly is that MPs were hungry to hear practical examples, and the secretariat for the committee did really good work to get information out and about, up on walls around Parliament, and through those one-on-one meetings to talk about practical examples of how the code works in practice.

Again, I will just thank the secretariat for all their work and thank all MPs around Parliament and all parties and independents who leaned in and got involved. And it will be ongoing work that as a committee and Parliament we are going to need to do in the future Parliament to ensure that all MPs and new MPs are aware of the code and how it will operate in practice. We look forward to going on doing that.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (13:25): As a member of the committee as well, part of our role is to make sure that other members are aware of what the statement of values and the code of conduct say. So I will refer to them now:

Statement of Values

Members should demonstrate the following values in carrying out their public duties –

- serving the public interest;
- upholding democracy;
- integrity;
- accountability;

respect for the diversity of views and backgrounds within the Victorian community;
diligence;
leadership.

The code of conduct covers quite a few different aspects. It talks about conflicts of interest, outside employment, use of influence, use of public resources and personal conduct, but I think one of the key aspects it talks about is upholding democracy and respecting others regardless of background. Sometimes I think the public can look on this place, and certainly the chaos that we are seeing today, and be a bit disappointed. But I think it is important as members that we remember the values that we are here to represent.

Motion agreed to.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into the 2026 Summer Fires across Victoria

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:26): Pursuant to standing order 23.22, I table a report on the inquiry into the 2026 summer fires across Victoria, including an appendix, extract of proceedings and minority reports, from the Environment and Planning Committee, and I present the transcripts of evidence. I move:

That the transcripts of evidence be tabled and the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Michael GALEA: I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

I am pleased to be able to table the EPC's report into the 2026 summer fires. The fires had a devastating impact on communities across Victoria. More than 440,000 hectares of land were burnt – an area larger than that affected by the Black Saturday fires of 2009; 451 homes were destroyed; and a further 1110 outbuildings were lost and businesses severely impacted. More than 45,000 livestock deaths were recorded, along with an incalculable loss of wildlife. Tragically, one individual, Maxwell Hobson, lost his life. I extend my sincere condolences to his family and loved ones.

Victoria entered the 2026 fire season with a clear understanding of the heightened risks posed by the conditions. On 9 January catastrophic conditions led to the creation or major expansion of numerous fires. Fire agencies and communities were generally well prepared, and through the tireless work of agencies, firefighters and local communities the response was strong and saved many lives. Considering the conditions, it is a remarkable thing to note that we did not see the mass fatalities experienced in 2009. Credit for this rightly belongs to Victoria's dedicated firefighters, including career firefighters, volunteers and private landholders, as well as the incident control teams that responded to protect Victorians. It also reflects the lessons learned from Black Saturday and the major fire events that followed. This includes improvements in technology, such as the VicEmergency app, and other emergency management measures. In particular, the evidence showed the importance of clear and timely advice, most particularly including the message to leave early. Nevertheless, the committee heard recurring concerns from communities, agencies and other stakeholders. The resilience of critical infrastructure, particularly telecommunications, was raised repeatedly, as was the need to make better use of local knowledge within incident control centres. These and other important matters are addressed in this report and provide a basis for further examination.

This report should be read alongside the other reviews taking place in the aftermath of the 2026 summer fires. Fire agencies have been conducting their own after-action reviews as is customary following an event of this scale. The Minister for Emergency Services has also instructed the inspector-general for emergency management to conduct a full review of the fires. That review will take place after this report is tabled, allowing the inspector-general to draw upon the evidence received by the

committee, particularly the vast evidence from the firsthand accounts of regional communities in the months immediately following the fires. This committee worked to ensure that these perspectives were heard throughout the report.

Transcripts from in particular the regional hearings powerfully reflect the energy, dedication and resilience of Victorians who experienced circumstances that were both unimaginable and regrettably all too familiar in this state. The committee held public hearings in Colac, Quantong, Alexandra, Harcourt and Melbourne, as well as an online hearing for north-east Victoria. Open mic sessions allowed members of the public to speak directly on record. The committee visited firegrounds in Carlisle River and Natimuk and held listening posts in Ruffly and Fawcett, two communities affected by the Longwood fire.

Given the compressed timeframe for this inquiry the committee was not in a position to draw upon an expansive body of technical evidence. Rather the strength in this report lies in the detailed evidence provided by communities about preparation and response as well as evidence received about relief and about recovery efforts, which remain ongoing to this day.

I took on the role of chair during the later stages of this inquiry, and I wish to acknowledge all fellow committee members for the collegial way in which they all worked to ensure that these voices are heard. I particularly want to acknowledge and thank the previous chair Mr Batchelor for his diligent stewardship of the inquiry throughout the submission and hearing processes. I would also like to thank our committee manager Kieran Crowe, and his team, including Te Kooanga Awatere, Joshua Pedersen, Simone McNaught and Monique Riordan-Hill, for their tireless work. We are also grateful to Hansard and broadcast.

The fact that the response to the 2026 summer fires limited the loss of life must not lead anyone to underestimate the severe and continuing impact of these fires. We know it is a question of when, not if, the next event will occur, and I trust that this report will contribute to the continuing improvement of systems. I commend it to the house.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (13:32): As a member of the parliamentary Environment and Planning Committee, these reports that have been tabled today are very important, and I hope they will not be lost in the chaos of Labor's leadership turmoil. The question from this inquiry is: did we enter the fire season prepared? We had hundreds of Unimogs and G-Wagons offline, increased fuel loads, reduced planned burns, an ageing CFA fleet, underinvestment over a long period and newly installed radios that failed to work in the field. Over the last decade we have had declining numbers of CFA volunteers, frustration over roadside vegetation and a lack of clearance and maintenance around critical infrastructure. Senior operational leader positions were vacant at the time of the bushfires, leaving communities exposed, and what happened on firegrounds reflected a decade of policy, governance and preparedness decisions. The government had been warned time and again and failed to respond accordingly.

The inquiry received submissions and held hearings across the state, and the stories were harrowing. We had brigades that pleaded for help and no help came; some volunteers working 38 days straight; and communities cut off when their telecommunications and power failed, leaving them with no emergency warnings. We had farmers given single bales to feed cattle that were starving and seriously injured, teenagers left to euthanise hundreds of injured livestock and local councils expected to step up and support communities but left waiting for funding.

It is over six months now and the recovery process is still well behind. We have got a clean-up program that has been delayed, home sites destroyed by fires yet to be cleared, the tip waivers with extension after extension, people still homeless and community recovery grants announced just days ago. What happens next? There is so much more that needs to be done. We have got to build strategic water supplies and recognise private vehicle units. Telecommunications and power are essential. I could go on. I encourage you to read the reports.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (13:34): I too want to thank my fellow committee members, the chair, former chair and the secretariat, and in particular I want to thank the community members, the firefighters, the wildlife carers and others who made submissions and who came to our hearings and our listening posts. The trauma experienced by communities who bore the brunt of these fires was something that I certainly felt viscerally as we travelled around the state. Many residents, farmers, CFA volunteers and businesses lost everything. One person sadly lost their life, and countless animals were injured or killed.

The trauma for many was also compounded by the recovery process itself, which could be frustrating, difficult to navigate and too often characterised by an overwhelming sense of abandonment. It is critical that these extraordinary losses and their pain are not in vain. The majority report recognises this and recommends numerous changes that need to be made to systems from preparation to recovery and in particular how CFA and firefighters need significantly more funding. We need better resource coordination during fire emergencies and easier to access recovery support.

While we broadly support the majority report, there are several key areas that are either inadequate or missing entirely that are the subject of the Greens minority report. It is absurd that recommendations we put forward regarding the need to address the drivers of climate change – that is, the new fossil fuel projects – were not supported. We have also once again called for a levy on fossil fuel companies to ensure polluters, not everyday Victorians, are paying to support disaster preparedness, firefighter resourcing and recovery. We also call for a science-based approach to fuel load reduction and safeguards for ecosystems and wildlife as well as an increased focus on critical infrastructure resilience in the face of climate disasters. As our climate catastrophically warms, we know that there will be more catastrophic fires, and it is absolutely critical that we are as prepared as possible for what is to come. I really hope that the government heeds the recommendations from this inquiry.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (13:36): This is an incredibly important inquiry and an incredibly important report. The fires across Victoria in January were devastating. The amount of the state that was burnt and the number of structures and homes that were destroyed was extremely significant. That only one life was lost is a tribute to the work that everybody did to keep Victorians safe. I think that both the firefighters on the ground and those who helped prepare communities when we knew that danger was coming all need to be thanked and supported. Certainly the lessons that this state has learned from the devastating fires we have seen previously did play a very important role in ensuring that on the days like we saw in January more lives were not lost. I think a lot of people should be very proud of the work they did to keep Victorians safe and protected, and we thank all of those who heeded the warnings and those who fought the fires.

It was an absolute privilege to be the chair of the Environment and Planning Committee during the hearings for this inquiry, and I want to thank the committee members and the committee secretariat for all the work that they did during those hearings. I was very moved by the evidence that we received and the communities we visited and the places we listened to. I have gone back since I stepped down as chair in my role as Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services and sat down and listened more to what has been said, and there is a lot of work that we have got to do in following up. I want to thank Mr Galea for taking over as chair of the inquiry, and all the rest of the committee members. I was not part of the deliberations for the report. My one reflection is that I think this report and this inquiry would have benefited absolutely from having a bit more time. These were very significant issues. I commend the report to the chamber.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (13:38): I rise to speak on the committee's report into the 2026 summer fires across Victoria, fires that absolutely devastated much of Victoria but particularly a vast area of my electorate of Northern Victoria. I too acknowledge the loss of communities, the loss of individuals and particularly the loss that was suffered by the family of Maxwell Hobson, who lost his life in the fires. I would like to take the time to thank all Victorians who took the time to submit a submission or to give evidence at our hearings. They were vitally important to our understanding what happened in Victoria during the summer fires this year. They did it under severe circumstances too,

because many of them are still struggling with the recovery from those fires, and they will continue to suffer for many years.

I would like to encourage Victorians to read not only the majority report but also the excellent minority report by the Liberal and National committee members. I would also encourage Victorians to read the deliberations of the committee, where Victorians will see the sensible findings and recommendations put forward by the Liberals and Nationals that improve this report somewhat. Many of those sensible recommendations were voted down by Labor and the Greens. I would also say that this report is chapter and verse on how Labor's fire services reforms have actually failed the CFA and regional communities, and the minority report highlights many of those failures and makes recommendations on how we can improve our fire services. I would like to thank our committee secretariat for the time that they put in and the support that they provided to us. This is an excellent report.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (13:40): Firstly, I would like to thank our secretariat – very dedicated staff who have travelled the length and breadth with us and our very collegiate committee. I want to start with this: the current situation we have got sets us up to fail.

Across the board CFA lacks depth in numbers for core roles in both the fireground and in ...

incident control management teams. So said experienced CFA group officer Lachlan Gales in Alexandra. If you were there, the emotion and content of all of our hearings was very palpable, including that one. We heard evidence from volunteers, firefighters, community, farmers, affected communities and councils. The evidence painted quite a damning picture: that this state was actually underprepared for this bushfire season. It heard evidence of declining CFA volunteer numbers, command shortages, ageing appliances and communications failures. It heard that there was inadequate fire management and fuel-load reduction. It heard that we were underprepared. Most concerning were the two responses, one from CFA on 4 June and the other on 30 June, that the committee received. The one that was vetted – I will say 'vetted' quite strongly – was in relation to leadership roles, vacancies, workforce shortages and the like. Fuel is the one thing that government has traction on and can materially make a difference on. Labor's bushfire mitigation has failed in this state. Hazardous fuel loads remain high, roads are poorly managed and strategic fuel breaks are lacking, and the communities remain exposed. The government was warned; the government failed to act. I encourage everybody not only to read the good parts of the main report but indeed the minority report by the Liberals and the Nationals.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General –

Annual Plan, 2026–27 (*released on 24 June 2026 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Delivering School Upgrade Projects, June 2026 (*replacement for copy tabled on Wednesday, 17 June 2026*) (*released on 30 June 2026 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Follow-up: Service Victoria – Digital Delivery of Government Services, June 2026 (*released on 24 June 2026 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Investing in Early Intervention Initiatives, June 2026 (*released on 30 June 2026 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Planning and Managing Drainage Schemes in Melbourne's Growth Areas, June 2026 (*released on 24 June 2026 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Victoria – Partnerships for Nature: Framework for Victorian State of the Environment Reporting.

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 –

Order of 8 July 2026 giving approval to the granting of a licence at Alexandra Gardens Reserve.

Order of 6 July 2026 giving approval to the granting of a licence at Sandringham Beach Park.

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 – Education and Care Services National Further Amendment Regulations 2026, under section 303 of the Act.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission – Annual Plan, 2026–27 (*released on 29 June 2026 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Integrity Oversight Victoria – Annual Plan, 2026–27 (*released on 29 June 2026 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notices under section 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to –

Statutory Rule No. 38 (*Gazette S408, 15 July 2026*).

Statutory Rule No. 58 (*Gazette G26, 25 June 2026*).

Statutory Rule No. 71 (*Gazette G27, 2 July 2026*).

Inquiries Act 2014 – Forum for Truth and Recognition: Truth, recognition and healing: Report on victim-survivors' experiences of child sexual abuse in Victorian government schools and certain non-government schools before 2000, May 2026 (*released on 16 July 2026 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Ombudsman – Annual Plan, 2026–27 (*released on 29 June 2026 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

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

Alpine Planning Scheme – Amendment C73.

Ballarat Planning Scheme – Amendment C234.

Bayside and Kingston Planning Schemes – Amendment GC246.

Boroondara, Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Stonnington and Whitehorse Planning Schemes – Amendment GC285.

Casey Planning Scheme – Amendment C302.

Darebin Planning Scheme – Amendment C231.

Golden Plains Planning Scheme – Amendment C113.

Greater Dandenong Planning Scheme – Amendment C251.

Greater Dandenong and Moorabool Planning Schemes – Amendment GC260.

Kingston and Monash Planning Schemes – Amendment GC247.

Monash Planning Scheme – Amendments C176 and C177.

Monash and Whitehorse Planning Schemes – Amendment GC248.

Mornington Peninsula Planning Scheme – Amendment C295.

Port Phillip Planning Scheme – Amendments C231 and C234.

Stonnington Planning Scheme – Amendments C316 and C361.

Whitehorse Planning Scheme – Amendment C255.

Yarra and Warrnambool Planning Schemes – Amendment GC278.

Professional Standards Act 2003 – Australian Property Institute Valuers Limited Professional Standards Scheme, under section 14 of the Act (*Gazette S366, 30 June 2026*).

State Owned Enterprises Act 1992 – Constitution of Innovation Victoria Pty Ltd, under section 75(a) of the Act, together with a Record of a resolution, dated 29 June 2026, of Breakthrough Victoria Pty Ltd adopting this Constitution.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

Borrowing and Investment Powers Act 1987 – No. 89.

Building Act 1993 – Nos. 72, 73, 87, 96 and 97.

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 – No. 103.

Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021 – Nos. 92 and 93.

Coroners Act 2008 – No. 68.

Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017 – No. 88.

County Court Act 1958 – No. 102.
Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 – No. 80.
Dangerous Goods Act 1985 – Nos. 100 and 101.
Electrical Safety Act 1998 – No. 71.
Estate Agents Act 1980 – No. 90.
Forests Act 1958 – Nos. 81 and 82.
Gambling Regulation Act 2003 – No. 79.
Guardianship and Administration Act 2019 – No. 69.
Land Act 1958 – No. 83.
Local Government Act 2020 – No. 75.
Local Jobs First Act 2003 – Nos. 74 and 98.
Magistrates' Court Act 1989 – No. 78.
National Parks Act 1975 – No. 84.
Private Security Act 2004 – No. 76.
Professional Engineers Registration Act 2019 – No. 91.
Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 – No. 86.
Residential Tenancies Act 1997 – No. 99.
Retirement Villages Act 1986 – No. 105.
Safe Drinking Water Act 2003 – No. 106.
Service Victoria Act 2018 – No. 94.
Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003 – No. 77.
Tobacco Act 1987 – No. 95.
Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 – No. 70.
Wildlife Act 1975 – No. 85.
Worker Screening Act 2020 – No. 104.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 –

Documents under section 15 in relation to –

Statutory Rule Nos. 64, 66, 68, 70, 75, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 97, 98, 102, 105, 106 and 107.

Legislative instruments and related documents under section 16B in respect of –

Local Jobs First Policy, under the Local Jobs First Act 2003.

Minimum Financial Requirements and Administrative Guidelines 2026, under section 316A of the Building Act 1993.

Ministerial Direction to Building Surveyors in relation to the operation of section 24A of the Building Act 1993, under section 188AA of the Building Act 1993.

Ministerial Order No. 1498 – Order amending Ministerial Order No. 713 – Exemptions from Attendance and Enrolment at School (Amendment) Order, under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006.

Statutory Insurance Scheme Premiums Order 2026, under section 137Q of the Building Act 1993.

Transfer of Bond Guidelines, under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997.

Surveillance Devices Act 1999 – Surveillance Devices Inspection Report by Integrity Oversight Victoria on its inspections of surveillance device records during the period 1 July 2024 to 31 December 2024, under section 30Q of the Act (*Ordered to be published*).

Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003 – Counter-Terrorism Powers Inspection Reports by Integrity Oversight Victoria on Victoria Police records, under section 37D of the Act, for the period –

November 2024 to February 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

March 2025 to August 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal and Improving Parliamentary Standards Act 2019 – Members of Parliament (Victoria) Annual Adjustment Determination 2026, together with a Statement of Reasons, effective 1 July 2026, under section 26 of the Act.

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

Consumer Legislation Amendment Act 2025 – Division 1 of Part 2 – 30 June 2026 (*Gazette S367, 30 June 2026*).

Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Act 2025 – Divisions 1 (other than sections 75 and 83(1)), 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 9 (other than sections 115 and 125) of Part 3.2 – 28 July 2026 (*Gazette S389, 7 July 2026*).

Petitions

Responses

The Clerk: I have received the following papers for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: the Minister for Police's response to a petition titled 'Mernda Police Station', the Minister for Roads and Road Safety's response to a petition titled 'Improve safety of Elmore-Raywood Road and Northern Highway Intersection', the response of the Minister for Sport and Major Events to a petition titled 'Prostate cancer and men's health awareness', the Minister for the State Electricity Commission's response to a petition titled 'Immediately cancel the Delburn Wind Farm' and the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC's response to petition titled 'Legislative reform for workers' compensation system'.

Production of documents

Cranbourne rail line

Ballarat train station

Suburban Rail Loop

The Clerk: I table three letters from the Attorney-General, all dated 27 July 2026, in response to resolutions of the Council on 3 June 2026 relating to the extension of the Cranbourne rail line, on the motion of Mr Limbrick; on 17 June 2026 relating to the Ballarat station upgrade, on the motion of Mr McCracken; and on 17 June 2026 relating to Infrastructure Australia's assessment of the Suburban Rail Loop East project, on the motion of Mr Ettershank. The letters each state that the date for the production does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

General business

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:02): I move, by leave:

That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 29 July 2026:

- (1) order of the day 3, second reading of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Facilitating Timely Reporting) Bill 2026;
- (2) order of the day made this day, second reading of the Cannabis Legalisation Plebiscite Bill 2026;
- (3) notice of motion given this day by Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell on the Victorian road network;
- (4) notice of motion given this day by me on leadership in the Victorian Labor Party; and
- (5) notice of motion given this day by Evan Muholland expressing that the house does not have confidence in the Victorian Labor Party to govern Victoria.

Motion agreed to.

*Committees***Legal and Social Issues Committee***Reporting dates*

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (14:03): I move, by leave:

That the reporting date for the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into claims made through the TAC be extended until 25 August 2026.

Motion agreed to.

Select Committee on the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in Victoria*Reporting dates*

Anasina Gray-Barberio (Northern Metropolitan) (14:04): I move, by leave:

That the reporting date for the final report of the Select Committee on the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in Victoria be extended to 9 September 2026.

Motion agreed to.

*Business of the house***Petitions qualifying for debate**

Lee Tarlamis (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:04): I move, by leave:

That so much of sessional orders be suspended to the extent necessary to allow on Wednesday 29 July 2026 petitions qualifying for debate to take place before statements on tabled papers and petitions.

Motion agreed to.

*Members statements***Maroondah Hospital**

Sonja Terpstra (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:04): I rise today to acknowledge the recent progress towards the planning and construction of the new paediatric wing at Maroondah Hospital. The Allan Labor government has invested \$20 million towards a dedicated children's emergency department, along with a separate triage area and calming space. With legislation passed this month improving nurse-to-patient ratios, these upgrades could not come sooner. On Friday 26 June I had the pleasure of visiting Maroondah Hospital with the Labor candidate for Croydon Richard Farr. Here we saw firsthand the tireless work of Maroondah Hospital staff in delivering state-of-the-art medical care, despite working in what are really ageing facilities. The staff are what keep our hospitals running, but they need to do so with proper facilities. This is why it is essential that we maintain our commitment towards public health and continue to make sure our medical staff are looked after. It is only a Labor government that will continue to fund improvements in our hospitals and medical systems, and we will continue to deliver them as well. The goal of the opposition is only to privatise and cut essential medical services, making it harder for Victorians to access the best health care. All Victorians have the right to the best health care, and it is not and should never only be reserved for a select few.

Government performance

Georgie Crozier (Southern Metropolitan) (14:06): What an absolute shambles the state has witnessed this morning with what has been happening in this Parliament. In the government's own ranks it is just chaotic. They are at each other's throats. It is an absolute shemozzle, with the former Premier Jacinta Allan being knifed by the faceless men – a woman that was put in by the faceless men removed by the faceless men. It is always about Labor and themselves, and yet Victorians are seeing this play out. It does not matter who leads them, they are still the same. They are a corrupt, divided and desperate Labor government. The policies that they have presided over, with Ben Carroll as Deputy Premier to Jacinta Allan and in the cabinet with Daniel Andrews, are policies that have seen

this state go into such a decline, that are destroying hope and aspiration, that are destroying innovation, that are placing unnecessary red tape on decision-making, that are taking away the rights of communities to have a say, that are destroying the ability for everyday Victorians to forge their own destiny without being reliant on government and that are sending the state broke, where the standard of living is falling, where the ever-increasing tax burden is killing businesses, where Victoria has the highest unemployment rate and highest taxes anywhere in the country, where crime is out of control and communities are living in fear and where our health system is so broken. Victorians are not looking for a change in the Premier; they are looking for a fresh start and a change of government.

Anglesea mine rehabilitation

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:07): I was so pumped last week to hear the news that the pump has been dumped. It absolutely made my day to hear that, after a huge local community campaign in Anglesea, Southern Rural Water has announced that they had rejected Alcoa Australia's application for a groundwater licence to extract 1500 megalitres a year for 10 years to fill its old coalmine pit. At a time when we can feel like we are up against it, when big corporate interests seem to always be put above people and our environment, this campaign shows what is possible when people come together and fight against the tide. I was honoured to join many of the campaigners along the way, like the incredible Keith Shipton, Dick O'Hanlon and Tarryn O'Leary, from Friends of Anglesea River, who brought together detailed geological, environmental and citizen science with community passion. They were able to demonstrate to Southern Rural Water that pumping from the aquifer would impact groundwater levels, reducing river flows and increasing the risk of acidification of the Anglesea River estuary. It is a waterway that has already suffered from the impacts of this coalmine, including mass fish kills, and is at further risk with climate change. It is a win for science, a win for the Anglesea community, and it shows what we can achieve when we demand better from our decision-makers.

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:09): I rise to deliver a brief members statement. Throughout the winter break I had the privilege of visiting several organisations throughout the Southern Metropolitan Region. This included the headquarters of the Bodd company with Minister Brooks and Stonnington councillor Meghan Hopper. Bodd demonstrated their impressive scan technology. Their technology can detect and diagnose potential health issues early and without invasive procedures. Founded in Melbourne, Bodd demonstrates how great our state remains at cutting-edge technology. I also had the opportunity to visit the National Communication Museum, which promotes learning about our nation's telecommunications history, present and future. I commend the museum's good work in upskilling young people and preserving telecommunications history. I also acknowledge the work done by the Melbourne Holocaust Museum. Alongside parliamentary colleagues I recently attended the MHM's Consular Breakfast, where they shared the work they have been doing on combating antisemitism through their project The Space Between. Supported by a Victorian government grant, this project is developing tools to combat hateful antisemitic attitudes. Finally, I had the honour of visiting the Shrine of Remembrance to commemorate the 110th anniversary of the Battle of Fromelles. This ceremony was delivered by the Friends of the 15th Brigade and honoured the sacrifice of Australians in their first engagement on the Western Front in World War I. I applaud the work done by all four of these organisations across their respective fields.

Shepparton train services

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (14:10): Five years ago, in 2021, Jacinta Allan promised that by 2023 Shepparton would receive nine weekday and five weekend return rail services, but the promised additional services are now three years overdue and there is still no confirmation of when they will start. Shepparton residents rely on their rail services for connectivity to Melbourne, including for work and medical appointments and getting to the footy and other events. However, under the Allan Labor government, they have been suffering severely overcrowded trains, with some passengers

having to stand for long parts of a journey that can take up to 3 hours. On Saturday night there were reports of a crowd of about 500 crushed into a three-carriage service to Seymour. The pictures show how unpleasant that trip must have been for those standing and even for those who had a seat, because people would have been leaning over them. On Sunday 19 July once again it was standing room only, with commuters posting to social media that there were no seats at all available from Melbourne to Shepparton. The long delay in delivering the nine weekday and five weekend return services is totally unacceptable, and Shepparton residents have run out of patience with the endless excuses from this incompetent Labor government, which clearly cannot manage rail services. When asked by the *Shepparton News* when the additional services would be delivered, Treasurer Jaclyn Symes was unable to provide a timeline. Unlike Melburnians who are enjoying their Metro and West Gate tunnels, there is no light at the end of the tunnel for Shepparton residents.

Police Veterans Victoria

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (14:12): I rise to recognise the work of Police Veterans Victoria, a not-for-profit organisation that supports Victoria Police veterans and their families with a singular focus of improving the mental health of former officers of Victoria Police. The backbone of this support within Police Veterans Victoria is the veteran peer support officers, former VicPol members trained to provide support and referral services to other veterans experiencing mental health issues caused by the challenges they faced whilst on the job. Sadly, many police veterans suffer a range of health issues long after their service has ended, including PTSD, anxiety, depression and social isolation. I was delighted to recently attend Police Veterans Victoria's annual corporate luncheon. Nearly 500 guests attended the event to raise money and show support for Victoria's police veterans and their families. The event reinforced to me the sacrifice our brave Victoria Police members make to protect Victorian communities and the traumas they potentially face every day that may remain with them for a lifetime. Thank you to Police Veterans Victoria for the wonderful work they do.

State election

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:13): Over the past month our Liberal leader Jess Wilson has travelled to all 88 Victorian electorates on her Fresh Start tour, listening directly to families, businesses and communities in every corner of our state. Wherever Jess goes, she backs our local champions, who know their communities best. I joined her alongside outstanding Liberal candidates and MPs across Western Victoria: Emma Muir in Eureka, Megan Read in Ripon, Andy Pobjoy in Geelong, Callum Whitehead in Bellarine, Libby Pettit in South Barwon, Roma Britnell in South-West Coast, Richard Riordan in Polwarth and Jarrod Bingham in Melton. Unlike this tired, out-of-touch Labor government, Jess and the Liberal team are present, engaged and listening. Jess is in the pub, at the market, on the farm, in small businesses and on the road, meeting Victorians where they live and work and hearing firsthand what matters to them. That is the clearest contrast in Victorian politics: a Labor government consumed by its own chaos and failing our state and a Liberal leader with the energy, judgement, determination and plan to deliver the fresh start Victoria so desperately needs.

Data centres

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (14:15): Labor must stop rolling out the red carpet for a frenzy of new AI data centres without clear rules to protect people, water and the climate. These are power-hungry, water-hungry industrial developments, and increasingly they are built to serve some of the biggest tech corporations in the world. For our local communities they can mean more trucks, noise and air pollution, and for our environment they mean pressure on already stressed rivers, creeks and drinking water supplies. At the same time these centres risk locking Victoria into coal and gas power for longer, just when we should be accelerating the shift to clean energy. No community should be asked to carry the local impacts while big tech profits are being made and households are facing pressure on energy bills. The Greens are calling for a moratorium on new AI data centres until proper safeguards are in place, and that means strict environment and water standards. It means requiring 100 per cent renewable energy and banning gas and diesel backup generators. It means protecting First

Nations cultural heritage from these developments, with free, prior and informed consent, and it means genuine community consultation, not fast-tracked approvals behind closed doors. Victoria needs a plan for AI that protects workers, artists, personal data, communities and the climate. Until then, people and the planet have to come before big tech profits.

Planning policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:16): Today I want to draw the chamber's attention to the decisions of Sonya Kilkenny, the Minister for Planning, in Ashburton and Glen Iris, where we are going to see an absolute destruction of the livability and the quality of life in those areas. What has happened here is decisions have been made by the planning minister without proper consultation and without agreement by the council, although I think the council could have spoken up more, which will see six to eight storeys as a base. These are discretionary height limits that have been put in place. A discretionary height limit, I say, is no height limit at all. And the government have shown across the state – even in Boroondara, in the area that I am talking about – a propensity to go well over the discretionary height limit, as they have just done in Kew. So people should understand that eight storeys is just the beginning. They are going to do more. They are going to build larger, and they are going to do it without proper community input. Around the immediate centre there are amendment VC300 impacts, which will see four and six storeys built as of right without council involvement. This is going to be a travesty. There are no services involved here, and the government is doing this without community support. We will see our suburbs changed – changed for the worse, changed forever and changed undemocratically.

Gippsland schools clay target championship

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:18): Last week I attended the Gippsland schools clay target championship, which was proudly hosted by the Morwell Gun Club, bringing together 130 students from 20 schools across eastern Victoria. The event showcased exceptional talent, marksmanship, sportsmanship and discipline. Clay target shooting demands concentrated precision and skill. Congratulations to category winners, including the Catholic College Sale, Bass Coast College, Lavalla, Maffra Secondary College, Lilydale High School, Korumburra Secondary College and our virtual and home-schooled competitors. Events like this do not just happen; it is the volunteers, parents, students and teachers that do the amazing work – and sponsors as well. Category winners include junior boys Jack Brady, Hayden White and Sonny Grant; junior girls Chloe Westland, Ella Missen and Audrey Heenan; senior boys Zac Sporle, Lachie Divine and Thomas Munday; and senior girls Clea Grillo, Ebony Passarin and Kate Perry; and the school that won the championship was Lilydale High School. The winner of the Mark Coleman Perpetual Trophy was Travis Hockley – and thanks to Mark for his ongoing support. I just want to say these sorts of events the Nationals and the Liberals will continue to support because we know they grow leaders, we know they grow champions and we know they are well within the proper realm of great sportsmanship and good care.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:20): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 1517, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

*Bills***Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Jaclyn Symes:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:20): I rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. This is a substantial bill that makes amendments across Victoria's education system. It covers Aboriginal recognition and self-determination; restrictions on student use of personal electronic devices during school hours; reforms to teacher registration and the Victorian Institute of Teaching; changes to the Victorian student register to support national reforms, including the unique student identifier and expanded information sharing powers across the education system; and a number of administrative and technical amendments. There is a considerable amount contained within the legislation, and it is appropriate that Parliament gives these reforms proper consideration.

I would like to acknowledge my good friend and colleague the member for Sandringham Brad Rowsell, the Shadow Minister for Education, who has consulted extensively with stakeholders throughout the development of our position. I thank Independent Schools Victoria, the Victorian Catholic Education Authority, Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools, the Victorian Principals Association, the Australian Education Union, the Australian Principals Federation, the Country Education Partnership, the Australian Christian Lobby and others who took the time to provide feedback to the shadow minister on this legislation. Their engagement has been valuable in informing our consideration of the bill.

After reviewing the legislation, receiving departmental briefings and consulting with stakeholders, the Liberals and Nationals will not oppose this bill. While there are aspects of the legislation that warrant further scrutiny and questions that remain unanswered, there are also several measures that are sensible reforms and deserve bipartisan support. One of the most significant changes relates to the Aboriginal recognition and self-determination within the Education and Training Reform Act 2006. This bill inserts a formal statement recognising Aboriginal people as the First Peoples of Victoria and introduces guiding principles requiring decision-makers to consider Aboriginal self-determination when exercising functions of the act. It also broadens the definition of 'parent' to better reflect Aboriginal family structures and formalises the inclusion of Aboriginal histories, cultures and perspectives across learning areas consistent with existing curriculum policy. The bill also requires consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders on relevant policies and system targets and provides for cultural understanding and training to be made available across the education workforce.

These provisions have attracted differing views from stakeholders. Some organisations have welcomed the formal recognition contained within the legislation while others have questioned whether the provisions could influence curriculum development beyond what is currently intended. The Australian Christian Lobby, for example, expressed concerns that aspects of the bill may encourage a one-sided historical perspective and have argued that the practical effects of principle-based provisions could ultimately become more prescriptive over time, and those concerns deserve to be acknowledged. However, having examined the legislation itself, our view is that these provisions are largely symbolic in nature. They do not mandate new curriculum content beyond what is already being taught, nor do they fundamentally alter existing operations of Victorian schools.

Given the Victorian government's commitment to the treaty process, we have sought clarification as to whether these changes were being introduced to satisfy obligations arising from that process. The department advised that these amendments were not developed in response to treaty obligations; rather, they were developed in consultation with the Aboriginal community representatives and education stakeholders independently of the treaty process – and that is a significant point. If these

amendments are not intended to satisfy the treaty obligations, it is reasonable to assume that further legislative changes may be required in coming years as the treaty process progresses. I simply place the observation on record because I suspect this Parliament has not heard the last of legislative amendments dealing with Aboriginal recognition within the education system. We will, however, seek to amend the bill to remove new parts 1.1A.1 and 1.1A.2, which are an acknowledgement of the Labor government's rushed and flawed treaty process and do nothing to further educational outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians and all Victorians. I ask for my amendment to be circulated.

Turning to another area of the bill, one of the reforms that has received widespread support is the requirement for all registered schools to implement policies restricting student use of personal devices during school hours. This reform applies across both government and non-government schools. The opposition supports measures that improve student engagement, reduce distractions in the classroom and lead to the best learning outcomes. What is particularly noteworthy, however, is that many schools did not wait for legislation before taking action. Catholic schools and many independent schools have already introduced restrictions on mobile phones, smartwatches, AirPods and similar devices, because they already recognise the growing impact that these technologies are having on classroom learning. They acted because they understood that education should be focused on teaching, not notifications, social media or digital distractions. They deserve credit for showing leadership before the government intervention became necessary and, to be honest, past time. Their experience also demonstrates that many schools are perfectly capable of making sensible decisions in the best interests of students.

Stakeholders across both sectors have publicly welcomed the government's decision. Elizabeth Labone, the chief executive officer of the Victorian Catholic Education Authority, welcomed the announcement, stating that measures which improve student engagement and learning should be supported. Similarly, Rachel Holthouse, the chief executive officer at Independent Schools Victoria, acknowledged the government's efforts to balance appropriate access to technology with the need to maintain learning environments and student wellbeing. These are sensible reforms and we support them.

The bill also contains significant amendments relating to the Victorian Institute of Teaching. These reforms expand information-sharing powers, strengthen interim suspension arrangements, improve disciplinary processes and broaden the public register of teachers to include disciplinary conditions and outcomes. Protecting children must always remain the highest priority within our education system. Parents rightly expect that a regulator responsible for teacher registration has the powers necessary to investigate concerns, share relevant information where appropriate and act swiftly when student safety may be at risk. These reforms move in that direction. However, stronger regulatory powers must also be accompanied by robust safeguards. During the briefing the shadow minister sought clarification regarding the transfer of disciplinary information currently contained within the register of disciplinary action into the register of registered teachers. The department advised that the current register of disciplinary action is maintained manually, while the register of registered teachers is generated automatically from the teacher registration database, and will further advise that the Victorian Institute of Teaching is conducting a comprehensive audit and data-cleansing process to ensure that all relevant information is accurate before the new arrangements commence. That assurance is welcome. However, the shadow minister does intend to follow up in the future regarding the outcome of that audit process. Where sensitive personal information is involved, accuracy is not optional, it should already be expected. If inaccuracies are identified during the audit, Parliament deserves to understand why they existed and what steps have been taken to prevent similar issues occurring in the future.

The bill also introduces reforms to the Victorian student register as part of the national rollout of the unique student identifier. These amendments expand the range of information that may be collected about Victorian students, including country of birth and other prescribed information, to better align with the educational reforms and improve data sharing across jurisdictions. On face value there is merit in ensuring that student records are accurate, consistent and capable of supporting students

throughout their education and training. Better data can support better policy decisions, improve continuity for students and reduce unnecessary duplication across government systems. However, whenever Parliament authorises collection of additional personal information, it also has a responsibility to ask whether that information is necessary, how it will be used and whether adequate safeguards exist to protect it. That is precisely the approach the opposition has taken.

Whenever government seeks additional powers to collect information, it should also ask whether the information it already collects remains necessary and useful. If the information is genuinely valuable, are government agencies making the best possible use of it? Distance from school, for example, could assist transport planning, road safety improvements, school crossing infrastructure, footpath upgrades or local council planning. Across government enormous volumes of data are collected every day. The objective should not be simply to collect more information, it should be to ensure that information is relevant, necessary and used effectively to improve public policy. At the same time we should continually look for opportunities to reduce unnecessary administrative burden on families. Parents already complete a substantial amount of paperwork when enrolling their children in school. If there are opportunities to streamline those processes while still ensuring schools receive the information they genuinely need, then government should take them. It is not only good administration, it is common sense.

The bill also makes changes to government arrangements and ministerial appointments. In particular it removes some existing limitations relating to acting appointments. Again, we sought clarification from the department regarding how these powers would operate in practice. The opposition understands that there are occasions when acting appointments are entirely appropriate. Public bodies must continue to function when vacancies arise or when substantive office holders are temporarily unavailable. Victorians rightly expect that appointments to public bodies are transparent, justified and subject to appropriate oversight. The department has advised that acting appointments remain governed by existing appointment and remuneration guidelines issued by the Premier and that acting appointments are generally limited to the period for which a substantive office holder is unavailable. Those assurances are helpful, and on the basis of those explanations we are satisfied that the appropriate safeguards continue to exist.

As I indicated earlier, one of the more significant aspects of the legislation relates to reforms to the Victorian Institute of Teaching. The department advised that there are currently 335 entries on the register of disciplinary action. As part of implementing these reforms, every one of those entries is being audited to ensure accuracy, relevance and compliance before information is transferred into a new system. Again, this process is welcome, but it also reflects why data governance really matters. When government agencies hold information capable of affecting someone's career, reputation and livelihood, there can be no tolerance for inaccuracies. For that reason, the opposition will be watching closely the implementation of these reforms through the appropriate parliamentary processes and will seek information regarding the outcome of the audit. If inaccuracies are identified, the Parliament should know the extent of those inaccuracies and how they occurred.

The broader reforms to expanding information-sharing powers also require careful implementation. Protecting children and maintaining high professional standards are objectives that everyone in this place supports. Equally, information-sharing frameworks must operate within clear legal safeguards to ensure personal information is handled appropriately and only disclosed where necessary. Getting that balance right is really essential. Throughout the consideration of this legislation the opposition has attempted to approach every provision on its merits. Where reforms improve child safety, strengthen professional regulation or support better learning outcomes we have been prepared to support them.

While this bill contains a number of worthwhile reforms, legislation such as this cannot distract from the broader challenges regarding Victoria's education system. Today we have seen a new unelected Premier elected by the Labor party room who has a clear track record in the education sector, and that is a record of failure.

A member interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I did say he had a clear track record; I did not say it was a good one. Indeed, it is one of failure. This is a Premier who as Minister for Education botched the VCE exams for two straight years. If he cannot run the VCE exams properly, how on earth can he run this state? Two consecutive years of VCE exam errors jeopardised the results of tens of thousands of students. Four clear errors were detected across general mathematics, mathematical methods and specialist mathematics exam papers; concerns relating to the wording of a further 19 questions were raised by mathematics academics; one error was detected in the chemistry exam; incorrect examination papers were handed out to students at two different schools; and students were given the Chinese second language paper instead of the Chinese second language advanced. You would think after all that happening in 2023 that the Minister for Education would have cleaned up the exams and got it sorted. We rolled around to 2024 and what happened? Sixty-five of 116 VCE examinations had embedded questions and stimulus material contained within sample cover pages, and a total of 24 students received an incorrect exam paper. Again, if he could not get the VCE exams right, how on earth is he going to govern this state? He is the second unelected Premier within three years and was Jacinta Allan's partner in crime. While he was Jacinta Allan's partner in crime and refusing to do a royal commission and signing up to every wasteful spending measure that has led to \$200 billion of debt and signing up to the Suburban Rail Loop and signing contracts, he was stuffing up the VCE exams.

Following a two-year legal battle, the release of the Victorian government school condition report confirmed almost one in five schools are in poor condition under Labor. I will contrast that with the fact that under this government over the next four years one-fifth of the entire infrastructure budget, including what we spend on school and hospital infrastructure, is being spent on the Suburban Rail Loop in the eastern suburbs, which I note the Premier has left open to another day. This means that one in five schools are in poor condition under Labor because they have got no money to invest in our schools. That is a failure of leadership from the now Premier, who as Deputy Premier and Minister for Education could not stand up to the Treasurer or the then Premier Jacinta Allan regarding desperately needed upgrades to our schools for our kids. They were more interested in enabling the CFMEU to have unfettered access to our construction sector and watching \$15 billion walk out the door to crooks and criminals instead of properly funding our schools.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, President, I just ask that you remind Mr Mulholland, in his contribution, to be relevant to the bill.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, I will call the member back to the bill.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I was just speaking about the funding for our schools, which is of course relevant to this bill. I will continue by saying that the now Premier was too weak to stand up to the Treasurer and to stand up to then Premier Jacinta Allan regarding school funding. As we know, through them spending one-fifth of the infrastructure budget on the Suburban Rail Loop and watching silently, saying a royal commission would cost too much and take too much time, watching \$15 billion walk out the door to crooks and criminals instead of funding our schools, this now Premier was too weak to stand up to Jacinta Allan. Instead he stood by Jacinta Allan and looked her in the eye and declared his loyalty, because he was too weak to stand up to Jacinta Allan to properly fund our schools. Prior to the November 2022 election, the Labor government promised \$850 million to upgrade at least 89 schools across Victoria by November 2026; however, years on, the promised upgrades of dozens of schools have been delayed until after the November 2026 election. I will say this again: when you are funding one-fifth of your entire infrastructure budget, including school builds, of course school builds and upgrades are going to be cut to the side and delayed, because the government is spending well over \$15 billion over the next four years on one tunnel in the eastern suburbs. This is what we got when a weak Premier could not stand up to then Premier Jacinta Allan. He could not stand up to former Premier Daniel Andrews, and he was too weak to stand up to then Premier Jacinta Allan.

Following more than a year of unsuccessful negotiations, in March 2026 Victorian teachers launched their first pay strike in 13 years over an ongoing pay dispute with the Allan Labor government, but mostly with the then education minister Ben Carroll, who had initially offered a 17 per cent pay increase before increasing their offer to 28 per cent. As of 3 June 2026, 100 per cent of education support employees voted to reject Labor's pay deal. The dispute has continued, and we see even more strikes planned, with the union and teachers not accepting the government's offer. That is a failure to sit down with teachers, who do a fantastic job. Teachers would be mortified to think that crooks and criminals dressed up as health and safety reps are receiving double what teachers do. Crooks and criminals who are out of prison and straight onto a construction site thanks to the crooked CFMEU, are getting paid more than our teachers, who work so hard to support our students. That was a failure of the now Premier Ben Carroll to stand up to Jacinta Allan; he was too weak to stand up to Daniel Andrews, and he was too weak to stand up to Jacinta Allan. This is a dishonest and distracted government and a dishonest and distracted now Premier, who was too weak to stand up to Jacinta Allan.

We saw that Ben Carroll was the minister responsible when hackers accessed information of current and past Victorian government school students. In a major data breach in January of this year, an external third party accessed all students' names, email addresses, school names, year levels and encrypted passwords. That is why, as I mentioned earlier, any additional powers to obtain data need to be scrutinised carefully, because you might just have an incompetent education minister – Ben Carroll – who lets these things through, who stuffs up VCE exams, who is responsible for data breaches, who cannot organise a pay offer, who was too weak to stand up to Daniel Andrews and who was too weak to stand up to Jacinta Allan. In every portfolio area he has ultimately failed, and as education minister he has been responsible for some of the biggest scandals we have seen in the education sector in a very long time. As I said, he said that a royal commission would take too much time and cost too much. Now he has changed his mind, but he was too weak to stand up to Jacinta Allan, stand up to Daniel Andrews and actually properly fund our schools. Again, about 29 different school builds that were promised by the Labor Party at the election, promised to the Victorian people, have been pushed back to after this election. All the while you have, just during this term, the North East Link blowing out by \$10 billion. Over the next four years they are spending about \$15 billion on the Suburban Rail Loop – one-fifth of the entire infrastructure budget, including school builds. That is a failure of this now former education minister.

As I said, the Liberals and Nationals, after extensive consultation with stakeholders, will not oppose the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill. I understand the minister will have an amendment seeking some clarification in the way the Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority is aligned with Victorian law. We will not oppose those amendments either. I will seek to move my amendment as well.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:47): It gives me pleasure to rise to make a contribution on this bill, the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. I trust that most of my remarks will be actually relevant to the bill, unlike Mr Mulholland's, which contained a lot of irrelevancies to the actual matter before this chamber. Perhaps he did not read it because, as we know, it is only a Labor government that actually cares about public education and funds it appropriately. We only need to reflect on the legacy of the Kennett government that closed 300 schools and sacked thousands and thousands of teachers. We will never forget that, because that is a disgraceful legacy that those opposite have, yet we are lectured to by Mr Mulholland, who clearly does not understand how budgets work. We have got funds allocated to all sorts of program areas that the government is responsible for. But you can just see that those opposite are really not ready to govern anything. It is an embarrassment really for them to come into this place and try and talk about all manner of things that are not even relevant to the bill and clearly demonstrate they do not understand budgets.

As I said, it does give me great pleasure to talk about this bill because there are some very important amendments in this bill that are going to make improvements to our public education system. The bill will amend the act to, first of all, strengthen First Nations recognition and self-determination in

education, including early childhood education and training systems, in order to improve cultural safety and responsiveness and support improved learning and wellbeing outcomes for First Nations learners. This is very critical, because we know if we can provide cultural safety and be more responsive to the needs of our First Nations people, those things are going to translate to improved outcomes for our First Nations people. I could not think of a better mechanism to do it than our public education system.

Also, we are going to require that schools, as a prescribed minimum standard for registration, have a policy that restricts student use of personal electronic devices, such as mobile phones, wearable devices and audio devices, during school hours. We all know the distractions that personal devices cause for children and sometimes for adults too. We know there are a number of adults, even in this chamber as we speak, who are welded to their mobile phones and looking at all manner of things. But these devices are a distraction, particularly for children who are trying to learn at school. I know a number of schools have moved on this, and our government has. Sorry, Acting President, it was not aimed at you; I looked across the chamber and saw a number of people with their phones in their hands. Nevertheless it is distracting, with the constant notifications that come up. Like I said, a number of schools have already implemented policies restricting the use of personal devices. There is research that supports the idea that the use of personal devices – you know, the sort of quick grab of social media – is reducing our capacity to focus on things. We are seeing some impacts that devices are having on learning and learners. This policy will restrict student use of electronic devices such as mobile phones and wearable devices during school hours.

The amendments will also improve the teacher registration framework administered by the Victorian Institute of Teaching and enable country of birth data and other information specified in the subordinate legislation to be recorded on the Victorian student register so that Victorian students can be assigned a unique student identifier, or USI, by the end of 2027.

If I can go into a little bit more detail about the first issue that I mentioned, which is strengthening our First Nations people's recognition and their right to self-determination, the bill before us, the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026, will amend the act to strengthen First Nations recognition and determination. It will introduce a statement that acknowledges the unique status of First Nations people in Victoria, and it will outline historical and ongoing factors that impact First Nations learning and wellbeing outcomes. As I said before, if we target these things, we will continue to work towards improving and lifting outcomes, whether it be health or education outcomes, for First Nations people, and that is critically important. The statement will also confirm First Nations histories, culture and perspectives, forming part of the learning areas that are subject to free instruction in schools; it is also critically important that First Nations history, culture and perspectives are taught in schools and understood by students, because it is part of our history. Despite some people – those opposite – wanting to deny that, we know that thousands and thousands of years of First Nations history exist. It is a welcome change to ensure that that now will form part of the learning areas that will be subject to free instruction in our schools.

The bill will also introduce a new duty on the responsible department secretaries to ensure that Aboriginal cultural understanding professional development training is made available to anyone working in support, learning or wellbeing across early childhood education – our schools, our TAFEs and adult community and further education providers, as well as state-funded registered training organisations. This is really important. We are seeing professional development being made available to anybody who works in early childhood education right through to adult education, making sure that every aspect of our education platform clearly enables people to be supported professionally and that we then roll out important curriculum that gives voice to these important areas. This aligns with key elements of recommendation 48 made by the Yoorrook Justice Commission in 2025 as part of our recognition of First Peoples as our first educators. I might say that I could not be more proud to be speaking today on these changes in this bill. It is only a Labor government that makes sure that these

things become reality. Further, it is part of our ongoing commitment to treaty and ensuring that our First Nations people's status in our communities is equally recognised.

I move to the second issue I raised, which is the restriction of personal devices in all Victorian schools. As I noted earlier, these devices can be a distraction not only for students or young people but also for adults. Nevertheless these changes are aimed squarely at Victorian students and Victorian schools, and they will be rolled out to both public and non-government schools in the form of a policy that restricts student use of personal electronic devices during school hours. What we want is for students to be focused on their learning as much as possible without distraction. We have seen how this has been in public schools across the state to date, and many non-government schools are already doing this as well, but including these amendments will only strengthen this. As I said, removing distractions from students in the classroom across all schools in Victoria will ensure future Victorian students have improved learning, engagement and mental health outcomes.

The other issue that I touched on, the third issue, which is improving the teacher registration framework, is also critically important. We want to further strengthen the teacher registration framework, which is administered by the Victorian Institute of Teaching. The changes include increasing the efficiency of the institute's operating processes and procedures with respect to interim suspensions, information-sharing powers and health assessment processes for teachers. These amendments are aimed at allowing for greater flexibility as to who may impose interim suspensions so that the Victorian Institute of Teaching can respond to serious cases when the Victorian Institute of Teaching's CEO is unavailable due to unforeseen illness or absence. Again, that gives greater flexibility to be responsive to these things.

Currently the Victorian Institute of Teaching under the previous provisions is required to review the basis of an interim suspension 30 days after the original decision and then every 30 days thereafter regardless of whether it has received any new information or not. Many reviews result in a continuation of the interim suspension where the Victorian Institute of Teaching has not received any new or additional information which is relevant to its opinion as to whether an interim suspension continues to be necessary to protect children. The need to review interim suspensions every 30 days even without any new or additional information creates a resourcing burden on the Victorian Institute of Teaching, which needs to support the council or the CEO under delegated authority to make a review decision. These are resources which the Victorian Institute of Teaching has indicated would be better directed to address other high-risk regulatory matters. Again, it is an unfair burden, and it is resourcing that could be better directed elsewhere. The amendment will also expand the information available about teachers on the register of registered teachers, otherwise known as the RRT, and enable the removal of obsolete or unnecessary information from the register of disciplinary action as well as widen the pool of eligible candidates for chairperson of the Victorian Institute of Teaching council board of directors. That was very pedestrian and ordinary but nevertheless important. It is very machinery-type stuff but critically important.

The last point is about information to be recorded in the Victorian student register. The changes will expand the information that must be collected and retained on the Victorian student register to include country of birth data and any information prescribed by the regulations. Under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–34 heads of agreement Victoria is required to implement and contribute to the national schools unique student identifier number for Victorian schools and students. The aim of this is to create a lifelong education record for students across educational institutions across the country. No matter whether you are a young student just starting out or you are on your education journey right throughout the course of your life and as an older adult, you should be able to continue to access high-quality education in Victoria. The student identifier number just makes it a little bit easier for you to do that. There is a consistent record of your educational pursuits and activities. Only a Labor government will remain and retain the very important title of the Education State. No other Labor government has done more for public education than successive Labor governments in Victoria. Education is the most important public investment we can make in our future. The Carroll Labor

government has set a strong foundation for education in this state. It is something that we are immensely proud of, and we will continue to build on the previous reforms and initiatives that we have delivered on.

I know those opposite will not like hearing this, but for example, we have invested an additional \$38.6 billion in our schools and have grown the teaching workforce every year we have been in office. That is a consistent track record that our government has. The key reforms we have delivered on are as follows: we will have the best paid teachers and principals and education support staff in the country; Victorian students have the best NAPLAN results in the country, better than at any other time on record; over \$4 billion has been invested in our nation-leading disability inclusion program; and Victorian public schools are seeing enrolment growth, one of only three jurisdictions to see this. That is a ring of confidence and a vote of confidence in our public schools. Phonics is a really critical change that we brought into our curriculum, and it is really delivering results for our youngest learners – updating the Victorian teaching and learning model to embed explicit teaching at its core, including the use of systematic synthetic phonics. That is such a welcome change and so many people have talked about how critically important that was. Mental health practitioners, again, are making sure our students are able to be supported and have any concerns identified early. We have the Schools Mental Health Fund and the Head Start apprenticeships and traineeships. We have been supporting disadvantaged students through the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund and affordable uniforms. The list goes on and on and on.

I know I am running out of time, but in the last 20 seconds I have available I just want to say this: \$20.1 billion delivering on our commitment to build a hundred new schools by 2026, including 19 new schools opened this year in our growth suburbs. We funded over 2400 school upgrades at more than 1250 government schools and invested \$294.8 million to upgrade and modernise 31 existing schools. As you can see, we are building schools faster than ever before, and I commend the bill to the house.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:02): I am pleased to rise to make a contribution on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. As a former teacher – and I have now been in Parliament for 11-odd years – mobile phones were certainly on the rise when I was teaching. There was a level of frustration back in 2015, when I left, that students were not keeping them in the lockers as they were supposed to do but sneaking them in and having a chat or playing games or whatever. Some of these amendments through this bill are certainly wise, and we accept them wholeheartedly. I am sure, in the last decade, with the advancing technology and many, many extra things that can go on to a mobile phone or an electronic device, that it does impact educational opportunities. It can make it much more difficult for teachers and/or schools to do the very core work that they do, which is creating active minds, hopefully encouraging intelligent thought from inquiring minds and putting down a very strong framework for a lasting success in life. I am looking across at my colleagues here, and I know Mr Welch's father was a principal at a state high school and another colleague Ann-Marie Hermans was in education as well – a very important area.

There are important and quite reasonable amendments in this bill, and we will not be opposing them. The general purposes will be to strengthen Aboriginal recognition and self-determination across the education system, and I will have more to say about that in a moment; to require all schools to implement policies restricting these personal devices – let us keep them where they need to be used, not as a distraction from the great education happening in our school systems; and to reform the teacher registration and regulatory processes through the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT).

I know when I started, again if we go back another 20 years before that, I was appalled that, after going to university and acquiring a degree and a diploma in education – so I was perfectly qualified – and after working for myself for 10 years, I could write to the VIT at the time, provide \$66, and they would provide me with a licence to teach. I certainly always felt that that was too easy on me, but I also accepted the challenge and taught myself how to teach in school, with fantastic mentors and colleagues in my regional schools – and I am forever indebted to them. This amendment also looks to expand the

Victorian teacher registration to support national data reforms, including the USI, the unique student identifier, and other amendments.

I do want to say that, as I have indicated, we are not opposing the bill. We do have an amendment which is consistent with our position. One of the things that I think is really important, having read the bill and seen the clauses that relate to the recognition of our Aboriginal people and embedding self-determination, is that recognition is important, respect is important and cultural understanding is important. Indeed I only yesterday had a meeting with Reconciliation Victoria and want to say a thankyou to, among others, Aunty Gina Bundle. She grew up in Orbost, which was a great place to be, and like me loves the Snowy River and had been down there only recently. There were many things that we had furious agreement on, and some of that furious agreement looked at ensuring that when there is recognition, when there is cultural understanding, they are actually really embedded through a process that all students can embrace, so that all students can have understanding.

I will give you an example of one such tremendous lady in my electorate, called Aunty Cheryl Drayton. I mentioned her to Gina, and she was aware, as Gina has done herself, of sitting down with students, young students in primary school everywhere, and having those really great educational experiences of what culture means to Aunty Cheryl Drayton, what it means within community but how there are connections and experiences that everyone can value. This is an area that I would like to see encouraged and facilitated in our system, and I am going to put a 'however'. However, no amount of recognition, no amount of embedding something into a curriculum, is of any greater importance than actually making sure that all of our children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and every single child in our education system, are able to read and write and count and complete school to the level that they want to attain.

What we have seen over the course of a decade under the Andrews–Allan and Carroll government now is that Closing the Gap has not worked. The other day when we were talking about the budget I asked the Treasurer specifically about this. I was asking about various elements within the budget, and she said, 'Yes, we acknowledge it hasn't worked for a decade, so we're trying something new.' You can go and check *Hansard* – these are very similar things to what the Treasurer has said. My concern is that there has not been that investment and that targeted approach in school readiness, in attendance, in literacy, in numeracy, in year 12 completion, and this is across all the years but indeed particularly for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, in pathways to employment, training and university. This is not a great track record: 'We haven't made improvements, so we're trying something else.' Well, the Liberals and Nationals have a separate policy, a First Nations policy for First Nations Victoria, where the buck stops with the minister about channelling and poking holes through silos to actually try and achieve outcomes that align with Closing the Gap targets, because we all universally – people in this house, in the federal sphere – agree that these are important initiatives. But unless you actually make headway, they are just rhetoric, and that is not good enough for students in my Eastern Victoria electorate and right across the state. I put that to the government. We are trying something new. For 10 years it has not worked, and I believe there must be a better way to achieve these outcomes. There is nothing more liberating, in my humble opinion, that would stimulate self-determination than being able to excel at school, get a job and have a career that you want, whatever that career looks like. It is opportunity and options, and that is what not only our Aboriginal students but all Victorian students need. I put that on record as the shadow minister.

We also want to talk about rural and regional Victoria. I should not be up here if I did not talk about students in my electorate. We in 2022 had an inquiry into the education sphere. We moved it, and I thought it was really important to have that inquiry because there was significant pressure in our school system. We do see teachers that are leaving in frustration. We heard it. We went to Bairnsdale and heard about the pressures that are on teachers: the churn and the difficult nature of trying to attract new teachers to the regions and provide that face-to-face, very important, critical work that teachers do.

I was speaking last week when Jess Wilson was down in the Latrobe Valley. She came out to a function that Martin Cameron held, and there was a principal there from the region, an outstanding principal

who has been in the system for over 20 years. I will not say his name, but he has written to me and provided some context, and he was happy for me to share the generalities of it. The system is not supporting not only our teachers but our principals. There are very important things like disability inclusion funding – the model is there, but educators are sharing with me that the funding model has significantly increased the administrative workload and schools are often expected to provide supports before funding decisions are finalised. That creates financial uncertainty.

The other day he was physically hurt – I will not say how – by a student. They are being asked to manage these severe and sometimes violent, in this case it was, behaviours of students in our classrooms. This is dangerous. This is the unfortunate thing. If you have been in the classroom, you will understand this. He says there are students who really, really need support but for a raft of reasons they are not getting that support. They end up sucking up over 90 per cent of the time and focus of the classroom teacher and/or the principal and/or our very valuable – we do appreciate them – classroom support educators. They take all that energy, and the resources are not there to support those principals and teachers.

The other thing he said that was quite alarming to me is that there is a system where students can turn up potentially one day a month and still their parents acquire and are able to receive all of the benefits. When a student can turn up one day a month to the education system, whether it is primary school or secondary college, and qualify for benefits and their family can get those benefits, what sort of education are we providing in this state? These kids and their parents know the system. That is unacceptable and needs to change. I am very thankful that we have some outstanding work being done by our shadow minister Brad Rowsell. I want to put on record my humble thanks to him and to recognise his work in the past. Indeed successful school starters is a policy that the Liberals and Nationals have put forward as a commitment to early intervention in our school system for our students. If they can get that assessment very early, if they can get that functionality in the programs around them, then their trajectory into success is far greater. This gentleman, this valued teacher, has said to me that there are great flaws in our current system.

We have a new Premier today – out we walk Jacinta Allan and in we walk former Minister for Education Ben Carroll. Well, let me say, in my Eastern Victoria Region under Ben Carroll we have got 19 schools listed as being in poor condition by the school condition report. Nineteen of them are poor in my electorate, and 26 of them are rated average. It would not take too long to wander around our schools and see the lack of that care and the lack of that quality. A school's condition does matter. There is no doubt about it, it does matter. We talk about education, and we have heard from those opposite and the minister in the lower house about improving education. Here we have got a minister who oversaw the debacle – there is no other word for it – of our VCE examinations. For my sins I taught year 12 general maths and chemistry when I was in the system, and I know how hard not only students but families work to make sure that they are exam ready. And then lo and behold, here we have got a debacle of a minister, now at the helm of Victoria, who oversaw a department that was clearly dysfunctional. I put it to this house that we have had an exams debacle and we have got a pay debacle. Indeed speaking to the principal again, there was a high level of frustration in and around those learning support teachers in terms of this pay debacle. He has left our schools to fall apart. This is the minister, now Premier, who will lead us to, I know, the loss of this government and the return of sanity and the return of the Liberals and Nationals and the leadership of Jess Wilson and Danny O'Brien. I will allow, certainly, this bill to go through.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:18): I rise to make a short contribution on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026 on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands throughout Victoria and pay my respect to their elders and the children and young people of past, current and future generations. Education in all forms is highly valued by First Nations people. First Nations education is being connected to country, lore, culture and the wisdom of the elders that is passed on to younger generations.

Let us be frank, the Victorian education system has previously failed First Nations people. Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care often face multiple and compounding disadvantages, including the impacts of intergenerational trauma, family separation, racism, colonisation and frequent placement changes that disrupt their education. The Yoorrook Justice Commission found that Victoria's education system fails First Peoples children and called for systemic reform to ensure Aboriginal children receive an education that is culturally safe, trauma informed and grounded in self-determination. The legacy of the White Australia policy continues, where First Nations children were barred from attending local schools, forced to travel long distances or attend underfunded schools focused on manual labour. The current school curriculum was designed at a time when First Nations history, culture and language were being erased. This bill is an opportunity to right this wrong, to embed self-determination and truth-telling in our Victorian education system.

This is also an opportunity to address the longstanding inequalities that have failed generations of Aboriginal children in Victoria's education system. Too many of these kids have experienced poor school attendance, low academic results, exclusion through suspensions or expulsions and reduced rates of year 12 completion compared with their peers. These are failures of government, not of these young people. In a time of treaty, this bill is a step in the right direction in addressing these failures. These legislative changes are an important first step, but they are only the beginning, particularly for First Nations children.

I would like to acknowledge that Victoria led the country with the phone-free policy in public classrooms and by introducing restrictions around devices within classrooms. Technology has many benefits, but the balance was definitely off. This bill will help address some of the negative impacts that technology has had on students' learning. Research shows that screen time can have negative effects on the health, cognitive development and, most importantly, psychological wellbeing of children and young people. While devices can help enhance learning, excessive social media and the use of these devices can negatively affect the health of children and young people. Evidence shows that for many kids spending too much time on screens can increase their risk of anxiety and depression. This bill is a mechanism to encourage healthy screen time, with limits for children and support for their learning and wellbeing. Legalise Cannabis Victoria is proud to support this bill in the hope that this opens the dialogue for a more inclusive education system for all of our children.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (15:21): I have taken the time this morning to really reflect upon the bill before us, and I have got to say I am really delighted to have the opportunity to make a contribution on this because, to my mind, this is a bill worthy of celebration and praise. I join with my fellow colleagues in speaking in strong support of the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. This is a piece of legislation that goes right to the very heart of what our government is all about. It is about fairness, it is about opportunity and it is about doing the hard and practical work required to make sure that Victoria proudly remains the Education State. Education is the most profound and important public investment we can make in our state's future, and this bill introduces vital, long-overdue improvements across our entire system.

I want to start by talking about something deeply important to me, to our government and to First Nations communities across this state. If you look at our current Education and Training Reform Act 2006, you will find a glaring omission. As it stands today, our core education legislation does not make a single reference to First Nations people or learners – not one. This lack of visibility and recognition reinforces the historical exclusion of First Nations people in the education system, and it is a reality that this bill finally and decisively changes. During the Yoorrook Justice Commission hearings commissioners rightly challenged us to increase the rate of system change to support improved First Nations outcomes in education. They highlighted that current-day educational inequality is part of a pattern of inequality that has been a feature of life since colonisation. We listened, and we are acting.

This bill introduces a formal statement of recognition into the act. It acknowledges that Aboriginal people have a history of practising education on the land now known as Victoria for more than

60,000 years. It explicitly recognises the deep wrongs perpetrated through the education system since colonisation, including cultural dislocation, oppression, intergenerational trauma, lack of healing, systemic racism, institutional inequality and the devastating loss of land, lore and language. It formally acknowledges that these historical wrongs continue to harm Aboriginal people in Victoria today and that the lack of access to culturally safe and inclusive learning environments continues to impact education and life outcomes. We are making sure that Aboriginal cultural understanding professional development training is rolled out to staff right across the board. This bill places a duty on the secretaries to make this training available to anyone working to support learning or wellbeing in early childhood services, schools, TAFEs, adult education providers and state-funded training organisations.

This training will cover crucial areas, including precolonial, postcolonial and contemporary Aboriginal history, cultures and perspectives, including working with Aboriginal people and supporting self-determination and cultural rights. This means that whenever First Nations people interact with our education system, whether as a learner, a parent or a staff member, they can be confident that the people they interact with have access to high-quality information about how to undertake their role in a way that is culturally safe and responsive.

In addition to this restorative work we are making highly practical changes to the daily environments in our classrooms. We all know that personal electronic devices can be a massive distraction for young minds, and the Victorian teaching and learning model emphasises the critical importance of attention, focus and regulation for effective learning. When students bring their devices to school, it fragments that attention and opens the door to a range of health, safety and privacy risks. Back in 2020 our government led the nation by introducing a policy requiring student mobile phones to be switched off and securely stored during the school day in government schools. The results of that policy have been absolutely fantastic. Independent evaluations have shown a significant increase in focus on learning, far greater student socialisation and physical activity during breaks and a reduction in the incidence of cyberbullying during school hours.

This bill rolls that exact standard out across the entire state. It introduces a new prescribed minimum standard for school registrations that requires all Victorian schools, both public and non-government, to have a policy that restricts student use of personal electronic devices during school hours. Importantly, this goes beyond just mobile phones. As technology evolves, we are seeing increasing issues with wearable devices like smartwatches and personal audio devices like earbuds, which can be just as distracting and can covertly capture images and footage – quite worryingly so. You see, this legislation ensures that all future Victorian students, regardless of what school they attend, will experience improved learning and engagement and better mental health outcomes free from addiction to our devices.

We are also doing the necessary regulatory clean-up to back our teaching workforce and to keep our students safe. Supporting our teachers means having a strong, efficient and responsive regulator, and this bill makes sensible, much-needed improvements to the teaching registration framework administered by the Victorian Institute of Teaching. Right now, if the VIT CEO is unexpectedly sick or away, time-critical decisions on imposing an interim suspension on a teacher to protect child safety can be dangerously delayed, because a full meeting of the VIT council must be convened. We are fixing that dangerous inflexibility by empowering the VIT council to specify skilled employees who can be authorised by the CEO to exercise interim suspension powers on their behalf. This guarantees that someone is always available to make those time-critical safety decisions.

We are fundamentally improving how these suspensions are reviewed. You see, currently the VIT is forced to review the basis of an interim suspension 30 days after the original decision and then every 30 days after that, regardless of whether any new information has been received. This repetitive 30-day cycle creates a massive unnecessary resourcing burden on the VIT, tying up staff in administrative reviews that simply result in a continuation of the suspension. The bill before us extends the period between a subsequent mandatory periodic review from 30 days to 90 days, and this will free up the institute to focus its vital resources on other high-risk regulatory matters. But let me be absolutely

clear: it does not mean that teachers will be suspended for longer than necessary. A companion amendment in this bill explicitly puts that the VIT must immediately consider any new information relevant to a suspension as soon as practicable, meaning a suspension will be revoked the moment the institute no longer reasonably believes there is an unacceptable risk of harm to children.

We are also expanding the VIT's information-sharing powers so it can collect and disclose information regarding applicants for registration. Currently, the institute is limited in how it can gather information about someone applying to be a teacher, often having to rely solely on the account of the applicant. These changes ensure the institute has access to verified third-party information to make a safe, evidence-based decision about who is suitable to stand in front of a Victorian classroom.

Furthermore, we are increasing transparency by requiring that the publicly available register of registered teachers includes information about whether a teacher's registration is subject to any condition, limitation or restriction and whether the teacher has been subject to any caution or reprimand. Previously this low-level disciplinary information was only required on the separate register of disciplinary action, and this created a genuine child-safety gap where a prospective employer or community member might miss important information if they only checked the main registration register. By aligning these registers we are closing that loophole and ensuring full transparency, and at the same time we are granting the institute the sensible discretion to remove obsolete information from the register of disciplinary action. We are also allowing the institute to withhold details of an interim suspension if it was imposed solely due to a teacher's medical impairment and publication would cause unjust reputational harm without improving child safety.

Additionally, the bill cuts frustrating red tape in the health assessment process by allowing an investigator to directly provide a health report to a nominated practitioner without first having to report back to the VIT, saving crucial time. We are also widening the talent pool for the VIT council chairperson by removing the restrictive requirement that they must be a registered teacher or principal, allowing us to attract candidates with deep experience in board governance and strategic oversight, in what is really an increasingly complex regulatory landscape. On top of all of this, the bill prepares our educational data systems for the future by expanding the information collected on the Victorian student register to include country of birth data. This is a direct requirement to meet our obligations under the National Better and Fairer Schools Agreement. By collecting this data centrally, Victoria will be able to implement the national unique student identifier for all our students by the end of 2027. This identifier will seamlessly create a lifelong educational record that follows a student through primary school, secondary school, VET and university across all jurisdictions and sectors. It will ease the administrative burden on schools and be particularly vital in helping identify and track our most vulnerable students who move between states and might otherwise be at risk of disengagement. I will just take a moment to say that as somebody who switched schools a number of times during my childhood, the amount of time it took for catch-ups to happen, waiting for records to come from other schools, I think this will make a real difference in the educational experience of students. I am so delighted to see that lifelong educational record.

This bill is just the latest step in our government's support for our education system. We have invested an extraordinary \$38.6 billion into our schools since coming into office, and we have grown the teaching workforce every single year. We are delivering on our commitment to build 100 new schools by 2026, including 19 brand new schools that opened just this year in our booming growth suburbs. We funded over 2400 school upgrades, and the fact is 50 per cent of all schools built across the entire nation of Australia in the past 10 years have been built right here in Victoria by our government. Our investments are undeniably working.

I am going to take a moment to give my respects to the Victorian students who achieved the best overall NAPLAN results in the nation in 2025, securing the highest or second-highest median scores in 18 of the 20 measures. It is hard proof that our evidence-based reforms, including explicit teaching and systematic synthetic phonics, through the updated Victorian teaching and learning model are genuinely delivering world-class outcomes for our kids. This bill is about ensuring that our regulatory

and legislative frameworks match the excellence happening in our classrooms every single day. It protects student wellbeing, it streamlines critical safety processes and it takes the historic, necessary steps towards First Nations justice and self-determination in education. I proudly commend this bill to the house.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:35): I am very, very pleased to speak today on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. It is no secret that I have a background in education, and it is one that I am very proud of. I want to commend Victorian teachers and even the Victorian teachers union for their hard work in standing up, holding the line and holding their ground to make sure that in the state of Victoria our teachers, our teacher aides and our learning support workers are properly remunerated for the very important work that they do, because it is a profession that is incredibly difficult at this time. There are unprecedented levels of violence in schools and unprecedented levels of pressure on teachers, and unfortunately this bill is going to add to the administrative burden on teachers. That is a concern for many people in the teaching profession, and I think it needs to be noted. There need to be ways to roll this out such that it does not put additional pressure on teachers.

Having said that, there are a number of amendments in here – some of them have been discussed – in terms of Aboriginal recognition and self-determination. I want to say this: it is already a requirement for teachers in their training and in their professional development to undergo training in Aboriginal studies and understanding Aboriginal perspectives. That has existed for some time. The difference is the degree to which that training takes place. I do feel that we need to be looking very closely at Closing the Gap. Whilst that is perhaps not as relevant to Victoria as it is to some other states, it is still an issue and it is something that is not being effectively addressed necessarily through this legislation. I think that that should be understood, and that will be a focus of a Liberal and Nationals government: to make sure that we are following through on closing those gaps and allowing every young person to have not just the right but the opportunity to read and the opportunity to do basic maths. I am very, very pleased to see the rollout in many schools and the improvement in the teaching of phonics, bringing that back. It just horrified me to think that there was no phonics being taught in some schools for many, many years. In fact many teachers have not even been trained in it.

Getting back to the issues in the bill, one of the things that this bill is looking at is the use of mobile phones. Whilst the use of mobile phones has been restricted in government schools, it has been up to every non-government school to determine how that rolls out in the context of their school. I have been very fortunate to work in some exceptional schools. In the one that I was working in prior to coming here it was a student-led operation that came up with how they were going to make restrictions on the use of their technology, particularly their phones, and it was a very, very effective ruling because it came from the students and was implemented and overseen by the students along with the teachers. The teachers did not have to do an awful lot to make sure that the students were using technology appropriately.

There probably should be some understanding of why we are needing to have restrictions on the use of phones. It is not to make young people feel unsafe or to go backwards in how we do education but to understand that the overuse of screen time in schools is definitely impacting learning. It is reducing what we call deep comprehension and causing constant distractions, which overstimulate the brain. Young people are not able to engage in their learning in the classroom if they are constantly flicking through these devices and things like phones. I think that that is important to understand. There is also a lot of skimming that takes place when we do the reading through devices, and that, as I said, prevents that deep analytical process from taking place. Some would argue that multitasking does not even exist. There are education professional developments around the world that say multitasking is not a real thing, because by trying to do more than one thing you are actually not doing anything particularly well. They have also found in many studies that there is classroom disruption, with a high percentage of students being distracted by digital devices, and that can actually cut down instruction time. It causes attention exhaustion and can also, surprisingly, lead to poor physical health from extended use of eyes

and poor posture, so causing eye strain and disrupted sleep patterns, and it can actually interfere with even next-day performance. I just want to bring those to the attention of the chamber, because that is why that particular specification has been put in there. And as I said, it has not been in Victorian legislation as it is about to be, because it has allowed the non-government schools to be able to have the freedom to work out the context of the students with which they work.

I find it astounding to listen to some of the people across the chamber in the things that they say. In fact I would like to actually read a quote, which is a wonderful quote. I think it really applies to the Liberals and the Nationals, but it was given by a Labor government spokesman in February 2026 and was recorded in one of the newspapers – I think it was the *Age*:

“Our priority is – and has always been – that every child, no matter where they live, has access to a world-class education for free in a Victorian government school backed by full and fair funding ...

I do not think you are going to get that under this government, unfortunately. We have seen that the new Premier has come from education. I think the largest teachers strike in the nation has taken place in Victoria this year, and I commend those 35,000 teachers that came out, because they are standing up for all Victorians when they stand up for education. We have a situation where our schools have not been properly funded. It is all very well to be putting restrictions on devices, but there are plenty of schools that do not even have decent devices, and in fact that is the least of their worries.

When we look at how many schools were supposed to be funded, there has been a massive reduction. There was an \$850 million upgrade that was promised to at least 89 schools, and that has now been delayed until after the election. We find this constant tokenism by this government, where it says things like – I think it was in the 2024–25 budget – that they were going to do capital upgrades to 25 schools and that they were promising \$227 million, and that has now grown to 29 schools in the 2025–26 budget, and we know for a fact that 28 schools are not going to get their upgrades until, at the very least, 2027 at the earliest. This is simply not providing that world-class, fair and reasonable education and funding that this government has promised. We are seeing larger classes. We are seeing fewer learning supports and teacher aids. We have not seen very much in the way of the Gonski reforms. When we have a debt that is reaching \$194 billion by mid-2029, with interest payments that are going to exceed \$29 million in the same period – and we can spend \$589 million on Commonwealth Games that we do not even have in our own nation – it seems to me that what the educators are asking for is just peanuts, and they deserve to be listened to, they deserve to be heard and they deserve to be reasoned with.

We see that the schooling resource standard, the SRS as it is called, was promised to be 75 per cent funded by this government, but that has been pushed back to 2031. It means that we have schools that are actually below the minimum standard. And for Labor to cut \$2.4 billion – billion! – from public schools in last year’s budget means we see ourselves in this situation with the lowest paid teachers and underfunded schools. So it is all very well to be doing some reforms in things like personal electronic devices and the use of them, which is part of what this bill is all about, and then the Victorian Institute of Teaching teacher registration and regulatory reforms to streamline things like health assessment and investigative processes, but it is not going to change the fact that it is very, very difficult for teachers right now and that administrative tasks continue to grow without any sense of how they are going to continue to do their everyday jobs of teaching and balance these administrative tasks that continually grow under the red tape.

Victorian student register reforms – this bill is going to be looking at expanding the type of data that it is collecting, including country of birth and prescribed information. It is going to support the implementation of the national unique student identifier system, which students that have done year 12 will be very familiar with from their exam period. There are a number of concerns too that have been raised by this increased administrative burden by a number of different groups that were consulted. I think that the rollout for teachers, when they are in the process of simply trying to negotiate for fairer pay and improved pay so that they are no longer the worst paid teachers in the nation, needs to also

consider now the additional burden of additional administrative tasks that are being relayed through this particular bill. Nevertheless, we are not going to be opposing this bill. Any reforms to improve things are going to be a step in the right direction. I think the buck does stop with the minister in terms of Closing the Gap, and I do feel that this bill is only providing tokenism in that area. It is nice to be saying you are ticking a box, but in actual fact what are you doing through this bill to improve literacy, to improve numeracy, to improve the educational system for teachers and their teaching conditions – absolutely nothing.

I am so pleased to be able to also add that the Liberals and Nationals have brought in, as part of their policy going into the election, successful school starters. This is going to allow assessment in prep. We are going to provide \$156 million to embed speech pathologists and occupational therapists into primary schools and allow them to be observe students for signs of autism and ADHD, starting in term 1. There will even be a bursary provided to families who need that additional help. Having access to speech pathologists in schools is something that took place many, many decades ago. My mother, after originally being a primary school teacher, actually became a speech pathologist and worked in primary schools. Later on the funding was changed again, but it is good to see that we are going to be providing that if the Liberals and Nationals are elected in 2026. I do want to commend my colleague Brad Rowsell for the great work that he has done as Shadow Minister for Education in ensuring that these sorts of policies are coming to the forefront.

In conclusion in terms of this particular bill, the Liberals and Nationals are more focused on trying to close the gap than providing tokenism when it comes to the learning and the understanding of Aboriginal studies. As I said, already in schools an awful lot of that takes place. The streamlining of it is perhaps inconsistent across schools, and it can be more extreme in some than in others. I do think that we need to understand that we are talking about different world views and that that needs to be also communicated when it is being taught. In conclusion, we will not be opposing the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill. It remains to be seen how our new Premier is going to fix up the mess that he has allowed to take place in terms of education. As I said, the worst paid teachers are in Victoria, the worst funding for schools is in Victoria, and now we have Ben Carroll, who has been the Minister for Education, leading the state. Let us see what gets done.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:49): I am also pleased to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. I will say from the outset that the Libertarian Party will be opposing this bill. There are two main areas of concern, and I will lay out now the reasons why we will be opposing it. The first one is around government-mandated policies on technology devices. It is my view, and it is the Libertarian Party's view, that education should be as decentralised as possible, and that involves allowing schools to make up their own policies on this sort of thing, on whether or not they allow devices in the classroom in schools. As has been pointed out by many, this is already the status quo in most schools, that they do prohibit these things. What I am concerned about with this law, and with any law, is that technology changes, and the law sets in stone our thinking at this point in technology today without taking into account how things may change in the future. Ultimately, I think that schools are best placed to make these decisions and policies, and therefore I object to what the government is doing here.

On the second part, another thing that this bill does, which is quite significant, is embed specific ideas about Aboriginal culture and how it should be integrated into the curriculum in schools. My concerns here are similar to what my concerns were about treaty: we are effectively undermining the principle of equality under law by having specific racial groups singled out for special treatment. I can give you some examples of what we are talking about here. This bill effectively redefines the term 'parent' to be different based on your race. This is something that is redefining the English language and what it means. It also seeks to embed Aboriginal lore throughout the entire curriculum, which is specified in schedule 1 of the regulations. It does not mandate that it is in every subject – and indeed it would be ridiculous if it was in every subject, because we are talking about things like maths and science and information technology. I do not know, maybe there is some relationship to Aboriginal culture, but

personally I do not see what that relationship is. Again, embedding this stuff deep within the law and deep within our education system rather than seeking to create an equal society where all Australians are equal seeks to create a separate class of people within Victoria, which I just find totally incompatible with the principle of equality under law, where we are meant to see everyone the same under law.

Some of the other things include: we have these undefined references to recognition of customary kinship structures within our education system. Is that even appropriate for what we are meant to be teaching in school? I have no objection to teaching about Aboriginal culture and the history of precolonisation and postcolonisation – I mean, these are parts of the Australian story – but it is trying to embed these things, and some of these are controversial as well. We are legislating things about claims on Aboriginal history, and some of these things are disputed. Some of these things are not held as universal truths by archaeologists or historians. The idea that we would just accept this without appropriate evidence is something that should be concerning to people who care about the truth. The truth is really important.

Ultimately what it comes down to is, again, that we are embedding these ideological things into our education system based upon race, which is an extremely dangerous thing. This has backfired spectacularly. Whenever the government tries to do this sort of thing, what ends up happening is that there is a backlash and people who are racist within our society see this as justification for special treatment. People question why the government talks about equality under law and yet does not practise it, and then people feel entirely justified engaging in their own identity politics, which is what this is – identity politics. As I stated in my inaugural speech when I came into Parliament, identity politics is a cancer. What the government are doing here is justification – their motives are not bad, but the outcome here is a bad outcome, because we are going to set the precedent of having race-based separation of our students and of our education system, which is not just dangerous, it is plain wrong. Therefore the Libertarian Party will not be supporting this bill.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:55): I am very pleased to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. Because this bill includes elements consistent with the treaty and other First Nations elements, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that we are standing on at this point in time and in this chamber. I am very, very happy to support this bill. It introduces several important reforms to the Education and Training Reform Act 2006. They fall under four main headings. It introduces Aboriginal recognition and self-determination across the education system; it restricts student use of personal electronic devices in all schools; it improves the teacher registration framework – as my colleagues have mentioned already, there are just a couple of minor glitches in the procedural continuity there that are being tidied up; and it enables the implementation of the national unique student identifier, which of course is a very logical thing.

I want to speak mostly about the important changes that include Aboriginal recognition and self-determination across our education and training system. The intention of these changes is to improve cultural safety and support improved learning and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal learners. That is a very important principle and a very important intention. What sits behind this intention is Aboriginal children feeling bullied and teased, feeling unsafe in classrooms and not feeling that their history and their cultural uniqueness is recognised in any way.

The act does not currently include any reference to Aboriginal people or culture, or the unique circumstances and experiences of Aboriginal learners. This lack of visibility and recognition reinforces a historical exclusion of Aboriginal people in the education system. The bill will introduce a statement of recognition to the act formally recognising Aboriginal people as the First Peoples of Australia. It acknowledges the historical and ongoing factors that impact Aboriginal learning and wellbeing outcomes.

The bill creates a new duty to consult with the Aboriginal community on anything that directly affects them – this is that notion of self-determination again. It introduces the principles that anyone making

decisions in Victoria's education and training system must take into account. These cover important issues such as self-determination and its centrality in improving outcomes for Aboriginal people, cultural safety, reclaiming and revitalising Aboriginal languages, making Aboriginal histories and cultures core to the curriculum and prioritising the prevention of racism, as I mentioned earlier. These principles are aspirational and directory as well. They are intended to help guide those involved in the education system towards delivering the best outcomes for First Nations people. They are not symbolic. They are practical measures that put substance behind Victoria's commitment to self-determination. Embedding these obligations directly into the act means Aboriginal communities have a legislated say in how early childhood, school and vocational education systems affect their children. These changes arose from the evidence given at the Yoorrook Justice Commission, where we were rightly challenged about the pace of change to improve learning and life outcomes for Aboriginal students. It is also an important part of the truth-telling and redress process that underpins treaty. Education is one of the clearest areas where the promise of treaty becomes real for families. Self-determination in curriculum and cultural safety and understanding of Aboriginal history, culture and language are exactly the kinds of structural changes that treaty negotiations are designed to deliver. This bill is a demonstration of how we honour the treaty process in practice, not just in principle. The duty to consult, the emphasis on cultural understanding and the recognition of Aboriginal histories and languages in the core curriculum are necessary elements of the structural reform that Statewide Treaty negotiations are working towards.

This is where I think we have perhaps not a generational divide but a generational line. When I went through state primary school and Catholic secondary school there was almost no education on our First Nations people, and the education that was provided was breathtakingly brief and incredibly incorrect. It was a complete misdescription of Aboriginal culture and had absolutely no reference to the local culture and tradition of where I came from, where I went to school, which was on Gunditjmara land in south-west Victoria. There was absolutely no local reference whatsoever, so there is a generation of people for whom it is not their fault. As an adult, having curiosity and interest and empathy to understand Aboriginal culture and the wonderful people who are leading the First Nations assembly, for example, has made engaging with First Nations people a joy for me and also enabled me to understand how important inclusion is for everyone.

In contrast, a while back – I think it might have been last year sometime – I visited a kindergarten at a school in Portland that our government had built, and it was terrific, because we talked about child care and we talked about early learning, but the very first thing that the children did was they sang an acknowledgement to country. These were four- and five-year-old children. They sang an Acknowledgement of Country, and it was an action song as well, perfect for their developmental age. I just want to share the very short little song that they sang. They taught it to me, but I will not sing it and nor will I act it out:

Gunditjmara people of the Maar nation.

Thank you for sharing your land and your sky.

We will care for the animals and the people.

Ngatanwarr animals, ngatanwarr people, ngata me.

That means welcome animals, welcome people, welcome me. This is an action song that the children sing every morning. I was struck by the contrast in their experience and their automatic acceptance that this was the First Nations of the Portland area and that they got to share the joy of that small piece of culture every morning at kinder.

I will leave my contribution there, but it just goes to show how important it is to keep updating pieces of legislation like this – that if we did not update it and include the First Nations reference and acknowledgement it would be exclusionary of us. I think it is an absolute shame that an amendment will be moved to remove reference to treaty from this bill, because I just shared the joy of a little piece of cultural messaging that would be excluded based on that. I think it is incredibly disappointing. It shows the kind of tone and personality that a One Nation–Liberal government in this state would have

towards not just First Nations people but anybody that is different – in fact towards everybody, including women. It is really important for us to read the intimidation and the tonal messages that we receive when we have amendments like those that have been circulated today to a piece of legislation like this. It is absolutely shameful. I absolutely support this bill.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (16:06): I rise to join the debate on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. The Liberal Party will not be opposing this piece of legislation, but we will be moving amendments to improve the legislation. The government can have their views on things, but the opposition are also entitled to a view, except that is not the view of the left. The intolerance of the left is that they are correct and nobody else can have a view.

This bill will amend the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to recognise First Nations people and increase the level of Indigenous self-determination in the Victorian education system. It requires schools to implement policies restricting personal electronic devices in schools. It updates the teacher registration framework and information sharing, and it will also support national data reforms by expanding the Victorian student register and introducing unique student identifiers. As I said, the Liberal Party will not oppose the passage of this bill, because the expansion of the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) powers that strengthen teacher registration and regulatory settings will improve oversight and reinforce child safety protections, and we believe these are positive reforms. The restriction on electronic devices also has strong support across the education sector. Both Catholic and independent school representatives have welcomed the ban on mobile phones.

The bill will make several changes to the governance framework and powers and functions of the Victorian Institute of Teaching. Clauses 6 to 18 reform how VIT evaluates applicants for teacher registration, maintains oversight of teacher status and handles information about disciplinary action. Clause 8 will amend section 2.6.21B of the principal act, which currently provides that the institute may only collect and disclose information about existing or former registered teachers. This clause will ensure that the institute can also collect necessary information when they are deciding whether or not to grant registration under part 2.6 of the act. Clause 9 substitutes section 2.6.24(d) of the act and provides that the register of registered teachers must detail whether a teacher's registration is subject to a condition, limitation or restriction. New subsection 2.6.24(db) provides that the register of registered teachers must detail whether the teacher has been subject to any caution or reprimand.

While we are talking about teachers being subject to caution or reprimand, I want to talk a little bit about bullying in schools. I am not talking about bullying between students, I am talking about the bullying of teachers by other teachers. I want to address something that I think needs to be emphasised in this current climate where we are going through a teachers dispute with the government. What is happening in our schools is not appropriate, where some teachers are being bullied by other teachers. Membership in an education union is not a requirement to be a registered teacher. The days of closed shops of compulsory unionism are long gone, and aggressive recruiting has no place in 2026. Freedom of association is a core principle of modern liberal democratic Australia. Union membership should be voluntary, and if anyone chooses not to take up membership in the union, that is their choice. Teachers who choose not to be union members should be treated with the exact same fairness and respect as those who are union members. Union membership or not should never be the basis for any discrimination or harassment by fellow teachers or school leadership, and yet I have received reports during the recent phases of negotiation and industrial action over teacher pay and conditions that Australian Education Union organisers have been bullying non-union teachers in Victorian schools.

One teacher at a government school in my electorate alerted me to emails being sent out by union organisers making threats that non-union members could suffer punitive placements or be forced to go to other schools. Non-union members have been targeted by unionised teachers with a campaign of harassment, belittling, snide comments and scaremongering. It should go without saying, but I will say it anyway: this sort of behaviour has no place in government or independent schools. The classroom is a professional workplace where hardworking and highly trained teachers use their skills and expertise to educate Australia's children to take their place as responsible citizens who are ready

to contribute to society. Every worker should be free from intimidation at work, and that includes schoolteachers who have a right to feel safe at work and not be scared of bullying, recriminations or adverse work decisions because they happen not to be union members. In Victoria unions are out of control. For my constituent, the very union representatives, who should be protecting a fellow teacher from workplace bullying, are actually the ones carrying out the harassment.

As Robert Menzies said in *Forgotten People*, it is one of the ironies of history that the trade union movement, which represented a struggle for freedom of industrial association, should now have taken a new turn so that it desires not that there be freedom to associate in trade unions but that there should be no freedom not to associate in trade unions. Menzies was right: it is not right that people are bullied into being members of a union. It should be their individual choice. I realise that this bill is not about unionism, but when we are talking about improving any aspects of education, the respect and freedoms of individual teachers should also be considered.

I just want to talk also about education in this state and the commitment from this government that we would be the Education State, that we would have the best resourced schools and that no school would be in poor condition, and where we actually are now. Just recently the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report *Delivering School Upgrade Projects* revealed that, of among 18 government schools in the Macedon Ranges, 11 are in poor condition, four are in worn condition and only three are in good condition. The VAGO report also confirms that decisions relating to schools receiving upgrades are not always made in line with the existing prioritisation guidelines. The VAGO report reveals that across Victoria 29 per cent of school upgrades have suffered cost blowouts, 25 per cent of school upgrades have been delayed and the number of schools in poor condition rose from 182 in 2022–23 to 221 in 2024–25, so our schools are getting more and more run down as this government moves on in its term of government. The Victorian government has also pushed back its target of having no school in poor condition from 2030 to 2034, so it is accepting that it is not actually contributing to improving the position that schools are in but that it is actually getting worse and that it needs more time for that to happen.

The continued decline in the condition of Victorian government schools follows the Labor government's failure to deliver dozens of promised school upgrades and their decision to callously cut \$2.4 billion in education funding in the 2024–25 state budget. As I said, in the Macedon Ranges, of the 18 schools there, 11 are in poor condition. I was at one of those primary schools on Monday morning looking at the condition of that school. The lack of maintenance there is just incredible. In fact there were some serious trip hazards and things that were dangerous for students and for the staff. Eleven schools out of 18 in the Macedon Ranges are in poor condition and four are in worn condition, so that is 15 out of 18. Only three schools in the Macedon Ranges could actually be classified as being in good condition.

In Greater Shepparton we have two schools in poor condition, 19 in worn condition and only seven schools out of 28 that can be considered to be in good condition. In the City of Whittlesea – once again a very poor outcome there – they do not even know the results of the audit for four of the schools. There are nine that are in poor condition and 12 in worn condition. So here we are talking about 25 schools in that region that are in poor condition, worn condition or an unknown condition. There are 17 there that are in good condition, and that is lucky for the families who attend those schools in the City of Whittlesea. But as we are seeing, the vast majority of our schools are not – and this goes for right throughout the Northern Victoria Region. I could talk about all the other regions, but I just chose to use those three when talking about the condition of schools.

This government is not investing in maintenance. I discovered this when I took over as housing minister, and there was a Victorian Auditor-General's Office report that said 10,000 of the public housing properties were about to end their usable life span because a Labor government had not invested in maintenance. It is not about building brand new shiny schools all the time, it is about keeping the schools that we have in good condition for the families that use those schools as well. We need to be balanced in the approach to education. There need to be new schools where they are needed,

but the schools that we have already need to be maintained so they do not fall into such a state of disrepair that they become unusable. It is an insult to the families who are zoned to those schools that a government does not invest in the maintenance that is needed to provide decent educational facilities for their children. I urge this government: look at your maintenance schedule to make sure that these schools are brought up to scratch and to make sure that there are no safety hazards, no trip hazards and no other problems that could be dangerous to students, teachers and families in these schools.

This government has failed this state when it comes to education. They try to claim that they are the champions of education, that this is the Education State, but we see every day education standards falling in this state, whether that be student outcomes or whether that be the quality of the schools that are being delivered. Education outcomes have declined under Labor, and they will continue to decline as long as Labor ignores Victorian schools.

Moirá DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (16:19): I also rise to give my contribution on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026, and I will not be supporting this bill. It is obviously logical that I would not support it, because I voted against the Voice, I voted against the treaty, and no matter what name you call this bill, it is the same kind of thing. It is a divisive, racist self-humiliation ritual and a redistribution of income and rights on the basis of race. Not only that but it has got the usual ridiculous virtue signalling. What this bill is going to do is funnel taxpayer funds into consultants and professional development days – which is a real insult to teachers, by the way. Teachers in Victoria do not need to be told to stamp out racism in schools.

I do not know what year you people think it is. We do not allow bullying of kids on any basis. That is ridiculous. Nobody gets away with that. Nobody tolerates that. It is not promoted, it is not overlooked – except, I have to say, in some recent incidences of really obscene antisemitism, just shocking things I could never imagine happening. I have seen those kinds of things being reported, and they have been dealt with by the Victorian Institute of Teaching, belatedly. The VIT needs some more looking into – that, I can tell you.

Then obviously it has a focus on personal electronic devices, as if schools do not already have their own policies to cover that – so bizarre. When we are talking about child safeguards and the VIT, if we are going to talk about how this is going to somehow stop bullying and that it is all about getting rid of racism, why does it only seem to care about one race? What about our Indian students? What about our Māori students? What about our Anglo-Celtic students? This is so internally incoherent. The most clear thing that this actually changes in law is that pipeline of funding to bloated, unrepresentative spokespersons or representatives that the government chooses to speak on behalf of Aboriginal students – who may or may not actually exist in the school, by the way. It is ridiculous.

If we want to talk about parents and the definition of ‘parent’, well, who is famous for undermining parental rights in Victoria? It is Labor, and it is Ben Carroll. Ben Carroll presided over the education portfolio and was quite happy to tell me that it is part of the school policy to lie to parents and withhold from them crucial information about psychological conditions their children might be undergoing which could lead to medical interventions, all behind the parents’ back, with lifelong consequences and against their will. And if the parents object to it, those are the people who could be subjected to action against them, even though they are just being loving parents. It is absolutely outrageous to even think that the Labor Party care about parental rights or student outcomes or racism when all this bill does is funnel money into some corporations and groups that say they represent what is best for Aboriginal families. You ask the kids in your school, you ask their families and you ask them directly. You allocate funding on the basis of merit and need. You do not divide people and hand out rights and taxpayer funds on the basis of diversity, equity and inclusion nonsense. That is actually how you create racist divisions in the classroom. That is how you create resentment, because suddenly they are seeing each other divided on the basis of race. You have to teach them to do that. That is what you are doing with this bill, and it is outrageous that anyone would vote for it. I will not be voting for it.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) incorporated the following:

President, I rise to make a contribution on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026.

And in doing so I would first like to thank my good friend the Minister for Education in the other place, Minister Carroll.

Our record on investment into education is second to none in Victoria.

Whether we're concerning early years education, school years, or tertiary and technical education, this Labor Government has been investing in these for over a decade.

Not only have we made record investments into our public schools, we have also made many reforms in the way the classroom works and is conducted, to ensure the next generations always have the best start.

And this bill follows that record with more reforms aimed at improving outcomes for our littlest Victorians, and modernising our classrooms to changing times and to ensuring inclusivity.

First, President, this bill will strengthen Aboriginal recognition and self-determination in the our education system, including early education.

This involves the improvement of training systems to improve cultural safety and responsiveness, and support improved learning and wellbeing outcomes for First Nations learners.

It will then also require that schools, as a prescribed minimum standard for registration, have a policy in place that restricts student use of personal electronic devices during school hours, an important point that I will touch on later.

That is in reference to devices such as mobile phones, wearable devices and audio devices.

The bill also contains reforms to the Victorian Institute of Teaching to improve the registration framework for teachers, as administered by the VIT.

And the bill also allows for country of birth data and other information specified in subordinate legislation to be recorded in the Victorian Student Register so that Victorian students can be assigned a Unique Student Identifier (USI) by the end of 2027.

This is important reforms designed to build up on our continuous improvement of our education system.

In the first instance, President, I would like to speak on the changes to the use of mobile phones and other similar smart devices at school.

What we are trying to achieve as a state, is a scenario where we capitalise on the benefits that technology can bring to the classroom, while balancing it out as to eliminate distractions and keep the focus on learning.

Removing distractions for students in the classroom across all schools in Victoria will ensure future Victorian students have improved student learning outcomes, better engagement with the classes, and better mental health outcomes.

We have already committed to several changes in this area.

Victoria led the nation by banning mobile phones in public school classrooms in 2020, and the effects were noticeable.

An independent evaluation found students were more focused in class and more social during breaks, playing outside and seeing their friends more often.

Schools also reported fewer critical incidents involving phones.

By introducing this ban into non government schools, we're ensuring consistency across the board.

It is not fair on one set of students if another student has access to those devices, just because one's in a public school and one isn't.

This consistency and uniformity will ensure the same conditions and regulations on this matter across all schools in Victoria.

Earlier this year, the Minister also announced that from Term 1, 2027 all secondary schools will be asked to include planned device-free time in their learning.

We have already limited digital devices to 90 minutes for Years 3–6 and minimal use in Prep to Year 2, to ensure that kids are not hooked on to, or reliant upon devices from an early age.

It meant that students could use devices intentionally, but not as distractions.

Device-free time meant time away from the screens and time spent using physical materials, such as pens, papers, whiteboards, and so forth.

Critical skills to know.

And now, President, we build upon that with this latest expansion of the policy.

Under the current system, students must have their phones in their locker or storage area, switched off, from the first bell to the last.

Expanding the ban to wearable and personal audio devices further limits distraction in classrooms and keeps students safe.

In that spirit, notifications, cellular connection and recording functions on wearable devices must also be switched off.

We understand how wearable devices that capture photos, video or audio can pose risks to students and staff, and as such those will be barred from the classroom.

Though of course, exceptions will apply for students that require devices to monitor health conditions.

This all goes towards building a better school environment free from distractions, which is consistent across the state and can help deliver stronger outcomes from our newer generations.

President, this Labor Government is also wanting to further strengthen the teacher registration framework administered by the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

There are some glaring inefficiencies we hope to rectify with this bill.

For example, the VIT is currently required to review the basis of an interim suspension 30 days after the original decision and every 30 days thereafter.

This is done continuously irrespective of whether it has received any new information.

That is why we are introducing new reforms to the VIT in this bill.

It includes changes that aim towards increasing the efficiency of the Institute's operating processes and procedures in regards to interim suspensions, information sharing powers, and the health assessment process for teachers.

It provides for more flexibility on who can impose interim suspensions so that the VIT can still respond to cases when the Institute's CEO is unavailable.

But on the point of the inefficiencies stemming from the routine and regular revision of the suspensions, irrespective of new information, there is a new fix in this bill.

Fixing this flaw will ease the burden on the VIT, and frees up resources which the VIT would be able to better direct to address other high risk regulatory matters.

President, a critical change in this legislation is the Strengthening Aboriginal recognition and Self-Determination.

It's first change is the introduction of a Statement of Recognition, that acknowledges the unique status of First Nations People in Victoria and outlines historical and ongoing factors that impact First Nations learning and wellbeing outcomes.

It will also confirm Aboriginal Histories, cultures and perspectives forming part of the learning areas that are subject to free instruction in schools.

In doing so, we are strengthening Aboriginal recognition and Self-Determination in The Education and Training Reform Act 2006, by embedding avenues for better outcomes for understanding.

The Bill will also introduce a new duty on the respective Departmental Secretaries to ensure that Aboriginal cultural understanding professional development training is made available to anyone working across early childhood, schools, TAFEs, adult, community, and further education providers.

This aligns with recommendation number 48 from the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

And finally President, this bill will also expand the information that must be collected and retained on the Victorian Student Register (VSR) to include country of birth data and any other information prescribed by the regulations.

Under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, Victoria is required to implement and contribute to the national Schools Unique Student Identifier (USI) for Victorian schools and students.

The aim of this is to create a lifelong education record for students across educational institutions across the country, integrating our state systems with a national body and ensuring seamless transition of information from one institution to the next, and one state's regulatory framework to the other.

President, we are a government committed to putting education at the forefront of our priorities, and we have demonstrated our commitment to this time and time again.

Education is the most important public investment we can make in our future.

We have set out our vision for education as one not dependent on someone's postcode, or how wealthy their parents are, and instead ensuring all students get the quality education they deserve.

Every Victorian, whether well off or struggling, regional or metropolitan, deserves the very best start to life.

It why we have invested an additional \$38.6 billion for our schools, and the results speak for themselves.

Victorian students having the best NAPLAN results in the Country and better than at any other time on record.

Victoria is one of only three jurisdictions in Australia to see growing enrolments in public schools.

We took the leading step of updating the Victorian teaching and learning model to embed explicit teaching at its core, including the use of systematic synthetic phonics.

All these reforms and investments into new programs and overall changes to the structure of the classroom, and how we teach our children, has led to demonstrably positive outcomes.

And that doesn't just stop at the organisational changes.

Since coming into Government we have invested \$20.1 billion to our education system with regards to upgrading existing schools and building even more.

We had set out a target of building 100 new schools, and we smashed that target.

We now have 19 new schools opened this year, all in our growth suburbs.

We allocated \$294.8 million to upgrade and modernise 31 existing schools.

And that builds on the progress we've made by funding over 2400 school upgrades at more than 1250 government schools.

We're building schools faster than ever before, and modernising school facilities so that students from across the state can get a world class education with the best facilities.

Over 50% of the schools that have been built across the whole of Australia in the past ten years have been built right here in Victoria, by this Labor Government, and that is something we should all be proud of.

President, these changes are the result of years and years of hard work.

We've been building up our education system to ensure it is modern and delivering outcomes for students.

It requires continuous investment, and continuous reform as times change and we gain the capacity to enact further change.

That's what this bill is building on.

We have a strong record of building a strong and robust education sector which is delivering strong results for students and for the community at large.

And we do not intend to stop that at all.

We want schools to continue delivering strong outcomes.

This bill's changes to the use of technology, particularly of wearable devices and phones in non government schools, is another step towards getting the balance right.

The balance between technology as a distraction, and technology as a tool of stronger productivity.

We already know the success we have had in government schools thus far on this policy, and it's time we extend its application, to ensure consistency and equality across the system.

That goes to the heart of this Labor Government's philosophy and it's been delivering results since we came to office.

I mentioned earlier that we have the best NAPLAN results in the country.

This was the first or second highest mean scores in 18 of the 20 NAPLAN measures.

It's proof that our changes to the VTLM 2.0, and the shift towards evidence-based best practice, particularly with respect to explicit instruction, is working.

These are changes to the classroom aimed at better outcomes, and the ways we can do this is not just by investing in resources and changes in the tools at people's disposal to teach but also protecting the classroom from distractions.

This is what happens when you take Education seriously, and invest in it consistently over a decade.

President, Victoria is home to the most talented teachers in the nation.

We have invested over \$1.9 billion in school workforce initiatives since 2019 with around 14,000 more registered teachers in 2025 compared to 2020.

That includes the Start Program, which is helping making sure graduate teachers across the state get dedicated mentoring and professional learning in the early years of their career, setting them up for a good career trajectory with proper mentoring.

The Pre-Service Teacher Placement Grants will see over 7000 students be supported to take placement at a rural, regional or specialist school in 2027 and 2028.

And the Today and Teach Tomorrow programs, which will support up to 1,600 Initial Teacher Education students to work in schools while studying at Victorian ITE providers.

We are a government that has backed teachers all the way.

This bill's reforms around the Institute is designed to reduce the administrative and bureaucratic burden on the entity to ensure more efficient outcomes.

It means more swift resolutions, particularly on the matter of suspensions, which can be dynamically managed without needing the repetitive procedures which yield no changes in status due to a lack of new information.

And of course, President, this bill does the very important task of bringing in another recommendation from the Yoorrook Justice Commission into effect, upholding our commitment to the First Peoples of this state.

It enshrines our commitment to self determination for our First Nations communities and adds the histories and perspectives of First Nations peoples into the learning areas that are subject to free instruction in schools.

That means students can be taught a greater amount of our rich history, culture, and traditions that constitute the oldest continuous culture on Earth, stretching over 65,000 years.

This is a commitment this government has continued to push, with truth-telling through the Commission, our commitment through the historic signing of Treaty this year.

We will continue to pursue justice and the elevation of First Nations voices in our understanding of history and how it is taught to our youngest Victorians, so that we can always learn about the past, and strive to be better in the future.

President, this bill is extensive and delivers essential reforms.

It makes amendments to the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to put in place improvements to our education system by strengthening Aboriginal recognition, restricting student use of personal electronic devices in all schools, both government and non-government, reforms the teacher registration framework, and expands the Victorian Student Register to be in sync with interstate systems.

They are not only common sense changes, but essential changes to continuously modernise our education system for the better.

And for that, President, I commend the bill to the chamber.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (16:23): Can I acknowledge and thank those who have contributed to this debate. This, despite the contributions we have heard in the chamber today, is actually a very straightforward bill and seeks to amend the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to make improvements to our education system. The bill will amend the act to strengthen Aboriginal recognition and self-determination in the education, including early childhood education, and training systems to improve cultural safety and responsiveness and support improved learning and wellbeing outcomes for First Nations learners. It will require that schools, as the prescribed minimum standard for registration, have a policy that restricts student use of personal electronic devices such as mobile phones, wearable devices and audio devices during school hours. It will improve the teacher registration framework administered by the Victorian Institute of Teaching. It will enable country of birth data and other information specified in the subordinate legislation to be recorded in the Victorian student register so that Victorian students can be assigned a unique student identifier by the end of 2027, and it will amend the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 to make a statute law revision amendment.

I want to briefly speak to the amendment in my name and ask that this now be circulated. This is a short, straightforward technical amendment, and I thank both the shadow minister's office and Mr Mulholland for their engagement with my office on this amendment. This amendment merely ensures that the provisions within the bill before us regarding the ability for the Victorian Early

Childhood Regulatory Authority to publish information can be operationalised effectively. This specific section relates to the override of the national law as it applies in Victoria, which we all agreed to in the reforms at the end of last year, and ensures that this provision is operationalised effectively. I am pleased to commend this bill to the house.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (35): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Noes (3): Moira Deeming, David Limbrick, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 (16:33)

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I move:

1. Clause 1, page 3, lines 8 and 9, omit “statute law revision amendment” and insert “technical amendment in relation to the publication of information”.

This is really a technical amendment that helps give effect to the changes that were passed in relation to the national law late last year.

Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 4 agreed to.

Clause 5 (16:34)

Evan MULHOLLAND: I move:

1. Clause 5, page 7, lines 1 to 10, omit all words and expressions on these lines.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: The Greens will not be supporting this amendment.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: The government will not be supporting this amendment.

Council divided on amendment:

Ayes (16): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (22): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Amendment negatived.

Clause agreed to; clauses 6 to 30 agreed to.

Clause 31 (16:43)

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I move:

2. Clause 31, line 3, omit “**Statute law revision**” and insert “**Publication of information**”.
3. Clause 31, line 6, before “that subsection” insert “subsection (5) of”.
4. Clause 31, line 7, omit ““that section”,” and insert ““subsections (5) and (6) of that section”.”.
5. Clause 31, lines 8 and 9, omit all words and expressions on these lines.

Amendments agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clause 32 agreed to.

Long title (16:43)

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I move:

6. Long title, omit “statute law revision amendment” and insert “technical amendment in relation to the publication of information”.

Amendment agreed to; amended long title agreed to.

Reported to house with amendments, including amended long title.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (16:44): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (16:44): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time and do pass.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (35): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Noes (3): Moira Deeming, David Limbrick, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill with amendments.

*Business of the house***Orders of the day**

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:49): I move:

That the consideration of orders of the day, government business, 2 to 4, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

*Bills***Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026****Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026***Second reading***Debate resumed on motions of Jaclyn Symes:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:50): I rise to speak on the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026, which are being debated together as cognate bills. The coalition up-front is not opposing either bill, and I want to put that on the record from the outset because whatever concerns are raised in the discussion of these bills are not arguments against reform in the area. The concerns are just an ongoing discussion about how this reform will actually work when it reaches the businesses, operators and farmers we want to comply with it. The key catalyst for these bills is probably well known to this house. There were two suburban chemical fires, one in West Footscray in August 2018 and one at a Campbellfield chemical waste factory facility in April 2019, both of which exposed serious weaknesses in how Victoria regulates dangerous goods, and both were linked to illegal chemical stockpiling. Both released toxic smoke into surrounding communities, contaminated waterways and put first responders at risk. In April 2020 the then Minister for Workplace Safety announced an independent review of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985, and that was conducted by Andrew Palmer KC, now Judge Palmer.

I make all those points briefly but deliberately, because everything that follows in this contribution should be measured against the fact that the harm here was very real and avoidable, the potential remains and reform is very necessary. The Dangerous Goods Transport Bill creates a new principal act regulating the transport of dangerous goods including explosives and high-consequence dangerous goods by road, by rail and by vessel on inland waterways. The occupational health and safety amendment bill brings the handling of dangerous goods, excluding transport, into the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004. The Dangerous Goods Act 1985 is repealed on commencement. Underneath that sits a duties-based approach. A person involved in transport of dangerous goods must ensure that those goods are transported safely and without risk to public safety, property or the environment. The regulations give effect to the Australian Dangerous Goods Code and are to be developed after these bills pass, with an in-force commencement of 25 April 2028.

There is a great deal in this package that the coalition supports. The duty extends across the supply chain. It does not stop at the drivers and operators; it reaches consignors, contractors, company directors and senior executives, and I think that is the right step. The businesses that cut corners on dangerous goods are rarely doing so because of a decision made in the drivers cab of a truck; they are doing so because of a decision made somewhere above it, and the law should reach that decision. The explicit duty on officers to exercise due diligence follows the same logic. Directors and senior leaders will need to understand the risks their operations carry, ensure the systems and resources are in place and satisfy themselves that those systems work in practice rather than on paper. It is a meaningful lift in expectations, and it is very welcome.

I want to single out one measure in particular, in clauses 85 to 87, which allows an obligation to comply with a direction to be redirected to a related entity that had control or an officer who knew or ought to have known of the circumstances and who had influence over the entity's compliance. The minister has described this as an attempt to stamp out phoenixing. Anyone who has looked into the operations behind the worst conduct in this sector knows how readily a company can be wound up and reconstituted with the same people and the same trucks doing the same practices, and if these clauses work as intended, they are the most valuable things in this package. The strengthened enforcement

provisions, the improvements to incident notification and record keeping and better coordination between jurisdictions are all quite sound, and I do not intend to canvass them at length.

The coalition has scrutinised this reform actively, and that is appropriate, because there is a great deal about it that this house is being asked to accept without seeing it up-front. The central concern around that is that almost everything of a practical consequence in this reform sits in the regulations that do not yet exist. The duties in the bill are expressed in terms of high-level principles. The government's own explanation is that they will be expanded upon in the regulations. The adoption of the Australian Code for the Transport of Dangerous Goods by Road & Rail happens in the regulations. The detail that determines what a small operator in Victoria actually has to do differently on Monday morning is all in the regulations. And the regulations are to be developed after the bill passes. The clearest illustration is clause 25: it creates an indictable offence, but it begins with the words 'If the regulations require'. So the Parliament is being asked to create an indictable offence and to leave the definition of the conduct that it attracts entirely to an instrument that nobody has seen. The house is therefore being asked to legislate a framework and take the content of it on trust.

I appreciate that there is an argument for doing it this way: the subject matter is technical, the national code moves and there is merit in leaving the detail to the instrument that can be updated without returning to the Parliament every single time. But it does place a real obligation on the government. If the Parliament is not going to see the substance of this reform before it votes, then the government carries the burden of demonstrating that the process which produces the substance will be genuinely open, genuinely consultative and genuinely responsive to the people who have to live with it as a result. That is a view shared by everyone that I and my colleague in the other place Cindy McLeish found in the industries that we consulted.

The government has been telling us for some weeks that these bills implement the accepted recommendations of the Palmer report, so it is worth looking at what the government actually said when it responded to that report back in October 2022, some four years ago, because the picture is not quite as clear as that suggests and as what the second-reading speech suggests. Judge Palmer made 49 recommendations. The government supported 22 of them in full. It further supported 15 in principle, in most cases subject to consultation, and then it said 11 required further consideration. So 22 of 49 were supported outright, 27 were not. There is no criticism for taking time over complex reform. That response was published in October 2022 and these bills were introduced in March 2026, so in the 3½ years between those two dates the Parliament has not ever been told what became of the further consideration the government said it needed. We are simply being asked to assume it happened and legislate.

The recommendations from those consultations have been parked, and there are some not incidental ones amongst them. There are provisions in this package that stakeholders are now raising with us, and I will go through a couple. Recommendation 9.1 concerns inspector powers of entry, including entry to residential premises. The government's response was that this required further consultation on associated risks and potential safeguards and that consultation would be undertaken with the other agencies, duty holders and industry to ensure the entry power included appropriate safeguards. Clause 51 of this bill permits an inspector to enter residential premises without a warrant and without consent. I have read fairly carefully through it and I cannot see the safeguards that go along with this, the safeguards that were present in Judge Palmer's original recommendation. I would want the minister to perhaps clarify what consultation was undertaken and what safeguards came out of it.

Recommendation 9.2 concerns step-in powers. Judge Palmer recommended that those decisions not be subject to merits review. The government's response said the detail required further consultation with stakeholders and identified one matter in particular as needing that consultation, which was the availability of merits review. In clause 94 of this bill the table of reviewable decisions runs to 16 items. Directions under clause 75 are not amongst them. Interventions under clause 76 are not amongst them. Costs notices under clause 77 are not amongst them. The government singled out the merits review as

a question that needed to be consulted on but has not arrived at the answer that Judge Palmer proposed, without ever telling Parliament what the consultation found.

Recommendation 9.4 concerns cost recovery. The government supported it in principle and committed that implementation would follow the Department of Treasury and Finance's pricing for value guide. Clause 77 of this bill contains no cap on the amount recoverable and expressly includes legal services within reasonable costs. It would be good if the minister could explain how an uncapped costs notice that includes a regulator's legal fees is consistent with the guide.

There are a couple of further matters worth comment. In October 2022 the government set out its preferred structural reform option. Its words at the time were that its preference was to create a new Dangerous Goods Act harmonised with the Occupational Health and Safety Act, with explosives and high-consequence dangerous goods remaining under the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 in separate regulations. That is option two of the two options Judge Palmer put forward, but that is not what is before us. What is before us is option one: handling is folded into the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 is repealed altogether and transport gets its own act. At some time in the last 3½ years the government has changed its position on the fundamental architecture of the reform, and it has done that without announcement, without explanation and, as far as I can find, with no mention of it in Parliament until the bills were tabled. When did that decision get made, on what advice and who was consulted beforehand? Good law can only be helped and aided by showing the workings and how we arrived at the final position.

In the minister's second-reading speech the minister devotes an entire section to explaining that the Dangerous Goods Act does not currently apply to the transport of reportable priority waste. Judge Palmer found that this exemption meant dangerous goods waste escaped requirements applying to everything else, and the government has therefore decided to remove it. The reasoning is set out. The Parliament was told that under the existing act primary producers hold clear and practical exemptions for the storage, use, handling and transfer of dangerous goods used in connection with their businesses, excluding explosives and high-consequence dangerous goods. Those settings recognise that most on-farm activity is low risk and own use. That act is repealed by clause 173 of this bill. Clause 9 of the bill sets out seven exclusions from its operation, but none of them include primary producers. In fact the words 'farm', 'agricultural' and 'primary producer' do not appear anywhere in the bill. They do not appear in the explanatory memorandum or the second-reading speech either. The government's response to the Palmer report does not mention them.

The government identified one exemption it wished to remove and explained it at length, but on another exemption affecting every farming business in this state it said nothing about it at all. This should be clarified. Is the omission of primary producer exemptions a deliberate policy decision the government has chosen not to announce, or is it an oversight? I would add one further difficulty: the explanatory memorandum explains that the transitional regulation power in clause 176 exists so that the existing licence-holders under the act can be moved onto equivalent schemes under the new one, which is sensible as far as it goes. But farmers hold no licence precisely because they are exempt. The transition mechanism has been built for people who are already inside the licensing system, but there is a very, very important gap for those who are outside it but that the bill now imposes upon. That seems to be another gap.

The member for Eildon in the other place and I have consulted with a number of organisations who have put their concerns to us. They go to how this reform will work in practice. The Victorian Transport Association raised the powers relating to entry, which they consider too broad and insufficiently directed at the dangerous goods themselves. My colleague in other place has canvassed that, and I accept that the powers are largely consistent with what already exists under occupational health and safety law. The second concern that has not been answered, however, is the seizure of a vehicle without formal notice capable of being communicated to the owner of the vehicle or the freight. Subclause 53(2) requires a written record of seizure to be given to the occupier of the place. When a loaded vehicle is stopped on a public road, it is not obvious who that is. In this industry the operator,

the vehicle owner and the owner of the goods are frequently three different parties. When a vehicle is seized, the commercial consequences fall on the people who may have had no involvement in the conduct that prompted it and no timely way of knowing what happened or recovering whatever goods or value they need to recover to continue their legal business. A notice requirement would not weaken the power or delay the seizure, so I will inquire why that is absent.

The Victorian Farmers Federation supports the intent of these reforms but is concerned they should not impose disproportionate burdens on primary producers. Farmers are not transport operators by trade, yet they are captured through normal farming activity. Every property handles and moves fuel and handles pesticides, herbicides, fumigants and fertiliser. Ammonium nitrate is both a common fertiliser and a high-consequence dangerous good. The federation also asks that the framework recognise the seasonal and time-critical nature of farming, where the movement of inputs happens in very narrow windows, at planting, spraying and harvest. It would seek meaningful input to the regulations when they are made so that farmers are not unfairly exposed. That goes back to what I said earlier in the speech about the regulations that come after the bill, and our expectation really is that deep consultation on the regulations must occur. The Australian Institute of Health & Safety is broadly supportive, describing this as progressive and necessary modernisation. Their warning is that the reform requires clear regulatory guidance, a structured transition period of 12 to 24 months and targeted capability uplift across the industry. Without that they say the complexity risks undermining the safety and governance outcomes that this reform is actually designed to deliver. None of these organisations oppose the bill. Each has identified a problem that will be left unresolved in the regulations. Again I urge the government to engage with all of these three directly as those regulations are developed.

The package is also being sold in part on harmonisation. The argument is that aligning Victoria with the national code will reduce compliance costs for operators working across borders, and over time that should be true. I think that is absolutely a noble priority aim. There are too many things where Victoria is an outlier, and the cost of doing business is an overhead when you are working in Victoria.

There were a couple of inconsistencies, though, in that goal. The first is that the minister's own second-reading speech concedes that the bill includes and maintains differences from the national approach and gives a broad general duty as the example. Victoria is imposing a duty that operators in other jurisdictions do not carry. That is not to say the divergence is necessarily wrong, but it has not been fully justified, especially if it creates a disharmony with the national standards. That sits uneasily beside the productivity case that is being made for the package. I think that is worth having a look at.

The second one is recommendation 11.2 of the Palmer report, which was:

That amendments to the ADG Code be automatically adopted –

so as to –

... allow the National Transport Commission's full transition period of 12 months.

The government supported that recommendation in full. It said so in October 2022 and explained that the existing act restricts the transition period to six months and would need to be amended. But I have looked for the 12-month transition period in this bill, and it is not there. Clause 3 adopts the Australian dangerous goods code as enforced from time to time, which is automatic adoption with no transition period at all. A recommendation the government supported in full is not present in the bill, and the people who have to implement it are going to wear the consequences, particularly the cross-border operators – again, where the harmonisation argument is meant to be helping, not hurting, productivity.

I endorse the call made in the other place for a structured independent review after implementation so that this Parliament can establish whether the intended safety and governance outcomes are actually being delivered on the ground rather than assuming they are. That is all the more important given that the regulations are going to be developed after we have passed the bill, not before, and that those

regulations are going to be technical in nature and need considerable consultation. So really, in a genuine sense, the proof of the pudding is actually going to be after the bill is passed – not now.

The coalition is not opposing these bills. Moving from a framework written in 1985 to a modern, risk-based, transport-focused regime is necessary and I think somewhat overdue. But it is four years after the review and the reform is only now just in front of us. It is in regulations that have not been drafted, and it is giving effect to a code that has not been adopted. It is creating offences whose scope cannot yet be described, because it has not been written, and it is commencing in April 2028, eight years after this review was announced. That is not efficient government. And given the origins and the catalyst for this reform date back to 2018, you think, ‘Why has it taken this long to come into power given the gravity of the risk that we have?’

I think probably the state deserves better in terms of the health and safety of our workers and our first responders. It certainly deserves better in terms of the productivity of the state, which has been, as we all know, trailing the nation for some time. I think more focus and priority should have been given to this, and yet it was not. The government has not told this house what became of the 27 recommendations it did not support in full and has not told this house why it abandoned the reform architecture it said it preferred originally and why it has gone to this alternate one. It has not told the house what becomes of the exemptions our farmers rely on now, which is a pretty big gap. I reiterate my colleague the member for Eildon’s point that this bill has taken too long to be actioned. But I acknowledge that it is a necessary step in the right direction, and we will support the bill.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:15): I have been waiting as well to talk on the cognate debate. It has been a while since I made a contribution on a cognate debate, and this one is especially important to me. As some members of this place will recall, workplace safety matters do very much strike to the heart of my values and the values that we all share on this side of the chamber. The two pieces of legislation we have got before us today are the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026 and the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026, and they are about keeping our community safe, protecting our incredible emergency services personnel and ensuring that the rogue operators who gamble with people’s lives are finally held to account.

To truly understand why this legislation is so necessary, you have to look back at events that shook our state and particularly, for me, the northern suburbs of Melbourne. Just a few years ago, we all remember the horrific scenes in April 2019 when a massive chemical waste processing facility in Campbellfield – for those so interested, in the electorate of Broadmeadows; it was a very tough time – erupted in flames. For those of us living and working in the north, that day is certainly burnt in our memories, excuse the phrase. Toxic black smoke blanketed the sky, five of our local schools were forced to shut down completely and residents were told to lock their doors and stay inside to avoid the poisonous air. It took more than 175 heroic firefighters and 40 appliances working around the clock for days to finally subdue the blaze. The human cost was truly terrible, with two factory workers hospitalised, including one who suffered serious burns and another who sustained a severe eye injury. The financial costs were absolutely staggering. The Environment Protection Authority had to step in and oversee the clean-up of that site, which dragged on until December 2021 and ultimately cost taxpayers \$6.5 million.

That disaster followed the West Footscray warehouse fire in August 2018, one that I know in Western Metropolitan Region was felt very much. Millions of litres of illegally stockpiled toxic chemical waste caught fire there, and that inferno took more than a week to put out, requiring the massive effort of over 200 firefighters, dozens of those brave first responders. They later reported health issues – musculoskeletal pain and deep fatigue from exposure to the smoke and the chemicals. The environmental devastation was absolutely heartbreaking. Toxic fire water run-off flooded into Stony Creek, killing more than 2300 fish and countless native eels and requiring the removal of 70 million litres of polluted water and nearly 3000 cubic metres of containment sediment. After those fires, joint inspectors from WorkSafe Victoria and the EPA uncovered 14 different sites across Melbourne’s north and regional Victoria that were illegally stockpiling highly dangerous chemicals. WorkSafe was

left to lead the clean-up of 13 of those sites. It became painfully obvious that the old rules simply were not working. The Dangerous Goods Act 1985 had sat there largely unchanged for nearly four decades. It was outdated, incredibly clunky and out of step with our modern occupational health and safety frameworks.

This is exactly why our government commissioned Andrew Palmer KC to conduct a comprehensive independent review of the entire system. The final report was delivered in 2022, handing down 49 recommendations to drag our dangerous goods laws into the modern era. Our government accepted the need for fundamental reform, and the two bills before us today deliver on 24 of those crucial legislative amendments, starting with the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026, which takes the handling, manufacturing, storing, processing and use of dangerous goods and incorporates it directly into the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004. By doing this we are creating a streamlined, unified safety framework. We are introducing a broad overarching general duty that requires anyone undertaking activities with dangerous goods to ensure, so far as it is practicable, that their work is safe and without risks to health, safety and property.

We are also taking a step further than the old laws. The new framework demands that operators protect the environment from harm as well, which is a vital lesson learned from the utter devastation of Stony Creek. At the same time, we are introducing the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026, which creates a brand new standalone act dedicated entirely to the safe transport of these volatile materials. By doing so, Victoria is finally coming into alignment with most other Australian jurisdictions, supporting national consistency of our freight and logistics businesses who cross borders every day. This bill gives legal effect to the Australian Code for the Transport of Dangerous Goods by Road & Rail and introduces a powerful general duty for transport operators, ensuring that whether dangerous goods are moving by road, by rail or by vessel on our inland waters, the risks to public safety, property and the environment must be eliminated or minimised.

One of the most critical fixes in this transport bill is how we handle waste. Under the old laws, the transport of dangerous goods which were also classified as waste fell into a dangerous regulatory black hole. A highly flammable or toxic chemical does not suddenly become safe just because a factory labels it as waste; the risks of fire, explosion or spillage are the same. The bill closes the loophole for good, ensuring that the transport of dangerous goods waste is subject to the exact same stringent safety and licensing requirements as all other dangerous goods. If you are trucking vats of chemical waste through our suburbs, you will need the proper dangerous goods driver and vehicle licences, plain and simple.

Having strong duties on paper means absolutely nothing if our regulators do not have the teeth to enforce them. For too long, WorkSafe inspectors have been hamstrung when trying to stop rogue operators. We have seen some really terrifying situations where people were conducting illegal fuel reprocessing, storing commercial explosives or refilling gas cylinders right in their residential backyard or their garages. Under the old laws, inspectors could not enter residential premises without the occupier's consent or without going through the lengthy legal process of securing a search warrant; this bill changes that. We are empowering WorkSafe inspectors to enter residential premises without a warrant if they reasonably believe that dangerous goods are present and that a person is actively contravening our safety laws. When the safety of an entire street is at risk from an illegal chemical stockpile our inspectors need to be able to act immediately, and this legislation ensures that they can.

I will take a moment to thank our WorkSafe inspectors for the work that they do. It is tough work, and this bill, I hope, makes it a little bit easier to stop some of these rogue characters around the place. In it is also an expansion of WorkSafe's power to intervene when a duty holder refuses to step up. If an inspector identifies a serious risk or issues a formal direction but the operator ignores it or if there is an immediate risk of harm to the community, the inspector now has the legal authority to step in, take control and do whatever is necessary to make that site safe. This bill even allows inspectors to enter neighbouring properties if that is what it takes to access the site and address the danger – I am thinking about some of those sheds out the back, for example. When WorkSafe has to step in and do the job that a rogue operator or a negligent landlord has failed to do, the Victorian taxpayer will no longer be

left holding the bag. We are introducing robust, ironclad cost-recovery mechanisms. WorkSafe will be able to issue a costs notice to recover the full reasonable expenses of their intervention.

We also know that criminal prosecutions can take too long, so we are introducing a fast, effective civil penalty regime, giving WorkSafe another tool in their belt to hold companies accountable through the courts where criminal prosecution might not be warranted but serious financial penalties are. The courts will have the power to hit offenders with compliance and restraining orders, monetary benefit orders to strip away any financial profit made from cutting corners and adverse publicity orders that force a company to publicly admit what they did wrong. If their illegal transport activities damage our state's infrastructure, the courts can issue road or rail authorisation compensation orders to make them pay for the repairs. These reforms do not just stand on their own, they are part of our deep commitment to workplace safety right across the state.

WorkSafe do an incredible job, and we are backing them every step of the way. I could talk about our investments, but really, one that stands out in my mind is the \$22.4 million to keep workers safe, help injured workers return to work and provide support for the families who are grieving the unthinkable loss of a loved one due to a workplace death. That one cuts particularly close, I have got to say. To WorkSafe inspectors: we are also recruiting an extra 20 of you to crack down on the five most dangerous industries in our state, building on the 60 additional inspectors we have already funded since 2018. We have created a dedicated healthcare and social assistance compliance division within WorkSafe to protect our hardworking nurses, aged care workers and allied health staff. We have implemented landmark psychological health regulations to ensure that employers take psychosocial hazards like bullying, harassment and trauma just as seriously as physical dangers. We have established Return to Work Victoria, and we have set up the Workplace Incidents Consultative Committee. We make sure that the voices of those that have been personally impacted by workplace tragedies are guiding our reforms. Very soon we will see the construction of a workers memorial in Melbourne to provide a dedicated space for reflection and to serve as a constant reminder of why this work matters so much.

This package is about looking at the reality of the risks in our community and acting decisively. We cannot ever afford a repeat of the West Footscray or Campbellfield fires, and we cannot ask our firefighters to walk into illegally stockpiled chemical infernos because our laws were not able to stop the stockpiling in the first place. We are drawing a line in the sand: if you deal with dangerous goods in the state of Victoria, you will operate safely, you will protect the environment and you will be held accountable. I commend both bills to this house.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (17:27): I rise to speak on the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026 and indicate that Legalise Cannabis will be supporting both of these bills. The Dangerous Goods Act 1985 is outdated and no longer reflects the way chemicals are used, stored and handled throughout the state. These bills deliver a much-needed overhaul of Victoria's dangerous goods transport laws. The core intention of these bills is well placed and widely supported. The bills enact key recommendations of the Palmer review following the West Footscray and Campbellfield fires in 2018 and 2019, which exposed shortcomings in oversight, information sharing and visibility for regulators. In concert these bills establish a modern framework to regulate the movement of dangerous goods throughout the state, strengthen oversight and enforcement and bring the handling of dangerous goods into alignment with contemporary occupational health and safety principles.

I want to start by thanking my recent parliamentary intern Aadi Arya, who wrote an excellent report on hazardous waste management in Victoria. His report, and indeed his analysis of these bills, has greatly helped in preparing my contribution. I should also mention that his report built on the excellent research of Jonah McRae-Palmer, my intern from last year. Aadi and Jonah's research highlighted the importance of traceability, information sharing, regulatory coordination and visibility across the entire

supply chain from the point where dangerous goods are generated to their transport, storage and eventual disposal. I would recommend their reports to the chamber. To quote Aadi's report:

... poor visibility can delay intervention until waste has already been unlawfully dumped, stockpiled, burned, mishandled or discharged into the environment, risking severe ecological damage, food-chain transfer, risks to emergency responders, and heightened exposure for communities located near industrial sites, particularly Melbourne's Western Metropolitan Region.

I would like to commend Ms Watt on her presentation, and I would also like to talk a bit about the 2018 Footscray fire, the largest industrial fire in Victoria since the 1991 Coode Island fire. At around 5 am on 30 August 2018 residents of West Footscray and Tottenham awoke to the sound of explosions and a black plume of smoke. Fire crews arriving on scene believed the site to be a wood recycling facility but were instead confronted by 44-gallon drums exploding into the air and Stony Creek, which abuts the property, literally ablaze. The massive warehouse held an illegal stockpile of highly flammable and toxic chemicals. Firefighters knew neither which chemicals were present nor their quantities. The smoke spread across Melbourne's west, triggering emergency warnings and public health alerts. Residents were told to shelter indoors, and more than 40 schools and childcare centres were closed. The fire burnt for days, contaminating kilometres of Stony Creek and causing significant environmental damage.

It took more than 750 Melbourne Fire Brigade personnel over 16 days to contain that blaze. More than 100 injuries were reported by firefighters, some not appearing until weeks or even months later. Several of them continue to experience health problems, and the full extent of the cocktail of chemicals they were exposed to remains largely unknown. This waste did not magically appear. It did not arise from the operations of the warehouse. This dirty bomb of chemicals was covertly transported there by criminals for financial gain. This criminality was allowed to flourish in a vacuum of regulation, and these bills seek to fill that vacuum.

Focusing on the transport bill, it repeals the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 and creates a dedicated Dangerous Goods Transport Act to regulate the transport of dangerous goods by road, rail and inland waterways. It positions environmental protection as a central pillar of dangerous goods transport regulation and identifies eliminating risk to public safety, property and the environment as an object of the bill. It requires those involved in dangerous goods transport to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that transport is without risk to public safety, property or the environment.

Environmental risk is outlined in the aggravated offence provisions and in the WorkSafe Victoria inspectors' entry, prohibition and intervention powers. These provisions are much needed as the impacts of environmental damage can last for decades and the cost of clean-up post incident can be immense. However, in clause 21, which covers incidents that trigger mandatory notifications to WorkSafe under clause 22, environmental damage is not listed as one of those. A pollution event may already trigger notification to EPA Victoria under the Environment Protection Act 2017, but it may not necessarily trigger direct notifications to WorkSafe. Indirectly the environmental damage can impact other workers, so ideally both regulators would be notified as soon as possible. If anyone was trying to imagine how that could be, I would just refer you back to the concept of a blazing Stony Creek coated with burning chemicals. In that way many, many people's health can be damaged, many workers' health can be damaged.

I did flag some amendments late in the piece on this. However, I understand that neither the government nor the opposition had adequate time to properly consider them, so we will not be proceeding with them. Hopefully these concerns can be dealt with through other mechanisms or regulations.

Another concern relates to clause 22, which requires incident notification by the consignor, the principal contractor and the driver or the vessel master. However, it does not extend that obligation to the consignee or receiving facility. In some cases it may be that the consignee is the one who first discovers a leak, contamination event or damaged container during unloading. While another party may eventually notify WorkSafe, the person who first identifies the incident may not have a direct

statutory obligation to do so. I will be asking questions on these issues during the committee stage, and I am happy to be advised as to whether these concerns can be dealt with in other ways. The success of these reforms largely rests on whether WorkSafe will be adequately resourced to administer the scheme and exercise their new step-in powers and whether the reforms improve early detection of risk rather than simply strengthening enforcement after an incident occurs. These issues will be the focus of my questions during committee of the whole. These reforms are well overdue and most welcome. We also need the federal government to develop a nationally consistent approach to end-to-end supply chain management and traceability of dangerous goods, including stronger information sharing between regulators and better visibility of the movement of hazardous materials across jurisdictions.

I would like to finish by thanking those first responders who protected the community during the West Footscray fire and other fires, recognising that they did so, and continue to do so, at significant personal cost. They deserve more than our gratitude. They deserve laws that protect them in their dangerous work. We need to take every step to prevent similar disasters. Likewise, the community deserves to feel safe as the lines between industrial areas and housing become increasingly blurred, especially in the west. Time and time again people in my region find themselves living alongside dangerous and polluting industries and are expected to just live with it, to just cop it. This government did not think twice about asking West Footscray residents to live just metres from a massive diesel storage at the NEXTDC data centre. As the firefighters have alerted us, this centre will not only contain hundreds of thousands of litres of diesel to power generators but will be co-located with hundreds of tonnes of lithium ion batteries, which are almost impossible to put out. What could possibly go wrong? Imagine living 50 metres from that data centre. For the residents of West Footscray or Tottenham right next to that centre that is their new reality. Likewise across the west we are seeing the government fast-track the approval of data centres in areas that are in or immediately adjoining residential areas, with no consideration, with no transparency and with no evaluative framework provided to the community. In fact it has got to the point where this whole process is so opaque, where the government have even refused to release the document that they say would regulate this hazard. It is disgraceful. It is utterly disgraceful. There is no social licence for these data centres. There is no social licence for this government to do these things, and these are entirely compatible with the principles that are identified in this legislation. These reforms are sorely needed, but so much more work needs to be done to restore the community's confidence. That said, I commend the bill to the house.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) incorporated the following:

President I rise to speak on the cognate debate for the dangerous goods and occupational health bills.

At their core, these two bills are about improving and ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the public and the environment.

It is ensuring that Victoria has a regulatory framework that is enforceable and fit for purpose for the realities of today's industries.

And it is about making sure that the workers who keep this state moving, and the communities that surround them, are properly protected under the law.

These bills are long overdue and I am proud to stand here today in support of them.

The Dangerous Goods referred to in this legislation are substances that pose inherent risks to people or property.

They are goods that include chemicals that are corrosive, flammable, combustible, explosive, oxidising, or otherwise hazardous.

They are goods that are at the same time integral to our economy yet pose inherent and unfortunate risks to the community if they are mishandled.

This Bill came about from a clear and urgent need for reform following a series of serious industrial incidents right here in Victoria.

After the devastating West Footscray and Campbellfield industrial fires in 2018 and 2019, investigations discovered illegal stockpiles of chemical waste.

And emitted toxic black smoke that could be seen from the surrounding suburbs.

More than 50 schools and childcare centers were forced to close after the Footscray fire alone.

I remember watching the news and seeing residents talk about what they had been through – nosebleeds, asthma attacks, headaches, nausea, respiratory problems, and skin or eye irritation – and this was weeks after the fires had been contained.

These were serious, large-scale health issues experienced by many Victorians.

And what is even more alarming is the nature of the materials involved.

Chemical waste of this kind is highly toxic, flammable, and reactive, and as these incidents demonstrate, improper handling of these materials leads to large-scale contamination of the environment and high-risk public health and safety issues.

These materials also carry long-term consequences, such as developmental and reproductive harm, that may impact a person for years to come.

It also has devastating impacts on the workers.

These are people who take pride in their work, who show up and do their jobs, and yet they are also those immediately exposed to these high-risk materials.

As someone who has worked in the transport industry, I understand the very real dangers that workers in this industry face every single day.

It is the drivers, the loaders, the logistics workers, and the people on the ground who bear the risks and consequences.

And it weighs on the workers, it weighs on their families, and it weighs on the communities that surround the roads, rail lines, and waterways where these dangerous goods may travel every single day.

The workers of this industry, along with the broader Victorian community, deserve better protection.

They deserve to know that the law has their back.

And actions must be taken to actively address the risks associated with transporting dangerous goods within the borders of Victoria.

It was precisely these concerns that led the Victorian Government to commission the Independent Review of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985, led by Andrew Palmer KC.

The Palmer Report was a thorough and comprehensive examination of Victoria's dangerous goods law and the regulatory framework surrounding them.

The Palmer Report found that current regulatory frameworks were no longer fit for purpose, difficult to navigate, and are inconsistent with other regulatory frameworks governing the management and transport of dangerous goods.

It also identified a gap in regulations around the transport of reportable priority waste, which despite carrying the same risks as other dangerous goods during transport, it was not subject to the same safety requirements as that outlined in the Environment Protection Act 2017.

One of the key recommendations in the Palmer Report was that the transport of dangerous goods should be regulated by its own Act and regulations that adopt, as far as possible, the structure, language and concepts of the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

In response to the handing down of the Palmer Report, the Victorian Government supported 22 of the recommendations in full, 15 in principle, required further consideration of 11, and noted 1.

Overall, the key theme of the government's response to the report was that the existing regulatory framework was outdated and required reform.

It emphasised that, going forward, a new framework would need to focus on managing risk, preventing accidents and disasters, as well as creating regulation which is simpler to understand and follow for those individuals and businesses who need to use these sorts of dangerous goods.

In doing so, this new framework would help to keep workers safe, keep the environment safe, and keep the community safe.

Keeping Victorians safe is one of the most important duties we have as parliamentarians and as a government.

It is something which we in this Labor Government treat with the utmost seriousness.

That is why we have gone through the process of developing these bills and why we intend to see these bills signed into law.

Starting first with the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill.

This bill does a number of key things to provide an improved regulatory framework to keep Victorian communities, environments and workers safe.

First, the bill makes it such that the regulation of dangerous goods falls under the OHS Act.

This has the effect of streamlining the regulatory framework by bringing the handling and sale of dangerous goods under one act.

Another component of this bill is that it introduces civil penalty provisions and for breaches of occupational health and safety obligations.

Under this framework, if a civil penalty provision is contravened, a court may require payment of a pecuniary penalty or through other orders.

This is important because this means that the person responsible may be required to fix unsafe practices, stop harmful conduct, or publicly account for their actions.

Regulators and courts will also be able to respond appropriately to different types of non-compliance, especially when criminal prosecution is not warranted.

In doing so, they provide more flexible and proportionate enforcement options.

Moreover, this bill also strengthens accountability of liable officers by introducing a positive duty for officers to exercise due diligence.

This means that officers must take reasonable steps to understand the risks associated with dangerous goods and ensure that body corporates are complying with their duties.

This duty also extends to officers of a partnership or unincorporated body or association.

Should an officer fail in their due diligence, they may be subject to penalty.

This provision makes it clear that responsibility does not rest solely with workers on the ground, but also with those responsible for enforcing and maintaining compliance.

By ensuring that officers are actively exercising their due diligence, this reform reinforces a culture of safety from the top down.

This bill also creates a new offence for an aggravated breach of an employer's duty to employees under section 21 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004.

Aligning it with the corresponding offence for aggravated breach of the general duty relating to dangerous goods.

This aggravated offence is designed to cover more serious cases, such as when an employer fails to meet their responsibilities and exposes workers to significant risk of harm, and where the employer ought to reasonably know that the risk existed.

In this way, this bill ensures stronger consequences for conduct that goes beyond ordinary non-compliance and reaches higher levels of risk.

Furthermore, this bill also brings the maximum infringement penalty under the Occupational Health and Safety Act into alignment with the amounts laid out in the Attorney General's guidelines to the Infringements Act 2006.

This ensures that penalties are strong enough to deter lower-level breaches, rather than being treated as just another cost of doing businesses.

Importantly, these changes apply across both the dangerous goods and occupational health and safety frameworks.

By strengthening these penalties, this bill creates a more balanced enforcement approach.

Ensuring that deterrence can be achieved by the penalties set out for infringement in a manner that is quick, proportionate, and effective.

In the Palmer report, it was also noted that WorkSafe requires adequate powers to ensure action can be taken to address a circumstance of serious risk.

Intervention is often necessary within circumstances where the safety of the Victorian community is at stake.

Allowing action to be taken in the instance a person has refused or failed to comply, or is unable to comply safely with a direction given by an inspector to address the safety risk.

This bill also gives inspectors a new entry power.

Giving them to access to a place if such entry is necessary to allow the inspector to exercise their power of intervention in addressing a serious risk.

It is true, that under the legislation currently in place through the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 that WorkSafe inspectors have the capacity to intervene.

However, one of the key findings of the Palmer Report is that these powers were inadequate in being able to fully take in the cause and scope of the risks that require an intervention.

When WorkSafe is unable to successfully intervene when conditions warrant it, there are going to be adverse effects.

It limits their ability to effectively regulate dangerous goods and keep the Victorian community safe.

That is why in this bill we are expanding the ability for WorkSafe inspectors to intervene and address cases of serious risk when they arise as they sometimes do.

Within this bill, there is also a provision to help ensure that WorkSafe can recover the expenses that are accrued by their operations in acting against those who have caused risk to the Victorian community.

This bill introduces a cost recovery mechanism that can be used by WorkSafe to seek reimbursement from those responsible for allowing risk to arise.

WorkSafe will also be able to place a charge on properties that have had action taken against them, but where there are still unpaid amounts of money owed to WorkSafe.

These changes mean that those responsible cannot avoid their obligations and that any remediation work can be recovered.

Importantly, noting that the owners of a property may not always be the responsible party in causing a risk, this bill ensures that landlords are not unfairly burdened by an issue caused by a tenant.

In these circumstances, landlords will be able to seek to recover damages from tenants if it is the neglect of the tenants that caused the WorkSafe action to take place.

This is a crucial step in making sure we are striking the right balance between holding those responsible accountable and protecting those who are not at fault.

Furthermore, implementing a cost recovery mechanism also means that we are maintaining a fair, sustainable, and well-functioning regulatory system, whilst ensuring that WorkSafe remains supported and resourced to continue carrying out the important work of keeping Victorian's safe.

I would like to now speak on the key reforms introduced by the Dangerous Goods Transport bill.

First, the bill creates a new standalone principal Act specifically to regulate the transport of dangerous goods, including high consequence dangerous goods and explosives, by road, rail, and inland waterway vessel.

This is a significant structural reform,

Because it brings together all of the relevant transport-specific dangerous goods obligations and makes it easier for businesses, workers, and regulators to understand what is required and to ensure that those requirements are met.

In doing so, it will repeal the Dangerous Goods Act 1985, which is over 40 years old, replacing it with a framework that is fit for purpose and better reflects the realities of industries today.

And because the nature of goods being transported, the scale of the industry, the complexity of modern supply chains, and our understanding of the risks involved have evolved significantly, it is only right that our laws evolve with them.

These new laws will be more modern, more up to date, and more able to deliver regulations which are both strong and easy to follow.

In doing so, we will be creating laws which are ultimately more impactful and more capable of keeping workers, communities, and the environment safe from the risks that come with transporting dangerous goods.

Second, this Bill introduces a broad general duty requiring a person involved in the transport of dangerous goods to ensure that dangerous goods are transported in a manner that is safe and without risks to public safety, property and the environment.

This general duty will be modeled on the duties-based frameworks of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 and the Environment Protection Act 2017.

What this means is that the new legislation will adopt similar obligations and languages as the aforementioned Acts,

Thus, we are ensuring that duty holders are not navigating entirely different regulatory approaches but rather operating within a framework with familiar structures to the one they already comply with.

This promotes consistency and streamlines laws for duty holders and the wider community and bridges the gaps in existing framework identified by the Palmer Report that contributed to non-compliance.

At the same time, it closes a gap in current regulations by holding the transport of dangerous goods to the same safety standards as all other dangerous goods.

Furthermore, this duty is supported by regulations, including the Australian Code for the Transport of Dangerous Goods by Road & Rail (ADG Code), Compliance Codes and non-statutory guidance.

This will provide duty holders with clear and practical guidance on how the transport of dangerous goods general duty should be performed in their day-to-day operations.

Making it easier to follow the regulations reduces noncompliance, makes it easier for companies to do the right thing, and makes it easier for companies who are doing the right thing to continue to do business.

Decreasing noncompliance also means that companies who are following the regulations will not be undercut by those who are not doing the right thing.

President, these two bills represent the biggest structural reform of the regulatory framework surrounding dangerous goods in four decades.

They serve to make the Victorian public safer, Victorian workers safer, and the Victorian Environment safer.

And that is why I support these bills.

I commend the bill to the Chamber.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (17:39): Thank you to the speakers who have contributed to the bill. I think we know why we are here. People have talked about some examples of behaviour and conduct that are wanting to be addressed by this reform following a comprehensive review. I know there are quite a few questions, so I am happy to deal with those in committee, probably just through clause 1 if people are pretty happy to do it that way. It is in your hands. I commend the bill.

Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026

Second reading

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 (17:41)

Richard WELCH: My first question is: the government's response of October 2022 records Judge Palmer's 49 recommendations. The government supported 22 in full and 15 in principle and considered that 11 required further consideration. What became of the 11 that required further consideration, and what consultation was performed on those?

Jaclyn SYMES: As you have indicated, of the 49 recommendations in the Palmer report, 24 will be addressed by these bills. I do not intend to go through every one of his recommendations and where they match up; it is probably quicker to go to the second part of your question in relation to the other recommendations. Since the government response was released, the government has adopted a final position on recommendations that required further consideration or were noted. The government now support four additional recommendations – that is, 7.1, 7.2, 9.2 and 11.4; support in principle one additional recommendation, 6.2; support in part two additional recommendations, 9.1 and 12.2; do not support four additional recommendations, 4.3, 4.4, 6.3 and 7.4; and recommendation 6.1 will be considered during the development of the regulations, which will occur after the bills have passed.

Richard WELCH: In October 2022 the government stated its preference at that time was for a new dangerous goods act that harmonised with the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, with explosives and the high-consequence dangerous goods remaining under the Dangerous Goods

Act 1985. That was option 2 of the recommendations, but this bill is on option 1, so at some point in the last 3½ years there has been a change in position. When was that decision changed and on what advice, and who was consulted?

Jaclyn SYMES: It was pretty clear from the events and the applicable legislation that there needed to be streamlining and consolidation of laws that would be much easier to regulate and apply and be understood. This is effectively a regulation reduction type exercise in one sense. Obviously through the report and through the consultation the position became apparent of the best way forward. The bill provides for the continued application of the Australian dangerous goods code. The ADG code sets out requirements for the transport of dangerous goods by road and by rail in Australia by providing rules and guidelines for classifying, packaging, marking, labelling and transporting dangerous goods safely. There are two bills. Arguably it could have still been one, but the advice after the review was that it was clearer and better for industry to have the two.

Richard WELCH: I agree. I can see that. When that decision was made, in consultation with whom was it made?

Jaclyn SYMES: There are two separate questions there I think. The form that it took was an evolving process of what was going to be the best vessel to produce the easiest legislative framework and regulations et cetera, which is why we have landed in the dual response. But particularly on stakeholder engagement, since the review began WorkSafe Victoria have engaged 560 individuals and 270 organisations, including targeted consultation with stakeholder groups, industry representatives and then also the public consultation via the regular Engage platform. Those consulted include government departments and agencies across all levels, unions, associations, alliances, institutes, stakeholder reference groups and businesses. Some of the examples here I have got are Ports Victoria, Victoria Police, CFA, EPA, Qantas – all the people that you would think would have an interest in this legislative reform.

David ETTERS HANK: The bill has sound objectives related to enforcement but seems to do little for prevention. How does the bill materially improve the ability of Victorian regulatory authorities to identify dangerous situations before they become another West Footscray or Campbellfield?

Jaclyn SYMES: Thank you, Mr Ettershank, for your question and your observation around the dual roles and responsibilities of many people that work in this industry as well as regulate this industry. The introduction of the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 will increase Victoria's alignment with the model – sorry. Just give me two secs.

What is a response to the question in relation to prevention is the new general duty to eliminate risk of harm to a person, property and the environment arising from the transport of dangerous goods. Where it is not reasonably practical to eliminate risks, duty holders must reduce the risk so far as reasonably practical. It is a new general duty to act to eliminate risk. Eliminating risk is a prevention measure.

David ETTERS HANK: I guess the long-term success of these reforms will depend not only on stronger penalties and enforcement powers but on ensuring regulators are adequately resourced to identify risks before they become disasters. Minister, can you advise on what resources the government is proposing to apply to increase WorkSafe's capacity to actually administer the scheme?

Jaclyn SYMES: As you would appreciate, I am more than happy to take some of that on notice and ask the relevant minister. I have only got the content of the bill for the purposes of today.

David ETTERS HANK: I would appreciate it if you could follow it up with the relevant minister. That would be much appreciated. Given that these reforms arise from incidents that occurred in 2018 and 2019, what work does the government intend to undertake between now and the commencement of the act to ensure industry, emergency services and regulators are ready to operate under the new framework?

Jaclyn SYMES: At the outset I did take the chamber through the extensive stakeholder engagement, and as a part of being involved in the engagement you are involved in the follow-through of the advice of how the legislation has been developed and how it will be, hopefully, passed through the Parliament and become operational. In relation to some other advice about this, again, through the review, through the consultation, WorkSafe are able to gain important insights on work health and safety and dangerous goods legislations from interstate regulators across New South Wales and Queensland. Implementation will also include engagement with stakeholders nominated during the previous phases, as I indicated, plus direct communication of the changes to duty holders, employer representatives and, as I said, anybody that had signed up through the Engage website, emergency services and other regulators. So there will be communication with everybody that was identified as relevant and any of those people who were engaged in the consultation process.

David ETTERSHPANK: We are just dealing with everything under clause 1 as I understand it, so I will reference a couple of other clauses if I may. In clause 3, 'Definitions', the 'dangerous goods' definition includes 'any prescribed substance or article'. Will this include toxic fly-ash that is generated by waste-to-energy incinerators?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I understand it, Mr Ettershank, there has been no change to definitions from the existing scheme. There has been no change to the list of existing dangerous goods. The definition of 'dangerous goods' is that they are substances or articles that pose an immediate physical risk to people, property or the environment because of their chemical or physical properties – for example, substances that are corrosive, flammable, combustible, explosive, oxidising or have other hazardous properties. What was a dangerous good previously will continue to be so under this legislation.

David ETTERSHPANK: If I could just persist a little bit on that question, I guess waste-to-energy fly-ash is kind of a new problem. Obviously the government is supporting the introduction of multiple waste-to-energy incinerators, but we do not have a lot to draw on in terms of large-scale general waste incinerators. I guess my question strikes to whether or not in the drafting of this legislation, and in particular this definition, that toxic fly-ash, which will be produced in huge quantities, has been contemplated as meeting that definition of any prescribed substance or article?

Jaclyn SYMES: Again, as I explained in my substantive answer, there is no change to the definitions in relation to any type of chemical or substance, whether what you are referring to or otherwise would be a matter for regulations for specific requirements. There is the possibility to prescribe future substances as they are identified, and that is able to be done and facilitated through the legislative framework.

David ETTERSHPANK: I guess to the people of places like Sunbury or Wollert or Lara that may not be a terribly comforting response given that they are facing the prospect of the transport of hundreds and hundreds of tonnes of that material on a weekly basis, often through residential areas. I guess I will just note that.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am not in a position to provide specific answers to a specific example in the way you have articulated. What I have indicated is that the legislative framework is able to be responsive to a range of matters. I am not going to comment on the example you are putting forward because that would be a matter for those in the industry. But what I could also point to is that duty holders must comply with stringent health and safety requirements for the transport of any dangerous goods.

David ETTERSHPANK: In clause 10(1)(c), in the event of a dangerous goods incident will Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) and other emergency responders have real-time access to dangerous goods manifests, licence information and transport records?

Jaclyn SYMES: Deputy President, because the member has referred to a specific clause, I just want to look that up. It is my advice that the regs will contain those requirements.

David ETTERSHANK: Could you elaborate a little bit, please, on what systems or protocols will be in place to ensure first responders know what they are dealing with?

Jaclyn SYMES: It was in my answer, Mr Ettershank. The regs will contain requirements along the lines of what you have identified, so they will be prescribed in regulation and are not yet prescribed.

David ETTERSHANK: Has the consultation occurred with Fire Rescue Victoria over what that might look like? Because we are talking about at the moment systems that simply do not communicate, that do not talk to each other, and I wonder whether that has been factored into implementation timeframes and the like.

Jaclyn SYMES: There has been heavy consultation in relation to the development of this legislation, which will continue across into the development of regulations. There is high engagement from CFA, VicPol, FRV and Emergency Management Victoria, for example.

David ETTERSHANK: Looking to clause 21, which identifies reportable incidents by reference to serious injury or death, serious risk to health and safety and serious risk to property, environmental damage is not listed. Given that environmental protection is a central object of the bill, can the minister explain why clause 21 does not expressly include incidents involving a serious risk of environmental damage and whether the government is satisfied that significant dangerous goods spills or releases with the potential to contaminate waterways, soil or groundwater, with obviously consequential damage potentially to workers and to the citizenry, would be consistently and promptly brought to WorkSafe's attention with the bill as currently drafted?

Jaclyn SYMES: It is important to understand this bill in the context of where it fits with other regulators. At the outset, I think in my response to some of Mr Welch's observations, this was about consolidation and reducing duplication, and the matters that you have raised are already regulated by the EPA. We did not want to create two mirroring systems for different regulators.

David ETTERSHANK: I do not know if I quite get that response, I am afraid. While the person who is responsible for a pollution incident must notify the EPA where the incident causes or threatens to cause material harm to human health or the environment, the concern is that a dangerous goods transport incident presenting a serious environmental risk may trigger direct notification to the EPA but not necessarily to WorkSafe, and as I understand it there are not protocols in place to ensure that notification of one results in advice to the other. I ask again, Minister: how will the government deal with this apparent shortfall in the communications between the agencies, and why is it not possible to simply ensure that environmental risk is included within the catchment of the bill?

Jaclyn SYMES: I disagree with the way you have articulated this. Your assessment that there is an apparent gap is not supported by the government's position. This is about our regulators working together, not all duplicating roles and stepping on each other's toes. In fact that is not good governance. It is not a good response to really important issues such as dangerous goods, because you have a situation where people are pointing at each other going, 'I think that's your job. I think that's your job.' That is something that you want to remove out of government regulation as much as possible, because otherwise you do not get people taking full responsibility and acting in accordance with the way they should. WorkSafe, the EPA and the emergency services already have intelligence-sharing arrangements in place. The intention is that the regulators receive information and act together rather than creating unnecessary duplication and multiple reporting pathways. The concern I have about the way you have articulated what you see as the appearance of gaps is I think you need to be thinking about the fact that it would be a gap if there was just one regulator responding, but when it is appropriate for two or three to respond, they go and do their jobs and work together – as opposed to trying to do everybody else's job under the framework of their specific task. That is where you get a lack of accountability.

David ETTERSHANK: But surely that assumes that environmental incidents are in one nice box and WorkSafe-related incidents are in another nice little box and that you can treat them with some

nice, clean thing. The reality is that they overlap, and we have seen in recent years multiple examples where in fact authorities have not been advised in a timely manner because exactly what you are saying was happening. All we are saying is: given that the environment is an objective of the bill, why can you not include WorkSafe as being notified in the context of what would otherwise be deemed to be an environmental spill, recognising that it will have potential impacts on workers and citizens?

Jaclyn SYMES: The way you are telling this story, Mr Ettershank, I do not think reflects the response from the agencies. As I said, WorkSafe, EPA and the emergency services already have intelligence-sharing arrangements. They already work in tandem. We do not want to create duplication. We do not want unnecessary duplication and multiple reporting pathways. We want this to be a strong response with everybody knowing what their response is. I do not know how you took from my answers that this is about putting things in little boxes. It is the opposite. It is about a multipronged approach by appropriate regulators, not expecting them all to do everybody else's job just because they are first on site or the issue is predominantly theirs. That is not a good outcome.

David ETTERS HANK: I think, Minister, we are talking at entirely cross-purposes here. I guess I will just leave it there, having put those concerns on the record, and let us hope that my concerns prove to be entirely ill-founded.

Clause 22, if I can move on to that, imposes an incident notification obligation on the consignor, prime contractor and driver or vessel master, but not the consignee. Given that the bill expressly recognises unloading and receipt of dangerous goods as activities involved in dangerous goods transport, can the minister explain why the consignee has not been included amongst those required to notify WorkSafe of a reportable incident?

Jaclyn SYMES: The government does not consider there to be a gap in the reporting framework. The two bills operate together to ensure dangerous goods incidents are reportable at both the transport stage and the handling stage. The Dangerous Goods Transport Bill imposes notification obligations on parties responsible for the transport activity itself, including consignors, prime contractors, drivers and vessel masters. Where an incident occurs during transport, these parties are required to notify WorkSafe. Once dangerous goods have been received and are being unloaded, stored or otherwise handled, the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026, when it becomes an act, will apply through the dangerous goods handling framework. If a spill, leak, release or other notifiable incident is identified at that stage, existing incident notification obligations under the OH&S framework apply.

David ETTERS HANK: Am I correct, Minister, in saying that your position is that, where a consignee receives, for example, a container that is leaking, and it has not been identified as leaking by the transporting body, that that obligation for timely reporting to WorkSafe and/or the EPA exists under the current occupational health and safety framework?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I indicated, once dangerous goods have been received and are being unloaded, stored or otherwise handled, that is when the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill applies – so, yes.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 8 agreed to.

Clause 9 (18:09)

Richard WELCH: Treasurer, the minister's second-reading speech explained at some length why the reportable priority waste exemption is being removed, but nothing anywhere is said about the primary producer exemption. Is that omission a deliberate policy position or is it an oversight, or do primary producers have any further exemptions?

Jaclyn SYMES: Licence types will be in the regulations, and primary producers may be exempted from requiring any licence in the regulations themselves.

Richard WELCH: I am going to quickly skip through because there are several questions on that theme that were answered that I do not need to ask now. But I will conclude with a summary of questions by asking: will there be an assurance that primary producers will not be worse off in licensing terms than they are under the current act?

Jaclyn SYMES: I anticipated that we might go to primary producers and farmers, so I might make just a few comments and see if I have covered off most of your queries. The reforms will impact duty holders, including farmers who may store or handle dangerous goods. In addition to any potential employer duties or self-employed duties, there will be new dangerous goods general duties that may apply to farmers who handle dangerous goods. Irrespective of the business structure or size, the bill will introduce a new broad duty for any person handling dangerous goods. This is to ensure that dangerous goods are regulated in workplaces and places where there are no workers. However, the standard remains qualified by reasonable practicability, which considers many factors, including availability, suitability and cost. The bill will provide an aggravated general duty offence to ensure alignment between the penalty for egregious behaviours and the penalty for other contraventions. This is, again, supposed to be an easing of regulations. This is about not creating new burdens, but in fact hopefully making it more modern and making it much easier to know how to comply.

Clause agreed to; clauses 10 to 16 agreed to.

Clause 17 (18:12)

Richard WELCH: I will read this slowly. The minister's second-reading speech concedes the bill includes differences from the national approach, naming the broad general duty as the example. If national consistency is the objective, why impose a duty that operators in other jurisdictions do not carry, and what does that divergence cost cross-border operators?

Jaclyn SYMES: My advice is that there is generally quite good alignment with the frameworks across jurisdictions and there is flexibility within the system to be agile and to respond to emerging issues.

Clause agreed to; clauses 18 to 52 agreed to.

Clause 53 (18:14)

Richard WELCH: Treasurer, this is in the area of general powers of entry. Clause 53(2) requires written record of a seizure to be given to the occupier of the place. Where a loaded vehicle is stopped on a public road, who is the occupier of the place?

Jaclyn SYMES: Can you ask that again?

Richard WELCH: Clause 53(2) requires a written record of a seizure to be given to the occupier of the place. Where a loaded vehicle is stopped on a public road, who is the occupier of the place?

Jaclyn SYMES: I can get some advice from the box, but there are powers to inspect vehicles and vessels in the clause above it. It actually talks about written directions to be served on the owner or the person having control or management of the vehicle or the vessel, so I think the clause above it pretty much – yes, they are nodding. Just looking at it, I think it is addressed in clause 52.

Clause agreed to; clauses 54 to 74 agreed to.

Clause 75 (18:16)

Richard WELCH: This is on power to give directions. A direction may be given orally. Failure to comply carries 500 penalty units and is an indictable offence. Why is a written record of an oral direction not required?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Welch, you are right; a direction may be given orally or in writing. In circumstances of it being delivered orally, it would be outlined in the entry report, which would then in turn be a written record of that oral advice.

Clause agreed to; clause 76 agreed to.

Clause 77 (18:18)

Richard WELCH: Treasurer, this is on powers to issue a costs notice. Clause 77 contains no cap on the amount recoverable and expressly includes legal services within reasonable costs. What safeguards apply against a disproportionate costs notice?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Welch, just going back to my attorney days, reasonable costs is something that is a matter for the court, and the system protects –

Richard Welch interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: Well, we can have an argument about ‘reasonable’, but what is reasonable would have to be justified based on the costs incurred and the cost of the inspector taking the action. There is nothing different in this bill in terms of reasonable costs, as would apply across a lot of the statute books in the state.

Clause agreed to; clauses 78 and 79 agreed to.

Clause 80 (18:20)

Richard WELCH: According to my records, 80 to 82 covers statutory charge on land. An unpaid costs notice may become a charge on land –

Jaclyn SYMES: Where are you?

Richard WELCH: Sorry, clause 81(1), I think it is. An unpaid costs notice may become a charge on land, which under clause 81(1) has priority over any other encumbrance. Was the effect on mortgages and farm finance considered?

Jaclyn SYMES: Given the materials that I have, obviously consideration was given to this particular element of the bill. If a person does not comply with a cost recovery notice, the bill allows unrecovered costs and interest to become a charge on the land under certain conditions. A charge on land is a legal claim placed over a property to secure payment of a debt or obligation. The charge must be registered on the register of titles. If a charge has been registered for at least 12 months, a court has previously made an order requiring payment of the costs recovery notice and any interest and the payment still has not been made within 12 months after the order is made, WorkSafe can take steps to sell the land. WorkSafe must give the owner of the land written notice of its intention to sell. It also must display a copy of the notice on the land and publish a copy on its internet site and in at least one other manner no later than one month before the date of the sale. Charges ensure strong incentives for duty holders to comply with their obligations, and therefore it was deemed an appropriate response for non-payment.

Clause agreed to; clauses 81 to 93 agreed to.

Clause 94 (18:22)

Richard WELCH: Treasurer, Judge Palmer recommended that step-in decisions not be subject to merits review. The government placed recommendation 9.2 in further consideration and identified the availability of merits review as the specific matter requiring consultation. The bill adopts the ‘no review’ position. What did that consultation find and with whom was it conducted?

Jaclyn SYMES: I have gone through all of the consultation during the review and in the development of legislation, as I said, which would continue through to the regulations. On this particular matter this approach is consistent with the Environment Protection Act 2017, which similarly limits merit review for equivalent types of directions. I think we have had similar conversations about some procedural fairness types of issues, you and I, Mr Welch, but procedural

fairness is preserved because judicial review remains available, ensuring inspectors remain accountable for the lawful exercise of their powers without undermining the immediacy and technical nature of their decisions. So again, it is going back to this being about reducing burden, making compliance easier and simplified, and therefore being consistent with similar acts was important.

Clause agreed to.

Clause 95 (18:25)

Richard WELCH: This is internal review. Clause 95 allows 10 business days from when a decision came to the person's notice. Where no notice of seizure is required to be given to a vehicle or freight owner, when does that period begin for them?

Jaclyn SYMES: The entry report would trigger the 10 days.

Clause agreed to; clauses 96 to 170 agreed to.

Clause 171 (18:26)

Richard WELCH: With clause 171 we are into the regulations. The question here is: when will the exposure draft regulations be released, and what will the consultation period be? I could join this with the following question: will they be subject to a regulatory impact statement under the Subordinate Legislation Act 1994, and when will that statement be published?

Jaclyn SYMES: We will work backwards. Yes, there will be a regulatory impact statement. We of course want to give industry time to get across the changes. Any notice period will be in accordance with the guidance issued by Better Regulation Victoria.

Richard WELCH: Just quickly, maybe I missed something in the answer there, but when will the exposure draft be issued?

Jaclyn SYMES: We have to wait until the legislation is passed.

Clause agreed to; clauses 172 to 175 agreed to.

Clause 176 (18:28)

Richard WELCH: Transitional regulations – the explanatory memorandum states that the power exists so that existing licence-holders can be transitioned into equivalent schemes. Primary producers hold no licence because they are currently exempt. What mechanism transitions the position of those currently outside the licensing system?

Jaclyn SYMES: The bill provides for a regulation-making power that enables transitional regulations to be made. This will enable, where appropriate, existing licence-holders under the DG act and regulations to be transitioned into equivalent licence classes made under own acts. This will allow for the impact on existing licence-holders to be minimised when transitioning from the DG act to the OH&S act. The transitional provisions will allow additional time for duty holders to obtain licences if that is needed.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

That the meal break scheduled for this day, pursuant to standing order 4.01(3), be suspended.

Motion agreed to.

Clause agreed to; clauses 177 to 187 agreed to; schedules 1 to 3 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:31): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:31): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill without amendment.

Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026

Second reading

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clauses 1 to 54 agreed to.

Clause 55 (18:34)

Richard WELCH: If the remit now extends beyond the work context, what guidance will be provided to people who are not employers and have never been duty holders under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004?

Jaclyn SYMES: They are existing duty holders.

Richard WELCH: No-one new will fall under the act that is not presently under the act as a result?

Jaclyn SYMES: Under the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 duty holders are also often those under the OH&S act, so the amendments bring duty holders from the Dangerous Goods Act into the OH&S act.

Richard WELCH: New section 35C carries up to five years imprisonment. What conduct is intended to attract it, and how does it interact with the industrial manslaughter provisions?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Welch, the new offence is an aggravated offence, and as you can see in relation to it being outlined in 35C, the contravention must result in the endangerment of health, safety or property or be likely to result in the endangerment of health, safety or property – and the person knew or reasonably should have known that the contravention would result in the endangerment of health, safety or property or would be likely to result in the endangerment of health, safety or property. You asked about how it could operate in the context of industrial manslaughter laws. They do not cancel each other out. There could be cases where you are charged with one or the other, depending on the conduct, or sometimes both.

Clause agreed to; clauses 56 to 171 agreed to.

Clause 172 (18:39)

Richard WELCH: I think we are looking specifically at directions, new sections 120A to 120L. How do the new direction and intervention powers under the OH&S act interact with the equivalent powers under the transport act? Can a duty holder receive inconsistent directions from inspectors acting under each?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Welch, they apply to different situations: one is to transport, one is to handling.

Clause agreed to; clauses 173 to 227 agreed to.

Clause 228 (18:41)

Richard WELCH: Will regulations under both acts be developed and consulted on together, given the boundary between them?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes.

Clause agreed to; clauses 229 to 274 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:42): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:42): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill without amendment.

Adjournment

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) (18:42): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Road maintenance

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (18:42): (2618) My adjournment is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, whoever that may be in the next week or so, and the action I seek is for the minister to urgently deal with the crisis on our roads regarding potholes. I recently had the opportunity to go up and spend some time in Wodonga with the fantastic Liberal candidate for Benambra Steve Martin, who is doing a fantastic job on behalf of his community. I could not help but notice, particularly on the Hume on the way up to Wodonga, the state of the potholes. There were literally signs on the side of the road warning people about potholes. They are not getting on and fixing the road and actually resurfacing the road so we can eliminate potholes, but erecting signs warning

people about potholes. Then you go over onto the New South Wales side of the Hume, and suddenly you have got quite a smooth journey.

I have got to tell you, President, Victorians are so ashamed to be Victorian because of this government's lack of investment in our roads. I heard too many stories from people at our listening post in Wodonga about their rims being destroyed and their suspension being broken because of incidents with potholes, and enough is enough. This government has treated regional Victorians and all Victorians with contempt. I have got to tell you, our plan to eliminate 1 million potholes and spend \$5 billion fixing Victorian roads for good went down very well. It was received very, very well, because this government has failed them when it comes to potholes.

Sonja Terpstra interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I know Ms Terpstra seems to think it is not an issue and would rather complain about 3AW. But those calls are real, and those people I spoke to in Wodonga had real stories. The same issues get raised with me in places like Wallan, in places like Craigieburn and even in places like Brunswick. Travelling across the state with Jess, I can tell you there is fury out there. So I seek the action of the minister to fix our roads.

Northern Victoria Region transport infrastructure

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:45): (2619) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and I raise it on behalf of our wonderful candidate in Yan Yean Amanda Dow. The action that I seek from the minister is for the minister to improve transport connectivity for residents living in the Yan Yean electorate by expanding the local bus network and increasing the reach and frequency of bus services. I was proud to stand with Liberal leader Jess Wilson, shadow minister Evan Mulholland and our wonderful Liberal candidates Amanda Dow and Steve Brooks to announce that a Wilson Liberal government will deliver the full duplication of Donnybrook Road from the Hume Freeway to Epping Road and slash traffic congestion for local commuters and commercial vehicles along Donnybrook Road. But not everyone can or wants to drive. Many residents of Donnybrook, Woodstock and Kalkallo say they want better public transport options. Unfortunately for them, the Allan Labor government has failed to significantly improve public transport in the area to meet the growing demand in the community. The outer northern growth suburbs are bursting at the seams, with a large population that is only growing bigger. The Liberal candidate for Yan Yean Amanda Dow recently met with residents of Donnybrook, who raised the issue with her, and numerous constituents have also contacted me about the lack of bus services in the electorate of Yan Yean. Alfred from the Kinbrook estate said that the estate has grown immensely, and while other estates that opened after his now have scheduled buses, Kinbrook is still waiting. He often sees people walking to Donnybrook station in the bitter cold, pushing through wind and rain just to get to the station.

These residents deserve better. They deserve a safe and comfortable bus service that will connect them to the train. A Donnybrook community group surveyed hundreds of neighbours and asking them what they want in terms of better public transport links. The survey showed that there is high demand for a bus route connecting Donnybrook to Epping via the schools in Wollert, as well as a dedicated shuttle service between Donnybrook V/Line station and Mernda Metro station.

We also cannot forget Whittlesea township, which is sometimes passed over in discussions about the northern growth suburbs. There is in fact quite a lot of new housing being built in Whittlesea, particularly the new estate along Ridge Road. One constituent from Whittlesea wrote to me to say that there are no buses going through the estate, which makes it hard for kids who need to catch public transport to school. Over the past 12 years the state Labor government has taken these communities for granted and failed to deliver basic public transport improvements, while spending billions of taxpayers dollars on underground tunnels that nobody asked for in order to funnel money to their corrupt union mates and criminal bikie gangs. Victorians are disgusted and deserve better.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region multicultural and multifaith communities

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:49): (2620) Like most, if not all, electorates across Victoria, the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region remains an incredibly culturally diverse area. This is one of the key factors making the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region the vibrant community it is. Many of the events I attend are in celebration of cultural holidays, and it is through the sharing of our different cultures and values that we improve knowledge and make the state a better place to live. Despite us knowing the importance of multiculturalism, there are some who are increasingly willing to deny this and seek to undo it. We know that something must be said and done when archaic policies such as the White Australia policy are spoken about in a positive light. This is nothing more than a blatant justification for discrimination and hatred. My question is to the Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria. Considering comments glorifying policies such as White Australia and the blatant disregard for the importance of multiculturalism in Victoria, the action I seek is that the minister advise me what is being done to protect our multicultural and multifaith communities from racial abuse and discrimination.

Justice navigator pilot

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (18:50): (2621) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, and the action I seek is for the government to commit to a full rollout of justice navigators across Victoria when the pilot program ends in December 2027. The recent announcement of the pilot sites of the justice navigator program has been welcomed by all those across the victim-survivor support sector. The pilot, run by Sexual Assault Services Victoria and Family Safety Victoria, was designed after extensive consultation with service providers, advocacy organisations, justice professionals, government agencies and, importantly, directly with victim-survivors of sexual violence. I am particularly pleased that the Mallee sexual assault unit in my electorate has been chosen as one of the pilot sites. Justice navigators will support survivors to understand and exercise their rights and assist them to navigate the support, compensation, justice and recovery options available. This builds on recommendations from the Victorian Law Reform Commission report in 2021 and is modelled on longstanding independent sexual violence adviser roles in England and Wales. The sites have been selected, the positions have been advertised and recruitment has begun, with the pilot intended to run for a little over 12 months to its completion in December 2027. Justice system journeys can take well over 12 months, particularly when involving criminal trials, which can take years. The government must provide the sector and the public with a guarantee of a full rollout of the service to ensure there is no gap when the pilot ends in 2027.

Ultimately, the pilot is not about proving that justice navigators are needed; we already know how confronting and burdensome the experience of navigating the complexities of the justice system is for victim-survivors. It also is not about proving that they work. We have the evidence from similar pilot programs in other states and from a similar model well proven overseas in the UK. The government must ensure that the communication surrounding the purpose of the pilot is to gain an understanding of the intricacies of creating the best model for Victoria, and they must guarantee a statewide rollout upon its completion. Justice navigators have the potential to significantly improve outcomes for victim-survivors, but I urge the government to provide some confidence that it will become a permanent feature of the specialist sexual assault sector here across Victoria.

Sex worker safety

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (18:52): (2622) My matter is for the Minister for Police and is regarding the closure of the Victoria Police sex industry coordination unit and the implications it has for detecting human trafficking, worker exploitation and organised criminal activities. The action I seek is that the minister explain how Victoria Police is now addressing these risks and whether the government will commit to restoring dedicated specialist capabilities in this area. The issue at hand is not simply the size of the Victorian sex industry, nor the broader debate surrounding decriminalisation. Rather, it is the removal of the specialist police unit that plays a critical role in identifying vulnerable

women, investigating exploitation and supporting enforcement action against criminal operations. Until December 2023 Victoria Police maintained a sex industry coordination unit, a specialist team responsible for overseeing the investigation of issues within this sector. This included detecting illegal operations, investigating allegations of human trafficking and identifying cases of exploitation involving vulnerable women.

A former investigator has described the unit as performing vital work prior to its closure. Police highlighted cases where women were allegedly being brought to Australia under false pretences, placed in debt arrangements and having their passports withheld until they worked off the debts. These are deeply concerning issues that go well beyond regulation and compliance and strike at the heart of modern slavery and human trafficking. Yet despite all these risks, the special unit has disbanded following changes to this regulations framework. While Victoria Police stated that the investigation of human trafficking continues in partnership with the Australian Federal Police, many questions remain about who is proactively monitoring the sector and identifying emerging risks. Victorians expect strong safeguards to protect vulnerable people from exploitation. If there is a critical, credible concern about women being coerced, manipulated or trafficked, the Labor government and now the new Premier have the responsibility to ensure that the law protects them and the community. I ask the minister: what measures have been put in place since the closure of the sex industry coordination unit to combat human trafficking and exploitation, and will the government consider restoring a dedicated specialist police capacity to protect vulnerable women and uphold community safety?

Public transport fares

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:55): (2623) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport in the other place. We are delivering significant cost-of-living relief for public transport users by halving fares for the rest of the year and delivering free public transport for under-18s permanently. At the same time we are introducing new tap-and-go technology to people, to give new options for how they pay their fares. For some people a Myki card is the best and most convenient way to pay their fare. Perhaps they have a concession on Myki or prefer to use cash when topping up their balances, and for others the new methods would simply be more convenient. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide me an update on how many new tap-and-go readers have been installed across Southern Metropolitan Region as part of this rollout.

Government digital strategy

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:56): (2624) My adjournment this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Government Services. El Salvador is a country that was dangerous and completely riddled by corruption and organised crime. This may sound familiar to some Victorians. They have been experiencing a turnaround recently as President Bukele has decided to do something a bit revolutionary and actually lock up the dangerous people, in the process becoming the political leader with the highest approval rating anywhere in the world, with over 90 per cent approval. Maybe there is a lesson in that for the new Premier or a future Premier after November.

One of the things that they are doing is rapidly developing their government services, integrating digital service delivery and centralised cloud-based services throughout government. This is a country that is rapidly changing from a Third World hellhole with one of the highest murder rates in the world to a country that is integrating technology so rapidly that it is positioning itself to be one of the most advanced countries in digital integration. Meanwhile, in Victoria the Victorian Auditor-General has just tabled a report updating progress on the Victorian government's progress in implementing the recommendations from a 2021 report, and it is damning stuff. It essentially outlines a government that is completely rudderless when it comes to digital service delivery.

Their follow-up review focused on two key questions: (1) have agencies implemented their action plans, and (2) has digital delivery of government services improved customer experiences and reduced transaction costs? Among their findings they state that little progress has been made on action plans to implement the 2021 recommendations; there is not a clear strategy for the Service Victoria platform

or a plan to encourage other agencies to use it; there is not a transparent assessment of costs and benefits; and there is no clear process to measure success or efficiency.

This is more than just a brief assessment of a minor Victorian government app. It is indicative of a real systemic problem in Victoria. The official government digital strategy is called *A Future-ready Victoria: Victorian Government Digital Strategy 2021–2026*. My request to the Minister for Government Services is to recognise that we are falling far short and meet with relevant stakeholders, including, where appropriate, representatives from global leaders such as Estonia and apparently El Salvador, and craft an ambitious digital strategy to get Victoria back on track.

State care leavers

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (18:58): (2625) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Government Services. I recently met with a lady who as a child was a ward of the state for 14 years. She was brought to tears sharing her concerns about legislation introduced by the Allan Labor government without consulting forgotten Australians and care leavers that makes sensitive records publicly available after 99 years and permits unrestricted access through the Public Record Office Victoria website. This reality contradicts the former Premier's 2024 apology to care leavers, in which she agreed to take steps to redress past wrongs.

Treating these records as ordinary public records continues the injustices experienced by forgotten Australians and care leavers by exposing their deeply personal histories to public view. These records can include personal stories, abuse allegations, medical and family details and more. The public release of this information can risk retraumatisation and reputational harm to forgotten Australians and care leavers and their families. This lady spoke up on behalf of all children in care to question who is protecting their privacy. After my constituent raised concerns with the minister, the Public Record Office Victoria responded and justified the release of this information so that decisions made by the government and its employees can be reviewed and remain transparent, but the Alliance for Forgotten Australians would like to see the legislation amended so that records relating to children who were wards of the state or otherwise in out-of-home care are designated permanently sensitive. This would uphold the privacy and dignity of forgotten Australians and care leavers through trauma-informed law and practices, preventing these records from ever being opened to general public access.

I ask the minister to review this issue to ensure the transparency of government processes without the need to make these sensitive records fully available to the public. My constituent is traumatised and distressed by the prospect of their personal information being made publicly available online and raised concerns on behalf of all forgotten Australians and care leavers, and I look forward to the minister's response.

Housing

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (19:00): (2626) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing and Building Nick Staikos. New building protections and the first resort home warranty scheme commenced on 1 July. The action I seek is an update on how these reforms will strengthen consumer confidence and better protect Victorian home owners.

Fines system

David ETTERSHPANK (Western Metropolitan) (19:01): (2627) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, and it relates to imprisonment warrants issued for unpaid fines. There are currently some 3000 warrants issued annually for unpaid fines for low-level offences such as unpaid tolls. In fact 83 per cent of these fines are for unpaid tolls to Transurban and ConnectEast. A relatively small fine can quickly accumulate late fees and administrative charges before being transferred to Fines Victoria, who then really apply the screws. Escalating enforcement measures can include licence or registration suspension, final notices or referral to the sheriff and eventually to the Magistrates Court, where imprisonment is definitely an option. Setting aside the bizarre situation of the Victorian government being Transurban's debt collector, no-one should be jailed for not paying a fine. It is

another example of the criminalisation of poverty and disadvantage in this state. People with the means to pay fines will do so. The people at risk of imprisonment are those who cannot.

The Fines Reform Act 2014 was designed to prevent people from facing imprisonment for unpaid fines, but it is failing in practice. The act requires the court to consider, amongst other things, whether imprisonment would be excessive, disproportionate or unduly harsh. I do not need to explain why prison is an excessive, disproportionate and unduly harsh form of punishment for someone who simply cannot pay their CityLink toll nor spend time detailing the lasting harms associated with that imprisonment. Even a short stint can cost someone their job, their home or their kids. These people have not committed serious or dangerous crimes; they just do not have the ability to pay that fine. Section 165 prohibits imprisonment where a person lacks the capacity to pay or has another reasonable excuse and no other order was deemed appropriate, yet magistrates are still issuing orders for imprisonment, including for defaulting on payment plans that would take decades to clear.

I have sought demographic information about those subjects via a question on notice, and we are seeking those warrants, but I was told that releasing that information could affect privacy. This is outrageous but entirely consistent with this government's lack of transparency. There are many ways to provide de-identified data. The action I seek therefore is for the Attorney-General to release the requested data in a de-identified format and to remove imprisonment as an option for fines debt from the Fines Reform Act.

Eastern Victoria Region bus services

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (19:04): (2628) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Today it happens to be Minister Williams. We often raise issues in terms of the bus timetable, and in regional Victoria buses are a real lifeblood for connecting people to services and their families and communities and work. 150 days ago I wrote to the minister with regard to the Latrobe Valley, which on 2 February had 'significant network upgrades'. Really what it meant was hardships and missed timetables for residents, older people, people with disability and those living with disability in Moe in particular. That was one area where people were most distressed about the misconnections of the bus timetable. I also raised in this house a matter in relation to the Leongatha and Wonthaggi bus timetable being so short that people really could not access the service to meet an appointment that they needed. In doing so, it is pleasing to know that the minister somehow managed to listen and update and change the Wonthaggi-Leongatha routes, after suffering. But imagine my surprise when we hear in relation to the Latrobe Valley – and I might add that I had bus drivers coming to me saying that they were so distressed that they were not connecting with their passengers and that they were very concerned – that the whole system is unworkable because of these timetable changes.

The minister announced on 14 July in Bendigo, in the former Premier's seat, that they were going to review the bus network. Indeed the former Premier – now – said in a media release on that day:

Whether it's making it easier to get to work, getting the kids to school or getting to appointments, we want to hear how local buses can work better for Bendigo.

The acting minister said:

Regional communities deserve bus services that keep up with how they live, work and travel today.

Apparently it is good enough for Bendigo, particularly when the Premier's seat was under threat from the Nationals' Andrew Lethlean, but it is not good enough for the people of Latrobe Valley who are really in distress about this. So I call on the minister, if she is fair dinkum about regional communities deserving bus services that keep up with how they live, work and travel, to do the same thing that they are going to do in Bendigo, apparently, in Gippsland and particularly in Latrobe Valley so stakeholders, bus drivers, community and disability groups can actually get a service that supports them so that people can use our bus services effectively and get them home, to work and to appointments in a good order.

Heritage protection

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (19:07): (2629) My matter for the adjournment tonight is, I think, for the Minister for Planning, but part of the point I am going to make is that the state government has lost its way on heritage issues. There is no specific area within government that takes overall responsibility. There are bodies, such as Heritage Victoria, that administer certain statutory protections for places of significance, but no state entity provides dedicated policy investment coordination across Victoria's broader heritage sector. Heritage is under attack under this government. First of all, a number of programs have been concluded by this government. The Living Heritage program played an important role over many years, about \$8 million a year, and that has gone and not been replaced. Support for the National Trust of Australia, a body that manages many of our heritage places, a not-for-profit body, has not been renewed. There is no multiyear funding for the National Trust in the way that would enable them to make proper decisions and proper heritage protection decisions.

Under the state government's planning changes, we see now an attack on heritage properties and heritage precincts. The state government has put in place a series of high-rise, high-density planning arrangements which sweep away the protections or leave the protections weak in the face of an overwhelming focus on high rise and high density and the destruction of existing streetscapes, existing heritage and existing heritage buildings. This attack on heritage is a bad outcome for our state, which has long been recognised as a place that understood the importance of our heritage in a cultural sense but also in an economic sense – and both are important. I am in receipt of correspondence from the National Trust pointing out many of these issues.

What I am seeking from the minister is, first of all, a focus on heritage directly, making sure that there is – and this might be a matter for the new Premier to take up – some sort of overarching place in government that focuses on heritage, and part of that would also see the reversal of the terrible attack on heritage that has occurred with the recent planning changes with the high rise, high density that is going to roll over many heritage areas in our state, and also a consideration of the restoration of some of the funding that provided support for heritage in key locations around the state. We are in a position now where, if we do not act, we will lose something valuable that will not be there for our children and their children.

Kindergarten funding

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:10): (2630) My adjournment is for the Minister for Local Government. This state Labor government talks big – that it provides free three-year-old kinder. The thing is that is what it says, but we all know it is actually not free. We know Victorians are paying for it, and the money is not going to properly supporting some of the programs or the Victorian families that are paying for it. The action I seek is for the minister to revise the CRES funding model to better reflect the workload required to support kindergarten participation in the City of Casey, which is one of Victoria's largest, fastest growing and most culturally diverse municipalities. The central registration and enrolment scheme, or CRES, exists to assist families to register to participate in kinder. Currently its funding model does not adequately cover the costs of this work, particularly in the City of Casey. This government prides itself on the Best Start, Best Life reforms, with its focus on improving kindergarten participation, yet it is leaving councils to do the heavy lifting required to get kids into kinder, without providing the funding to match. Over the past three years the Casey CRES has managed an average of more than 6500 registrations each year and has placed more than 5000 children annually. The question has to be asked: what happened to the approximately 1500 kids who did not get placed? I was told initially that there were more than 400 students that missed out on places. I have also been told that several City of Casey families are worried about woke indoctrination that does not reflect their family or personal values which is continually creeping into our kindergartens.

The CRES program in the City of Casey told coalition MPs in a recent meeting that it goes far beyond registering children for kindergarten and explained it participates in intensive family engagement,

outreach, registration support, manual offer processes, transfers, cancellations and sustained family follow-up. The City of Casey even undertake offer rounds throughout the year, not just during the main registration period, and they support the many families who move into the municipality throughout the year, families whose circumstances change and families who require additional time and support to complete enrolment due to language or literacy challenges. Without this support, vulnerable children face a higher risk of delayed or even non-participation in kindergarten, as has been the experience of hundreds of families in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region, yet this government turns a blind eye. Its funding model looks at one thing: the number of children placed in kindergartens. It spends taxpayer money on a bag of goodies to bribe Victorians which many families are not going to use. Labor is prepared to bribe its constituents and deceive them into thinking it is spending our money with thought, with its bag of lollies in this government kinder pack, which is for vulnerable children. Shame on you. This Labor government needs to use its money fairly and update its funding model to one that recognises (1) the total registrations managed and not just those converted, (2) the intensity of engagement and (3) the additional resourcing needed to support vulnerable families.

Responses

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) (19:13): There were 13 adjournment matters this evening to nine separate ministers, and I will make sure that there are written responses provided. Ms Terpstra asked a question in relation to the multicultural affairs portfolio in relation to the strong action our government is taking on racism and discrimination. I will provide Ms Terpstra with a fulsome written response, because there is a lot that our government is doing in this area. Mr Limbrick asked me a question in my capacity as Minister for Government Services, and it was quite detailed. Again, I will provide a written response in accordance with the standing orders. Mrs Broad, thank you for your adjournment matter in relation to the Alliance for Forgotten Australians. I am aware of the organisation. I have actually asked my department to sit down and meet with this group to hear directly from them, because I am concerned of there being adverse outcomes with people's personal data. If you are of a mind to do so and if you want to share any of the personal information of your constituent, with their consent, I would be happy to follow that up with my department. As I say, I have initiated already some conversations between the Alliance for Forgotten Australians and the Department of Government Services.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7:15 pm.