



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 15 October 2025**



# 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

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 <sup>1</sup>	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 <sup>2</sup>	Western Metropolitan	Lib	Ratnam, Samantha <sup>5</sup>	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem <sup>6</sup>	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 <sup>3</sup>	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	Northern Victoria	PHON
Limbrick, David <sup>4</sup>	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Welch, Richard <sup>7</sup>	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 7 December 2023

<sup>2</sup> IndLib from 28 March 2023  
until 27 December 2024

<sup>3</sup> Appointed 14 November 2024

<sup>4</sup> LDP until 26 July 2023

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 8 November 2024

<sup>6</sup> DLP until 25 March 2024

<sup>7</sup> Appointed 7 February 2024

### Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;  
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; PHON – Pauline Hanson’s One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party



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**Wednesday 15 October 2025**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Petitions*

**Lang Lang extractive industries**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 1744 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council:

That the Victorian State Government have proposed draft land use planning controls across Lang Lang which would see new and extended quarries, within designated areas, exempt from standard planning provisions and remove notice, review, and appeal rights from the local community. These areas are known as “Strategic Extractive Resource Areas” (SERA’s).

The Petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council ask the Victorian State Government to:

- halt works on the SERA for the Lang Lang area until an updated Lang Lang Township Strategy is formulated,
- work with council and the community on this new strategy, which considers the needs of the town and the wider community, such as the long-promised Lang Lang bypass and other infrastructure needs rather than considering SERA’s in isolation, and
- amend the draft planning controls across the SERA’s to ensure that community consultation is undertaken and considered before any approvals are given for new and extended quarries.

**Renee HEATH:** I move:

That the petition be considered on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Rossdale Golf Club**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 2042 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws attention of the of Legislative Council to reject the rezoning of Rossdale Golf Course and preserve it as vital public green space. Rossdale is a thriving, financially viable community asset with over 800 members located beside the Ramsar-listed Edithvale Wetlands. Rezoning would destroy tree canopy, wildlife corridors, and climate buffers in a high-density area.

The push to rezone is Rossdale Board and Developer-driven, not community-led. The planning minister has been approached directly, bypassing Kingston Council and undermining democratic planning processes.

Traffic congestion, infrastructure strain, and lack of genuine consultation compound community concern. Viable alternatives exist to resolve modest club debt without full redevelopment.

The Petitioners therefore request the Legislative Council: Oppose any rezoning that bypasses council and community input; Protect green space near Ramsar wetlands; Support an independent financial review of Rossdale; Strengthen planning laws to safeguard urban green space.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS:** 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.

***Papers*****Papers****Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General –

Relief and Recovery Funding for the 2022 Floods, October 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

Report, 2024–25.

Border Groundwaters Agreement Review Committee – Report, 2023–24.

Financial Management Act 1994 – Financial Report for the State of Victoria, 2024–25 (incorporating Quarterly Financial Report No. 4) (*Ordered to be published*).

Victorian Local Government Grants Commission – Allocation Report, year ended 31 August 2025.

***Business of the house*****Notices****Notices of motion given.*****Members statements*****Diwali**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (09:49): Across Victoria this month communities will be coming together to celebrate Diwali, the Festival of Lights. And whether you call it Diwali, Deepavali, Tihar, Kali Puja or Bandi Chhor Divas, each of these celebrations carries a shared message of light triumphing over darkness, hope, renewal, good over evil, unity over division and the importance of compassion and community. These are values that sit at the very heart of what it means to be Victorian. From temple gatherings and family feasts to community festivals and school events, Diwali lights up our state with colour, joy and connection. It has been wonderful to see my community open their hearts and share their traditions with all Victorians in Melbourne's west. On Sunday night it was wonderful to attend Tarneit Diwali in the west with the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and the members for Werribee and Point Cook in a celebration of the diversity that makes our state so unique. Our South Asian communities have long been an integral part of Victoria's story, contributing to our economy, enriching our culture and strengthening the social fabric of our state. The west would not be the place it is today without the extraordinary contribution of our vibrant South Asian community. Happy Diwali to everyone.

**Prisoner safety**

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (09:50): I rise to commend the Northern Territory Liberal Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro for her courageous and principled decision to ban biological males from all women's prisons. It is the first government to take such a step in Australia, but it was taken only after a female inmate was raped by a male, saying he is a woman, in that prison. She has done what no other leader in this state has been willing to do: she acted to protect women, not ideology. Again I would remind people that here in Victoria, in my region, in the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, women are still being forcibly housed with a twice-convicted male rapist, and they do not want to be. Staff and survivors have spoken out, and the government has refused to listen. But they need to listen, because safety is not discrimination, reality is not hate, and protecting women's spaces is not bigotry. It is actually the bare minimum of justice, and I hope this Labor government gets on board quickly.

**Kangaroo control**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:51): Today I will have the privilege of hosting an event here in Parliament with a range of kangaroo advocates, experts and First Nations peoples whose cultures and stories are deeply connected to our kangaroos. Today these representatives, including



Kangaroos Alive, Victorian Kangaroo Alliance and Animals Australia, will send a letter to the Premier and the Minister for Environment in the lead-up to World Kangaroo Day, calling for an immediate moratorium on commercial kangaroo killing in Victoria. The letter raises serious concerns about the government's current approach to kangaroo management, particularly through commercial killing and the authority-to-control-wildlife system. It recognises the urgent need for policy reform, including the adoption of coexistence strategies, nonlethal management methods and genuine partnerships with traditional owners. Survey data reveals that 90 per cent of Australians want kangaroos to remain a visible part of the Australian landscape, and 98 per cent believe it is important to protect them. As this letter points out, even our Premier has acknowledged the need to explore nonlethal control mechanisms. I commend these kangaroo advocates for their tireless work and urge fellow members to seriously consider their calls for reform. Protecting our iconic kangaroos is not only a cultural and ecological imperative but just the right thing to do.

### **Maltese community**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:53): I recently had the privilege of joining Victoria's Maltese community at the Maltese Community Council of Victoria to celebrate 61 years of Maltese independence. It was good to be there with Mr Mulholland from across the aisle for a terrific celebration of Maltese culture. We have well over around 20,000 people of Maltese descent living in Victoria, which made it special to join Antonia Camilleri, the president of the MCCV in Parkville, as well as Dr Gioconda Schembri, who is Malta's consul general for Melbourne, and Mario Sammut, who is the Honorary Vice-Consul for Malta for the Latrobe Valley. It was a terrific night. It was great to be back at the MCCV, where many years ago I did some Maltese language classes, trying to reconnect with my heritage. I dusted some of it off but am certainly not going to win any awards for my contributions in Maltese. It was very special to see one of my old teachers, Edwidge, there at the event as well. It was a terrific event enjoyed by all.

### **Fiji Day**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:54): Over the weekend we celebrated Fiji's national day with an event at Dandenong Park, along with Mr Tarlamis, Minister Stitt and many lower house and Council colleagues as well, celebrating the contribution and impact that our Fijian and broader Pasifika communities make to Victoria, especially in the south-east, where we are very proud to have a large and growing population.

### **Waste and recycling management**

**David ETTERSHPANK** (Western Metropolitan) (09:54): On Saturday I went to the Sunbury Show, and I had the best time – great people, food, rides and show animals, including bulls in the ring and one under a marquee. There was also a huge, enthusiastic crowd, many of whom seemed very keen to express their concerns with the government and the local member. As you might ask yourself, President: why are these people so very upset at the government? The reason is that they see this as a safe Labor seat in the western suburbs and they can be treated as second-class citizens. What has really brought this sentiment to the boiling point is the prospect of three-quarters of a million tonnes of garbage being burnt upwind of the town and the rapidly expanding surrounds. There is a very strong feeling in Sunbury that they are treated as Melbourne's tip. Let us remember that it was Sunbury where the government dumped that PFAS-contaminated soil from the West Gate Tunnel. Every day as people drive along Bulla Road they can look over at that man-made mountain of soil as a testament to the high regard in which the government appears to hold them. Now, to add insult to injury, they are to receive the gift of what is literally a toxic dumpster fire on a monstrous scale. It is time that the government woke up and smelled the garbage, because the incinerators proposed for Sunbury, for Lara, for Wollert and for Dandenong are nothing short of a disgrace, and it stinks.

**Rosebud Hospital**

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (09:56): We had exciting news at Rosebud Hospital when the Minister for Health joined me to announce \$4 million in funding. We went out there this year, talking to community about how much the community love the Rosebud Hospital – the family feel, the doctors, the nurses, all the staff and indeed the volunteers at the hospital. It is not just sentiment around the southern peninsula about the hospital. The data has come back for Frankston and Rosebud hospitals. Their ambulance transfer times lead the state. Congratulations to Helen Cooper and everyone at Peninsula Health. It was just so exciting to be able to invite Sue Gilbert along. She did not know why she was coming to the hospital. When we announced the \$4 million in funding upgrades, it meant so much to her. Thank you to Sue and everyone else who has advocated for the hospital and for what it means to the entire community. As I said to Peninsula Health, to all those doctors, nurses and staff – Jacqui Allen, director of nursing, came and joined us and showed us around – there is lots more to do, but Rosebud Hospital is here to stay.

**Parentline**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:57): Tomorrow, after 25 years of dedicated service to Victorian parents and carers, the state's only confidential counselling phone line support service Parentline is shutting its doors permanently, all thanks to a decision made by this Labor government. With an annual budget of just \$1.3 million, Parentline has supported up to 18,000 families a year. It has been a lifeline for so many. For a service with such a small budget, its impact across our communities has been far reaching. We have heard in this chamber from the Minister for Children that this Labor government has 'doubled the funding to family services, increasing that funding to over \$446 million', yet it refuses to allocate less than \$2 million to a service that is clearly needed by Victorian families. This is shameful at a time when evidence shows rising rates of adolescent depression and anxiety, compounded by ongoing education challenges and the lasting impacts of COVID-19. If achieving better outcomes for children in Victoria is truly a priority for this government, then it must also prioritise the parents and carers who support and care for them every day. The decision to close Parentline must be reversed, and my Victorian Greens colleague Kat Copsey and the community have a petition to reverse this ill-conceived decision.

**Melbourne High School**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:58): Last week I had the great opportunity to visit Melbourne High School with the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education in the other place. Just down the road from my office, Melbourne High has been an institution of not just my community the Southern Metro but the whole state of Victoria since 1905. The Deputy Premier and I had the great chance to meet with the school's political interest group, taking questions from keen future leaders. Thank you to the principal Dr Anthony Mordini and the student leadership team for meeting with me and the Deputy Premier. In a couple of weeks time I will be returning to address their political interest group, a great initiative led by Matthew Hayes to encourage political discussion and debate amongst our next generation, and I am looking forward to joining them.

**Metro Tunnel**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:59): As a quick second matter, I also want to briefly mention that I had a chance to visit and journey up the brand new Melbourne Metro last week. This is the best part of being Labor. When others say it cannot be done, we get it done.

*Production of documents*

**Housing**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:00): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes the government's plan to demolish all of Melbourne's 44 high-rise public housing sites, with North Melbourne and Flemington estates being the first towers slated for demolition;
- (2) further notes that during the public hearings held on Wednesday, 6 August 2025, for the inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers, the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee heard Simon Newport, the CEO of Homes Victoria, confirm the existence of documents containing a cost-benefit analysis of other viable options to demolition, including retrofitting for all 44 towers; and
- (3) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within two months of the house agreeing to this resolution, the document containing the cost-benefit analysis of other viable options to demolition including retrofitting for 120 Racecourse Road and 12 Holland Court in Flemington, and 33 Alfred Street in North Melbourne.

I rise to speak on our notice of motion 1089. The government's announcement in 2023 of their plan to demolish Melbourne's 44 public housing towers came as a shock to thousands of residents living in those homes and to many in the community who know how important public housing is. It has been over two years since, and in this time community members, housing advocates, public housing residents, academics, journalists and the Greens have raised their voices, mobilised, picketed, written letters, rallied, signed petitions and fronted up to a public inquiry. Time and time again, we have been asking: where is the business case for this project? Where is the evidence that supports the plan to demolish rather than refurbish? So far, Labor has been reluctant to answer these questions head-on or produce the evidence. It is incumbent upon the government to be honest and open with the Victorian public, in particular the public housing residents that these decisions so deeply impact. They deserve to know the reasoning behind these plans.

This motion is asking the government to share with the residents from the Flemington and North Melbourne estates and the broader community the rationale, analysis and consultations that have taken place to justify demolishing these homes. The government has been repeatedly dismissive of the case put forward by multiple residents, advocates, engineers, architects, academics and community leaders arguing for these towers to be retrofitted and refurbished instead of demolished. Show us the evidence that backs up your case. Show us what alternatives were considered and demonstrate why your plan for demolishing all the public housing at the Flemington and North Melbourne estates, instead of renovating, is the only option.

Every time we have requested the production of documents in this place, documents to show justification of the government's plan to demolish our public housing towers, we have been met with resistance, excuses and claims of executive privilege. One such request saw the release of just 12 out of 158 documents the government has detailing this plan. That is 146 documents that were withheld from Parliament under executive privilege. Under standing order 10, even where privilege is claimed, the documents must still be provided in full to the Clerk and the member who moved the motion. This is not for public release. It allows for proper parliamentary oversight, including referral to an independent arbiter if needed. In this case, that process was not followed, demonstrating the government's alarming disregard for parliamentary processes.

Given the government's inability to produce adequate justification or evidence, why should we have any confidence in the legitimacy of this plan. Furthermore, why should we have any confidence in the government's commitment to transparency and accountability in general. In Supreme Court proceedings last year, senior counsel for the government stated that:

... a decision was made and there are no documents ...

Relating to the decision to demolish the towers in North Melbourne and Flemington, Justice Melinda Richards described the position as ‘startling’. But earlier this year public hearings for the parliamentary inquiry into the decision to demolish Melbourne’s public housing towers showed that these documents do in fact exist. Homes Victoria CEO Simon Newport testified in front of the committee that this work has been done. Four times in responses to questions, he stated that the government did in fact consider retrofit reports relevant to all 44 towers in order to conduct a proper cost–benefit analysis. Simon Newport confirmed that he has personally seen the documents that justify the demolition of all 44 towers versus retrofitting or other options. He has seen the evidence. What we are seeking with this motion today is to see this evidence – not for all 44, just North Melbourne and Flemington, the first two towers on the chopping block.

What we are seeking today is basic accountability for a really major decision, and I do not think that is too much to ask for. These are not just a couple of towers. We are talking about people’s communities, their sense of security, connection and safety, the lives they have built and the memories that they have shared. We are talking about people’s homes. This plan is causing huge distress to the public housing residents and communities around North Melbourne and Flemington. Show us the justification you have for demolishing these towers.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:05): Honestly, it is a bit difficult to listen to someone asking to be shown evidence when it is quite clear that they do not listen to the evidence that they are shown, they do not listen to the information that is provided in public hearings of the Legal and Social Issues Committee’s inquiry into the demolition of the 44 public housing towers that Ms Gray-Barberio has participated in – in fact evidence that has been given to her by witnesses. She asks for more evidence, but she has not listened to the evidence that she has received. There are inaccuracies in the speech she just gave. I do not have time to go through them all, because I would rather spend this contribution reminding Ms Gray-Barberio about the evidence that has been presented, that is in the public domain, about the condition of Melbourne’s 44 public housing towers.

I will start with the evidence that we received at Simmons Court in South Yarra on 1 July. Ms Gray-Barberio asked a witness, ‘Have you got any evidence that they are structurally unsound?’ The witness replied, ‘Yes’. Ms Gray-Barberio said, ‘Evidence you can provide the committee?’ And the witness said, ‘Well, if you look at the back of the square in the ceiling, at all the things from the water pipes, there is something coming from the sewerage in places.’ In the hearing when Ms Gray-Barberio asked for evidence, a witness who is a resident in those public housing towers said, ‘Turn around and look at the ceiling’ –

**Katherine Copsey:** On a point of order, President, this is a narrow motion relating to two public housing towers, and the documents related to those in South Yarra are not part of the motion. I ask that the member be brought back to the subject of the motion.

**Michael Galea:** On the point of order, despite proving the point that the Greens are not prepared to listen to evidence on this matter, Mr Batchelor is being relevant to this motion.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Batchelor is responding to a contribution made by Ms Gray-Barberio, which he has a right to.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** I am sorry that the Greens continue to not listen to evidence provided to them about the condition of the 44 public housing towers. As I was saying, in a public hearing when Ms Gray-Barberio asked a witness about evidence about the condition of the towers, she pointed to the ceiling where sewage runs out of pipes. And when asked, ‘Have DFFH tried to fix those pipes?’ the witness replied, ‘They have tried to fix that hundreds of times, and sometimes the water keeps running. So I do understand that they cannot keep on fixing it when it is unfeasible. They need to go.’ That was evidence that Ms Gray-Barberio heard in public hearings.

Later in the course of these public hearings we did have evidence from Homes Victoria about the condition of the public housing towers. I admit, this was not a question that Ms Gray-Barberio asked –

it was a question that a member of the opposition asked about the condition of the towers themselves – but the witness, Mr McCurry from Homes Victoria, talked about how he had, with his own fingers in front of members of the committee, crumbled pieces of concrete and steel reinforcement from the corridor of the tower in North Melbourne. He reminded members of the committee in public evidence that they had seen him hold a piece of concrete in his fingers and watch it crumble in his hands. That is the evidence that we heard as a committee in public hearings that Ms Gray-Barberio was part of. We also had evidence about the escalating costs of maintenance. Ms Gray-Barberio asked, ‘What about the other options? Can we just refurbish them?’ We had considerable evidence provided at our public hearings about the escalating costs associated with just keeping the towers the way they are.

We do not have time in this debate, because the standing orders preclude us from having a proper debate on short-form documents motions, thanks to the deal that the Greens and the Liberals did. What we will have is a report from this inquiry soon, and I look forward to working on it and tabling it. I do not think the Greens are going to listen to a single piece of evidence about this program because they have not listened to what they have been told so far. They do not listen.

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (10:11): That was quite an extraordinary contribution. Just because some evidence has been listed does not mean that all evidence has been listed. This is about openness, transparency and accountability. I know as chair of the committee that we have asked numerous times for documents. A member of the committee talked about witnesses that have come before the committee to give evidence. Those witnesses are not structural engineers – they are not experts – and they were not the ones charged by the government to provide them with evidence which justifies knocking down the towers. I will not be lectured by someone in here about providing documents and about evidence given from a witness that is not an expert in that matter, particularly from Mr Batchelor, who is on the committee himself and knows better. He knows better. He talked about witnesses and their testimony and the condition of the building. If that is the case, why doesn’t the government provide the documents that confirm that? If there is nothing to hide, why do you want to hide them? It is as simple as that. What is there to hide? If what you are asserting is true and what you say is confirmed by witnesses, why won’t you provide documents that confirm that? It is a simple question: why won’t you provide documents that confirm that?

*Members interjecting.*

**Joe McCracken**: I am glad to hear that you are not opposing it. That is fantastic to hear. I am pleased to hear that. If it is your practice to support these documents coming to the chamber, I very much look forward to the Treasurer providing those documents to the chamber in a timely manner. I hope that that happens with the rest of the documents that have been provided as well, because practices, I have to say, are not always adhered to, and there is a live motion at the moment to that effect, moved by Mr Davis. I hope that we do see these documents. Legitimate questions that have been raised, which have not really been responded to in an effective way, deserve an honest response.

**Michael Galea** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:13): I also rise to share a few remarks on the motion that has been put forward by Ms Gray-Barberio today. As Mr McCracken helpfully highlighted the interjections of the Treasurer and Ms Terpstra just now, I can affirm that the government will not be opposing this motion, as is our standard practice. It does give me the opportunity to make a few remarks. On Mr Batchelor’s comments, I know in particular that it was quite a powerful moment of evidence in the inquiry when we heard from a resident who lives in the towers, who supports residents with their issues in the towers day in, day out. When asked to provide that evidence, they literally pointed above our heads and very vividly described to us one small example of the issues that are being faced. I acknowledge your contribution as well, Mr McCracken – dare I say, a contribution fit for a frontbencher. Maybe next time.

**Joe McCracken**: You’ll get there one day too, mate.

**Michael GALEA:** That is very kind of you, but we support each other on this side, and we have already got a very good front bench, thank you very much.

Acknowledging Ms Gray-Barberio's passion for this and noting that the government will not be opposing this motion, I really do think it is important that we again look at the evidence that we have. The towers as they currently stand fail against noise standards. They certainly fail against sustainability standards: waste, recycling, room depth, door width, ventilation, fire, resistance to extreme heat and resistance to cold. The showers are step-up, and they cannot be retrofitted to be accessible for people. The issues go on and on and on, and they are not providing an acceptable level of minimum amenity for residents. We know that only 5 per cent of the lifts in these towers are stretcher compliant, posing a risk. We know that elevators in 11 of the older people's towers are so narrow that new fridges need their doors removed in order to fit them in. On top of that, key systems like the electrical infrastructure, which this committee has had the opportunity of seeing onsite in the towers, the plumbing and the sewerage systems are breaking down.

This is not a prediction; this is already happening. In 2022 renters had to be evacuated from the red brick towers in Elgin Street in Carlton after the sewer stacks completely failed – a biohazard risk for the residents. They had to be evacuated immediately. We know that renters have repeatedly expressed concerns about these and other issues in their towers, and as Mr Batchelor said, in one such instance the concrete was literally falling off the wall. We cannot ignore these issues, and we must act now.

The problem when it comes to it is that every single viable solution to this issue involves the relocation of residents. We have seen and we have had much discussion around various alternative proposals, such as the OFFICE proposal, which claims that relocations under its refurbishment program can be completely avoided. They claim in fact that the government can save hundreds of millions of dollars in relocation costs over the entirety of the program, and they also claim that there will be no health and wellbeing impacts through relocation under their plan. But what they do not discuss is that their proposal means that residents have to continue living in these towers whilst they are under reconstruction. The sorts of issues that would require refurbishment are not a quick lick of paint or a few new door hinges and things like that here and there; they are major structural works that need to be done. Advocates of this report are effectively saying that it is appropriate for residents, for their health and wellbeing, to be living in these ongoing major construction sites for potentially years on end. The alternative, as discussed in the OFFICE report, is that an entire tower could be decanted and refurbished. Now, my understanding of 'decanted' is that it would plainly mean relocations – the same issue that is apparently the reason why we cannot be rebuilding these towers properly.

Rebuilding these towers properly, though, is a better solution because it provides homes that are of that highest possible standard of accessibility, of amenity, of temperature and of comfort. All these issues that are too commonplace in the existing towers are things that most Victorian residents would not countenance living with for any sensible stretch of time. All these are things that public housing and social housing tenants deserve and that will be delivered by the new towers, and they will be delivered with a major increase in housing capacity, including a minimum 10 per cent uplift in social housing on these sites. In the first projects, which we are already seeing underway, that percentage is well and truly exceeded.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:18): I stand to also speak on this motion, having been part of the public hearings on housing. I have to say in my area what concerns me is that I see so many people without somewhere to live. I see women with their families in cars having fled domestic violence, I see young people having to leave their homes for a number of reasons and I see people sleeping out in cardboard boxes. We do not have to go very far, if we are very honest and open our eyes out here in the city on a sitting week, because just up the road there are plenty of people sleeping in between shops and outside the fronts of shops on their sleeping bags or whatever has been provided to them – on a mat, if they are lucky, or on a bit of cardboard – to protect them from the cold, between the concrete and themselves. When I hear about any issues to do with public housing, I feel quite emotional, because I know how much people are suffering. It bothers me. If there is nothing

to hide, then why would the government be suppressing documents? If there is nothing to hide about the finances, then there should be open and transparent governance, and we do not have that with this government. When we are requesting documents that can actually help us to make informed decisions and provide informed reports, we need to have the evidence to provide the evidence-based information. We need to have that information freely accessible to the public in the reports and not suppressed from them.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Construction industry**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:20): On behalf of Mr Davis, I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes the negative impact of corruption on Victorian employees and businesses both large and small, and the impacts of corruption in the construction sector, including the increased costs of state government major projects; and
- (2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within four weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, copies of briefs relating to corruption in the construction sector, including the Big Build, and the cost of corruption in construction, provided by government departments to the Premier since 2018, to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure since 2018, to the Minister for Industrial Relations since 2018, and to the Treasurer since 2018.

I am pleased to rise and speak on Mr Davis's behalf on this short-form documents motion 1090 on corruption in the Victorian building industry. Corruption has a very corrosive effect on business, on trade. It has a very corrosive effect on people's individual lives and their families, and it also has clearly a financial impact on the state as well. Corruption is not just a terrible social contagion, it is a terrible business contagion and a terrible industry contagion. Any tolerance of it simply invites more of it. It is certainly something that needs a very, very firm hand on it from the outside, because corruption comes in all forms. There is overt corruption. There is loads of what we would call grey corruption. Grey corruption is where, at the margins, people may compromise or make accommodations thinking it is not necessarily quite wrong and not quite right. You soon find yourself on a very slippery slope to accepting things that should not be accepted.

In the Victorian context we have many cost overruns in our Big Build. We have great difficulty keeping to budget within our projects, and we know that we have issues with corruption on our industrial sites. This creates a really poor use of capital, and the state has limited capital to spend on these things. We are deeply in debt as a state. So making sure that we do not have corruption on our industrial sites is an important thing, but actually going beyond that and quantifying it and clarifying the nature of that corruption is equally important.

Under standing order 10.01, we ask the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within four weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, copies of briefs relating to the corruption in the construction sector, including the Big Build, and the cost of corruption in construction provided by government departments to the Premier since 2018, to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure since 2018, to the Minister for Industrial Relations since 2018 and to the Treasurer since 2018. There have been a large number of works in those periods. We have seen delays. We have seen cost overruns. We have seen unsavoury activities on many of these sites. It is important to understand what we know, when we know it, what we are going to do about it, how the problem was analysed and what considerations were brought forward in addressing it. It is a narrow motion. It should not be too onerous for the government to bring these forward. It is a matter of significant public interest and concern. I think the public, who are, after all, funding a lot of this through their taxes, are entitled to know. Do we have the governance and the processes across our construction sector and industrial sectors that are fit for purpose, fit for the future and that limit the mistakes of the past and set us up so that people, including vendors and suppliers and those in the supply chain, can tender in confidence

and work in safety without any overt pressures or inappropriate pressures on them as well? I will commend this motion to the house, and I will leave it there.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:25): I rise to make a contribution on this motion standing in Mr Davis's name, which again is a motion calling on the government to release documents. Of course it is our standard practice to not oppose documents motions, but it is curious the way the motion is framed. It talks about the negative impact of corruption on Victorian employees and businesses, and it implies that corruption is absolutely rife. All I would say is: if the Liberal opposition members have any information in regard to corruption, they should make complaints to the appropriate bodies. It is quite one thing to talk about corruption and continue to, I guess, make it up and continue to fan the flames of fear and distrust for people and yet provide absolutely no shred of evidence that there is anything going on, because the appropriate way to deal with that is for those opposite to make complaints to the appropriate bodies and actually let them investigate them.

Again, the narrative of those opposite is that there are cost blowouts. I mean, Metro Tunnel is being delivered a year ahead of schedule and on budget, and they hate that. You have only got to look at what the Auditor-General said about that. But they cannot handle that. I am telling you that this government has the confidence of the Victorian people, because we know we continue to get re-elected, and that is what those opposite cannot handle.

The other thing is that the second part of this motion calls for the Leader of the Government to table, within four weeks of the house agreeing to this motion, copies of briefs relating to corruption in the construction sector. Again it presupposes that there must be briefs on these matters given to the leaders. Integrity agencies, if they are going to investigate corruption, I am pretty sure, Mr Davis, would not be telling the government anything about it. They would be investigating it. So it is a ridiculous motion. If you knew anything about the way that corruption agencies investigate things – they do so with secrecy for very good reasons, because they actually want to make sure that they are getting good evidence and it is not tainted. Again, this idea that there would be some kinds of documents floating around – mate, knock yourself out. Honestly, seriously. Because again, if there is any evidence of corruption that the Liberal opposition have, they should give it to the appropriate authorities so they can investigate it. Again, I am yet to see anything, any shred –

**David Davis:** I have.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Then you should give it to IBAC and the Ombudsman – good.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** And what has happened, Mr Davis? We are still waiting to hear what is happening, because again, all those opposite want to do is to continue to talk down and create fictional complaints. The constant Olympic-level whingeing and complaining about anything that this government does – it is a good thing that no-one is listening and you are just talking to yourselves, because again, all you have got to look at is the fact that this government continues to get re-elected and we continue to invest public money in much needed infrastructure projects like Metro Tunnel, like North East Link, like West Gate Tunnel and like the Suburban Rail Loop, because we know these are the projects that Victorians voted for and want this government to get on with. I think those opposite must have some KPIs about how many bot farms they have got to support. Every time we put something up about Metro Tunnel, the absolute torrent of abuse that comes from Facebook bot farms generated by those opposite is so fake and obvious. The fake outrage is just beyond the pale.

It is our government's position that we never oppose documents motions. We always support them. We will not be opposing this motion. Again, it is just simply a fishing expedition by Mr Davis, continually fishing for things to look at – because again, what is their policy? What is their alternative? No policies, no alternatives. They do not build anything, because they are incompetent, and the Victorian people know it. That is why they keep voting for this government.



**The PRESIDENT:** Before I call Mr Davis, I just remind the chamber that there is a list of unparliamentary words that have been precedents of previous Presidents, and calling someone a goose is on that list.

**David Davis** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think it was actually from you calling someone a goose years ago. So I just remind you that it has been determined: calling someone a goose is unparliamentary.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:30): I am pleased to rise on this matter of the documents motion in my name, and I note Mr Welch has made a very helpful contribution. This notes the impact of corruption in Victoria. Transparency International says that between 3 and 8 per cent of government procurement internationally is actually corrupt purchases; that is the number that you are talking about. That is what they say. It might be that we are a bit less than that; it might be that we are a bit more. What we also know is that in this state there are massive, massive cost blowouts on our major projects – huge blowouts – and they are inextricably linked with the behaviour of a certain union and other unions as well, and it is very clear that the costs are loaded onto families and taxpayers across the state.

The Metro Tunnel was spoken about before – a good project in concept at \$9 billion but less satisfactory at somewhere between \$14 billion and \$15 billion. That is actually a huge cost blowout. Now, why has that cost blowout happened? That is a fair question. It is a massive cost blowout – huge. It appears the government speaker just recently did not understand that that is a concern to the community. Yes, we are concerned about massive multi-billion-dollar cost blowouts on major projects. The list now shows more than \$50 billion in cost blowouts under this government on major projects. That is not the original price of the project, that is the difference between the final price and the original costings. That is a huge amount of money. It is a major part of the state's debt, and that is actually a big issue for Victorians now and into the future.

We are interested in preventing corruption. We are interested to see how the government has been briefed, what the government is doing and what steps the government has taken. If, as Ms Terpstra said, the government has referred these matters to authorities – to IBAC and others – we would welcome that. But if the government has sat on its hands and not acted swiftly and properly, that would concern us. Ms Terpstra seemed to think that there were not briefs on this. Well, I can inform her I have two of them in my possession, actually, which were sent to the former Minister for Transport Infrastructure, now the Premier, and they relate to CFMEU corruption. The government has provided part of the briefs but not the full amount of the briefs. But I am certain that across government it is not just the Minister for Transport Infrastructure who would have requested briefs or been provided briefs on corruption in this government. I would be staggered if the Treasurer has not had such briefs. I would be staggered if the former Treasurer did not have such briefs. I would be staggered if the Premier and others have not looked at these matters. It would be surprising and problematic if they had not. So we would expect briefs on corruption and what the government is doing in that area. We would expect to understand what steps the government has taken.

This motion is a very straightforward motion. It points to briefs that are held by government. They are easy to locate. They should not be difficult to bring forward to the chamber. The chamber will be interested to see them. It is clearly in the public interest for this chamber's scrutiny role to apply here – for the government to be scrutinised by this chamber; for us to, as a chamber, exercise that role in a robust way through documents motions of this type. If the government has a problem bringing forward those documents, we will no doubt hear about that, but the government will need to identify the briefs that were provided to those various ministers, and then the government will have to look at those. If there are claims of executive privilege or other, we would expect the government to proceed to the arbiter process that is laid out in chapter 10 of the standing orders for the chamber. Again, it is a very straightforward motion. It is in the public interest. Everything that is done to reduce corruption is helpful for taxpayers.

Also in response to Ms Terpstra, who wants to know what some of us have done when we have heard about problems about corruption, in a number of cases a number of us have referred it to relevant agencies, and that is what we should do. I would expect the government would do the same – that government members and government ministers would do likewise. I do not find that to be a difficult concept, but what I do find a difficult concept is Ms Terpstra not understanding the significance of corruption to our state and the cost overruns on many of our projects.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:35): I am very pleased to rise to speak on the short-form documents motion seeking information with respect to the negative impact of corruption on Victorian employees and businesses, both large and small. The government, as Ms Terpstra has said, does not oppose documents motions. They will be processed in the normal way and considered in accordance with the conventions that apply to such matters. It is also important to say that the government does not tolerate corruption in any form. We do not tolerate criminal or intimidatory behaviour within any workplace or organisation, and when allegations of such matters have been made, there have been referrals to appropriate authorities. Not only has the government taken action to refer matters to appropriate authorities, we have also initiated our own investigatory processes to look at how our programs, processes and procedures can be improved to strengthen against corruption risk. And on a number of occasions in recent times we have debated legislation in this chamber – legislation that has passed – to strengthen our protections against corruption and corrupt conduct.

We do know that organisations across the board face risks associated with corrupt individuals and corrupt practices, and we do know that all organisations who receive evidence that significant individuals within them have participated in conduct that is corrupt, that is criminal, should feel the full force of the law. That is the attitude that we are taking to the construction sector. It is also the attitude that obviously the Liberal Party itself has had to grapple with, when its former state director was convicted of fraud and sentenced to time in jail. Corrupt –

**David Davis** interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea)**: Order! Mr Davis.

**Ryan BATCHELOR**: Say it, Mr Davis. Say it.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea)**: Mr Batchelor, through the Chair.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Ryan BATCHELOR**: Mr Davis seems to think that he can make political arguments that seek to wound the Labor Party or wound me about conduct that he alleges to have occurred 40 years ago. All I am doing is explaining that – whilst he was a minister of the Crown – the state director of the Liberal Party was embezzling funds provided to the Liberal Party for their purposes, and he ended up in jail. So whilst Mr Davis was a minister of the Crown, whilst there was a Liberal government in this state, the state director of the Liberal Party was embezzling funds. He was convicted of fraud and was sentenced to imprisonment. That is the record that the Liberal Party has with respect to corruption in this state. And when allegations of corruption have been made against activities that have occurred on building sites here in Victoria, they have been taken seriously. They have been referred to appropriate authorities, and action has been taken. Mr Davis, the Liberal Party want to somehow equate allegations of corrupt activity to other matters in the construction sector. We do not have time, given the short amount of time that the sessional orders provide for these debates. As a result of the sessional orders that were put in place at the behest of Mr Davis, we simply do not have time to go into the detail of these matters here on the substantive, because the sessional orders prevent us from doing so. But we have had detailed debates about the government's response to allegations of corruption in the construction sector here before, and I am sure the Liberal Party will raise them again. This government remains resolute against corruption in all its forms.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:40): I have got about 13 seconds to speak on this, but I would like to acknowledge the contributions of my colleagues Mr Welch and Mr Davis and absolutely agree with them.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Motions*

#### **Animal shelters**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (10:41): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes:
  - (a) the community has concerns over the circumstances in which a healthy 12-week-old puppy along with his litter mate and their mother were euthanised;
  - (b) a remaining sibling named Milly remains alive but her whereabouts unknown;
  - (c) the Lost Dogs' Home's claims for killing these animals, including 'genetics', 'anti-social behaviour' and a 'high risk of developing aggression', are contested by dog behaviour specialists;
  - (d) this incident is not isolated and concerns around transparency have been raised in the past;
  - (e) since shelters have been required to report the fate of animals, the Lost Dogs' Home have:
    - (i) killed 662 cats and 355 dogs for behavioural reasons in 2023;
    - (ii) killed 971 cats and 611 dogs for behavioural reasons in 2024;
  - (f) Victorians have a right to know that all organisations, especially those who receive considerable government grant funding and public donations, use scientifically accurate methods for testing the rehomingability of animals;
- (2) calls on the government to commit to investigating:
  - (a) appointing an independent oversight mechanism to approve euthanasia for behavioural reasons by open-intake shelters;
  - (b) mandating pounds and shelters to offer all animals set to be euthanised for behavioural reasons to authorised pet rehoming organisations except in instances where an animal has been legally declared dangerous;
  - (c) requiring open-intake shelters to change to quarterly reporting on animal fate data; and
  - (d) ensuring animal data is more transparent and outlines what steps were taken when an animal is euthanised for behavioural reasons.

I dedicate my speech today to Murphy, who was just a baby when he was cruelly killed. Murphy was three months old and had only just been given his first taste of life. Like most Staffordshire pups, he was playful, he was cheeky and he loved to be around people, but on 25 September Murphy was failed by the very people that were supposed to protect him. I want it to be on the public record that the Lost Dogs' Home, an organisation that claims to care about and to shelter animals, killed Murphy. This is an organisation that states its vision is to give animals 'the best chance of a happy and healthy life'. On this occasion, they spectacularly failed at everything they purport to be about. But we know this is an organisation that relies on the cover of darkness to carry out its murderous and monstrous ways.

The Lost Dogs' Home has a long and troubled history when it comes to transparency and when it comes to accountability. For decades animal advocates and former staff have spoken out about unnecessarily high euthanasia rates, poor rehoming practices and a deeply entrenched culture of secrecy. In 2015 the Victorian government launched a formal investigation into the Lost Dogs' Home, following concerns made by the wider community. The investigation examined high euthanasia rates, the housing and accommodation of animals, the identification of animals' owners and the assessment of animals for rehoming. The findings revealed that the shelter could not adequately account for why so many cats and dogs were euthanised under its care, prompting urgent calls for improved transparency and reporting practices. These are not new issues; they are part of a systemic problem

that has been allowed to continue under successive leaderships and governments, with little to no reform, and it is the animals who suffer as a result.

Murphy's death is not an isolated tragedy; it is the latest in a long line of failures by an organisation that has consistently refused to evolve or to take responsibility. Murphy is just one of the thousands of animals that the Lost Dogs' Home deemed unworthy of being given a second chance at life and unworthy of being allowed to thrive in a loving environment. Murphy was brought to the Lost Dogs' Home with his mother, brother and sister Milly. The four dogs were found as strays in the Casey local government area. Now they are all dead, with the exception of Milly, who remains alive, but her whereabouts is unknown and her future is also uncertain.

After arriving at the Lost Dogs' Home, Murphy was placed into the loving hands of his foster carers, Elizabeth and Sean, who are in the gallery with us today. Between 12 September and 23 September Murphy experienced for the first time what it felt to be loved and to be cared for. He learned to trust people. On 22 September Elizabeth and Sean were asked to return Murphy to the Lost Dogs' Home for a so-called behavioural review before his scheduled desexing on 25 September. The Lost Dogs' Home said this was a precaution as part of protocol for his litter. Elizabeth and Sean had nothing to worry about, they had no concerns about Murphy's behaviour and there was never any mention of euthanasia. But on that day that he was meant to be desexed, Elizabeth and Sean received a call that their boy was instead going to be put down. He, according to the Lost Dogs' Home, had failed one of their outdated behavioural tests. Elizabeth and Sean, desperate, contacted me, pleading for help. My office and I, on the eve of a public holiday, got immediately in touch with the Lost Dogs' Home and did whatever we could to try and buy Murphy just some time. But by the time we got involved and had made inquiries, Murphy was already dead. For whatever reason, the Lost Dogs' Home appeared to be so desperate to kill him that night, within hours of notifying Elizabeth and Sean. They killed him despite Elizabeth and Sean pleading for his life. They killed him despite their attempts to adopt him, and they killed him despite rehoming organisations wanting to take him in. Murphy died despite a long list of people begging for him to survive. Not only were Elizabeth and Sean's voices ignored, they were escorted out of the Lost Dogs' Home building by security.

The Lost Dogs' Home's response to this scandal has been nothing short of disgraceful. They can barely get their story straight. First, they tried to claim that Murphy was killed because his mother exhibited signs of aggression, citing genetics. If that is the case, then why is his sister Milly still alive right now? When it comes to Milly, the Lost Dogs' Home said they committed to, in their words, 'take the time required to understand her behaviour'. In their most recent statement, they said 'animal behaviour is dynamic and context dependent'. 'These are decisions we don't rush,' they said, and that is fundamentally at odds with their handling of Murphy, his brother and their mother. Once they realised that the excuse of genetics did not stack up, the shelter pivoted and started claiming that Murphy exhibited so-called antisocial behaviour and a high risk of developing aggression. But the Lost Dogs' Home have deliberately and repeatedly failed to explain any examples at all of Murphy's behaviour in this so-called test, other than the fact that he was timid – a baby, in a scary shelter environment.

In fact when my office sent a list of questions about Murphy and his testing regime to the shelter, at their own request when they failed to answer our questions in a meeting, their acting CEO responded to say, 'We won't be responding further to your queries in this regard.' Let me be clear: Murphy was not dangerous; he was failed by a system that allows animals to be killed behind closed doors, with no independent oversight, no appeal process and no accountability. Animals are not dying in shelters like the Lost Dogs' Home because there is nowhere for them to go. They are dying because of these outdated and frankly barbaric behavioural tests, which fail to take into consideration anywhere near a reflection of a loving home.

I have spoken at length about why we need to move away from these so-called tests. The Lost Dogs' Home have refused to tell anyone exactly what Murphy was put through in this test. In the past I have been told by former staff that some of them involved disgusting tactics to try and scare dogs into a reaction. It is beyond concerning that these assessments are unregulated, unverified and impossible to

challenge. Foster carers – the very people who know these animals best – are completely shut out of the decision-making process, and shelters like the Lost Dogs' Home are able to continue to rely on the status quo and on silencing people to kill healthy dogs and cats for the sake of convenience, under the cover of darkness and secrecy. It is time that they were stripped of their right to make life and death decisions in secret. That is why today I am calling on the government to appoint an independent oversight mechanism, such as a person within the department of Animal Welfare Victoria to approve all behaviour-related euthanasia decisions that are carried out at open-intake shelters just like the Lost Dogs' Home.

In 2023 the Lost Dogs' Home put down 3542 cats across their shelters at Cranbourne and North Melbourne. Of those, 662 were because of behavioural issues. That same year 624 dogs were killed, including 355 for behavioural reasons. That means that more than half of the dogs killed at the Lost Dogs' Home were killed because of so-called issues relating to their behaviour. It did not get better in 2024 – in fact it got worse. 4190 cats were killed. Behaviour was the reason for 971 of those cats, including kittens. When it comes to dogs, the Lost Dogs' Home killed 1065 in 2024, 611 for behavioural reasons. That is a staggering and unjustifiable number. Essentially 57 per cent of dogs killed at the Lost Dogs' Home were killed because they were deemed to have behaviour issues. In all of those cases shelter staff made that decision in secret with no pushback at all. This is why experts and advocates have been calling for an independent role away from the organisations themselves to have the final say on the decision to euthanise for so-called behavioural issues. Had an independent officer had the final say when Murphy was being sentenced to his death, I would be willing to bet that he would still be here today.

It is currently not a requirement to document or to even declare any information about these decisions, such as what sort of testing was carried out, what other options were explored and whether an animal was assessed in a foster home or only in a scary pound environment. There is no accountability. There is no transparency. In fact it is not even a requirement to have an expert behavioralist make these decisions. My motion seeks to change that today. By taking the final say out of the hands of internal shelter management, with decades of poor management practices, often still using practices not supported by science or by evidence, I know we will see more animals given the chance that they deserve. By having to justify to an external and independent officer why an animal should be killed for their behaviour we will force transparency. We will see more pounds and shelters reconsidering their decisions before they make them. We will see more animals receiving treatment for conditions that should never be a death sentence, such as anxiety or timidity. We will see more animals surrendered to rescue groups who have the time and the ability to properly rehabilitate them, if they need it at all, in a more suitable setting.

The level of killing at the Lost Dogs' Home is unprecedented, but it does not have to be this way, because hardworking pet-rehoming organisations who believe every animal is worthy of living are willing to take in some of the animals on the kill lists of these pounds. In fact for years they have been begging for that right. As we were desperately trying to save the life of Murphy after his foster carers reached out, I put in writing to the Lost Dogs' Home that night that award-winning animal rescue Forever Friends was willing to take Murphy and any of his remaining family members to put them through their behavioural rehabilitation program. This is not a rare scenario. There are countless specialised pet-rehoming organisations across Victoria that are willing and able to take on animals put in the too-hard basket by organisations like the Lost Dogs' Home and other pounds and shelters. That is why this motion also calls on the government to make it mandatory for all open-intake shelters to offer every animal set to be killed for behavioural reasons to a pool of authorised pet-rehoming organisations, except in the case where an animal has been legally declared dangerous. This is something that the Lost Dogs' Home will tell you that they already do. But the culture is one of silence, and most of these groups have been shut off after questioning the Lost Dogs' Home's decision-making capacity. By making this change, there is no obligation on these groups to take them in, but it does make it a possibility. It opens up another chance that previously never would have been had at all. Rescue groups are already resource stretched, but they are up for the challenge. This is a request that

has come directly from them, and we should be listening, not telling them what they are not capable of. Because had it already been in place, I can guarantee that Murphy would still be alive today. It is in these smaller rescue groups where animals will truly thrive, because they will be given the time, the care and the environment to show their true temperament.

I know that even with these changes in place, there will still, sadly, be a need for some animals to be euthanised. But it is vital when that does happen – and it should only happen as an absolute last resort in extreme cases – that pounds provide as much information as possible to justify this decision. We want to ensure that animal fate data is not only more transparent but also outlines what steps were taken to come to that decision in the first place. Currently the code of practice requires Victorian shelters and pounds to collect and report their animal fate data annually. But too often this data is deliberately clunky and hard to interpret. We are calling on the government to tighten these deadlines so that data is reported on a quarterly basis, so we receive it more often and so that every three months the public, advocates and policymakers are able to get a clearer understanding of exactly what is happening inside these places and when it is happening. It will enable problems within the sector to be identified and addressed more promptly and drive shelters to maintain higher standards through increased visibility and ongoing scrutiny. Without timely and transparent data, more lives just like Murphy's will be at stake. Animals will continue to be needlessly killed before the public are even aware that there is a problem.

It might be too late for Murphy or the countless other dogs and cats across Victoria that shelters have deemed easier to kill than to be given a chance at life. But it is not too late for every other dog and cat that will, through no choice of their own, end up in these places in the future. While we believe these changes will ultimately make shelters and pounds a safer place for animals, it is also up to the Lost Dogs' Home to do some much-needed soul-searching. It is time we got a commitment from them that they are willing to change. They have lost their social licence, and it is up to them to earn it again. They are meant to be a life-saving shelter, but instead they have become a killing factory. Shame on the Lost Dogs' Home for killing Murphy. Murphy was not a number. He was not a mistake. He was a life, and his life mattered.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:59): Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today on the motion put forward by Ms Purcell regarding the tragic incident of the euthanasia of 12-week-old puppy Murphy along with his littermate and mother at the Lost Dogs' Home in September of this year. This is a particularly hard one. Georgie, you have brought something to us that I am going to do my best to get through in one piece, but no guarantees, can I just let you know. I will pass on my deepest condolences to Murphy's carers, who I understand are with us in the gallery today, and express my sorrow and, frankly, my disgust at what has transpired. Thank you for being here but also thank you for all your efforts to raise this story for us so that we can speak here in the Parliament on the tragic loss of Murphy.

I want to also be clear that for this government animal welfare is a priority. The community of Victoria expects that we do the right thing by animals in our industries, in our workplaces, in our communities and in our homes. The events of last month were shocking and disturbing, unsettling not only those from within the animal-loving community but people right across the state. The circumstances surrounding the euthanasia of these innocent animals have left many of us questioning the processes and the standards by which these animal facilities operate and how we are protecting the animals that we call humans' best friends. These questions deserve our attention, deserve to be addressed and deserve an effective resolution. These concerns are not only felt throughout the community but also throughout the halls of this place right here. I would like to reinforce again that animal welfare is a priority of the Victorian government, and it is at the very heart of the motion brought to us by Ms Purcell. As a society all of us have an obligation to care for and provide for these animals, as they depend on us with their lives and of course with their love.

The Victorian government has upheld and continues to uphold the obligations very seriously. Much has already been done and continues to change. I am thinking particularly of the Prevention of Cruelty

to Animals Act 1986. Along with the codes of practice and other associated regulations it sets out the legal framework that ensures the safe, ethical and humane treatment of animals across the state. These laws are robust and comprehensive. They advocate and protect while making sure that institutions and organisations are held accountable for their actions and their processes. You see, Victoria proudly holds a zero-tolerance policy for animal abuse and misconduct, with our laws being taken seriously and investigations being conducted according to the appropriate procedures and legislation. It is critical that the public has confidence in the systems that govern the treatment of animals in our care, especially within the shelter and pound system. We all share the expectation that shelters and pounds operate transparently and responsibly, particularly when it comes to making difficult decisions such as euthanasia, which is, I accept, at times necessary to protect public safety or the welfare of the animal.

I want to talk about the case at hand before us – the case of Murphy, the 12-week-old puppy who was euthanised at the Lost Dogs' Home. This incident has understandably raised questions within the community, particularly around the reasons given for the euthanasia, such as genetics, antisocial behaviour and the potential for the puppy to develop aggression. These claims have been contested by some animal behavioural specialists, and the community is absolutely right to seek greater clarity. This is the bit where I am supposed to talk about how I love dogs and my own dogs. The truth is I have never owned a dog. It was one of those life things that never quite happened for me. But I am surrounded by folks that love their dogs, and maybe I am just best placed to be an aunty for so very many, including my favourite of all, Lincoln.

I read about this case, and I heard the news, and it was quite distressing. We all know that shelters and pounds hold a responsibility to care for, assess and rehome any animal that comes through the doors of any institution. The Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 sets the standard for the assessment, behavioural rehabilitation and rehoming of these animals. What happened at the Lost Dogs' Home should never have happened, and that is why organisations like these need to have and seek greater clarity on their processes for animal justice and rehabilitation. The code not only provides important guidance on the treatment of animals, it also has remarks around processes regarding new approaches and improvements.

There is so much that can be examined on this. That is why I am glad that this comprehensive motion was brought before us by Ms Purcell, because there is better transparency required with respect to topics of behavioural rehabilitation, rehoming and euthanasia. The community absolutely has the right to know what processes and actions are being taken in consideration of animals in these areas. I expect, and I believe the Victorian government also recognises, that transparency is the key to maintaining trust, public trust, in the shelter and pound system. We understand that concerns over transparency have been raised in the past, and I just want to assure those of us here in the house and listening elsewhere that the government is committed to addressing these concerns. We must ensure that all animals are given a fair assessment and that decisions to euthanise are made in line with best available practices. This is a difficult but necessary step, and it will help to ensure that the community has confidence that such decisions are made with due diligence and with due care.

I just would like to say that the Labor government fully supports the call to ensure that animals who are at risk of being euthanised for behavioural reasons are given every chance for a second life. I agree that unless an animal has been legally declared dangerous, they should be offered to an authorised pet-rehoming organisation. It is heartbreaking to think that a dog's behavioural issues might mean the end of their life when, with the right care and the right training, they could turn their life around. Many of these animals, even the ones facing significant challenges, can become loving pets with the right rehabilitation. By broadening the options available to them, we increase the chances of finding the loving homes that they so truthfully deserve.

We also support the proposal for open-intake shelters to provide quarterly reports on animal fate data. Regular updates on the outcomes of animals will give the community confidence that animals are being treated fairly, assessed properly and are being given every opportunity to find a new home where

possible. This is about accountability and making sure we are doing everything we can to improve the system.

I want to say that we are, of course, committed to ensuring that these groups that work tirelessly to provide care for vulnerable animals are supported. We know that the rising number of animals being relinquished or abandoned is putting a strain on their resources. That is why there was money made available in the 2024–25 state budget to continue delivering essential animal welfare regulatory services and support for critical functions like the pet exchange register and the commercial dog breeder scheme, ensuring that we continue to improve animal welfare standards. There is more there around funding and investment by the Labor government, including an allocation of \$5 million over the next four years to support animal rehoming services through the Animal Welfare Fund. This funding aims to help ease the burden on rehoming organisations and assist in finding loving homes for the increasing number of animals in need. We know the groups are stretched thin. I have heard from you directly, and I know, also through the incredible advocacy of Ms Purcell, how tough it is for these groups out there. I am hoping that this support will help manage the rising demand for their services and ensure that more animals get the care and the attention that they need.

I could talk about the efforts of this government with respect to animal welfare, but I want to bring it back in the last moment to talk to the community and recognise the very valid concerns that so many have raised with respect to the tragic euthanasia of Murphy and his littermates. We are committed to looking into ways we can improve the processes surrounding the rehoming and euthanasia of animals. I commend this motion to the chamber, and I thank again Ms Purcell for her incredible advocacy as per usual.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (11:09): I would like to thank as well Ms Purcell for bringing this motion forward. It was very distressing to see reports about Murphy, and obviously it is something that deeply affected a lot of people. I say this as someone who cares deeply about animals and acknowledging my own dachshund Gavroche, who I believe Ms Purcell has met, is a rescue. There are thousands of families – tens of thousands of families – across the state that are very willing and able to adopt pets. I would like to acknowledge RSPCA in Burwood, where I got Gavroche from, but I would also like to acknowledge Second Chance Animal Rescue in Craigieburn and the team there, who do an outstanding job. It is always a cause for distress when an animal is put down. The story that prompted this motion is heartbreaking, and it is natural that people would want accountability and compassion in how we treat our animals. While this motion is well intended, it risks undermining the very organisations that do the most to protect and care for vulnerable animals, such as the Lost Dogs' Home.

For over a century the Lost Dogs' Home has been a refuge and a last resort for unwanted, injured and abandoned animals. They do difficult work that others cannot or will not. They take in every animal that comes through their doors; that is what an open intake means. With that responsibility comes difficult and heartbreaking decisions. Those who work on the front line of animal welfare know that not every dog or cat can be safely rehomed. Some have severe behavioural or medical issues, and some present a genuine risk to people or to other animals. The professionals at the Lost Dogs' Home make those calls after careful assessment. They deserve our support and respect and probably not more red tape. This motion would introduce an independent approval mechanism for euthanasia decisions, introduce new mandatory referral processes and increase reporting requirements, all of which sounds good on paper but in practice may bury shelters in paperwork and delay quite urgent decisions. The result would not be more compassion but would lead to more suffering. Animals in distress would wait longer for help. Staff would spend more time filling out forms and less time caring for animals. Another consideration is the motion does not adequately distinguish between animals legally declared dangerous and those assessed as high risk through professional behavioural evaluation. Transferring animals with poor prognosis may prolong suffering rather than prevent it.

We should also be honest about what drives these issues. It is not the people at the Lost Dogs' Home, it is the chronic underfunding of animal welfare services by the state Labor government. This



government has been happy to shift responsibility onto charities and volunteers while providing nowhere near the level of support that they need. They have failed to invest in education, early intervention and desexing programs that actually reduce the number of animals entering shelters in the first place. This motion lacks the clarity on how additional burdens will be funded. Without additional funding or infrastructure, these requirements may be unfeasible and counterproductive. If we really care about transparency and accountability, then let us start with government, not by imposing another layer of bureaucracy on those doing their best with limited resources. Let us support shelters with proper funding, training and facilities. Let us work with them to expand behaviour rehabilitation programs and foster community networks so that we can limit the amount of very difficult decisions that these supports have to make.

Let us remember that compassion for animals also means compassion for the people who dedicate their lives to saving them. We need ongoing efforts to improve transparency and accountability in animal welfare. I want to note again in my electorate – I have been delighted to visit a couple of times – Second Chance Animal Rescue in Craigieburn. So many people across the north have a story about how they got their dog there or their family member or friend did. They have been quite vocal about the financial predicament that they are in and in calling on the government for additional supports. Yes, the government jumped in and gave \$50,000, but as pretty much everyone has acknowledged, that is nowhere near enough to deal with the issues that they are facing. Often it is Second Chance Animal Rescue that are the first to take in animals that are victims of domestic and family violence, where a couple goes their separate ways and the dog, cat or other animal needs looking after, and that situation is only getting worse in the northern suburbs, which is leading to a massive, stretched demand. I have fears about increasing the regulatory burden. I want to acknowledge Marisa and the team and the work that they do, because their facility is outstanding. They do very important work in the northern suburbs of Melbourne.

Both of my brothers have got dogs from Second Chance Animal Rescue in Craigieburn. It was very sad: last week my brother's staffy Buddy unfortunately passed away after 11 long years of life. He got his staffy from Second Chance Animal Rescue in Craigieburn, and Buddy was given 11 great years of life thanks to the efforts of Second Chance Animal Rescue and the work they do. There are so many similar stories throughout the northern suburbs and beyond stemming from Second Chance Animal Rescue and similar organisations as well.

For Ms Purcell's part, I think we can all agree that what happened to Murphy was horrific. I think the intent we can all agree on, but the reality of the suggestions in the motion I think will punish those already struggling to help, and it imposes unfunded mandates that may well worsen animal welfare outcomes.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:18): I also rise to speak on motion 1091 in Ms Purcell's name. Every year around December – sometimes January if we are a bit late in coordinating with each other – my parents, my partner and I all plan a day out together. Instead of giving Christmas presents to each other, for the last three or four years we have all put in money to buy blankets, other materials and things, and we have taken them to the Lost Dogs' Home in North Melbourne. It has become a bit of a recent family tradition, a small way of giving back.

When people support services that look after animals, people expect the animals will be looked after. It is not for me to draw conclusions in today's debate, but certainly the story that we have heard in the past few weeks regarding Murphy has been – I think 'distressing' would be too polite a word – extremely concerning. For a dog to be given a home, to have supports offered for rehoming or placement in another shelter, and then still to have its life ended is something that troubles me greatly. That is why the government will be supporting this motion today; we will not be opposing its passage.

I would like to acknowledge today the presence of Elizabeth and Sean in the room with us. I cannot begin to imagine the sort of month that you have had. It is an unthinkable thing to lose a pet in any circumstance, but especially in one where you have done everything in your power – and certainly

what I know from what Georgie and her team have said to me is that you have done everything in your power – to keep them alive. In any little comfort that you may have, I hope that you have that comfort – that you did your absolute best.

There are far too many animals – cats and dogs in particular – who do find themselves in the situation of needing care homes or support or fostering, not through a fault of their own but through the actions of reckless or unsavoury humans. We need to do more. Ms Watt did go through a number of initiatives, such as the Animal Welfare Victoria funding in last year's budget, which provides funding over three years over a number of areas, and time permitting, I will come to that. There is more work that is being done, but the allegations put forward today certainly warrant being looked into, and they certainly warrant a greater degree of transparency from those who are charged with looking after vulnerable cats and dogs and who rely on significant public goodwill, donations and others to do their work.

In preparing for my remarks today, I did discover, as Ms Purcell noted, that Murphy and his siblings were located and picked up in the City of Casey, which is part of my region. I have learned that the Lost Dogs' Home has a relationship with the City of Casey, as it does indeed with four other councils that I look after in the south-east: those being Cardinia, Kingston, Frankston and Greater Dandenong. Supporting the transparency outlined in this motion is something that is important for the state government to do, but I think it is also important that councils, whether they have a relationship with the Lost Dogs' Home or have different scenarios, are asking these questions. It is not obviously for me, as a local state MP, to be telling my councils what to do, but I would be certainly encouraging them to have these conversations as well and to ask the sorts of questions that Ms Purcell has been raising. Those five councils of course are not the only councils in Victoria who have these relationships – I do not have the full list to hand, but there are, as I understand it, quite a few – but five out of my seven councils engage directly with the Lost Dogs' Home.

It does go to a deeper structural problem, and that is ultimately a sadder aspect of human behaviour, that so many cats and dogs are abandoned or left in these situations by humans. Councils, state governments and charities cannot fix that. But where we have issues like Murphy's coming before the Parliament today, it is appropriate for us to be asking those questions. And it is also appropriate for our colleagues in the City of Casey, in the Shire of Cardinia, in the City of Kingston, in the City of Greater Dandenong and in the City of Frankston to continue to have those conversations with their partners and for all councils who deal with this important issue to have these conversations with whomever it is that provides these services for them.

As part of the funding which came through in the state budget, we have seen money put into various animal welfare initiatives, all under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986. We have also seen, over the course of this government, the banning of puppy farms, with the strictest breeding rules in the country; the establishment of the offence of selling a pet without a valid microchip and source number from the pet exchange register; the removal of the need for greyhounds to be muzzled in public; the provision of Victoria's first *Animal Welfare Action Plan*, which recognises that animals are sentient; the establishment of renters' rights to keep a pet; and the reforming of the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to ensure that the government receives the best advice that it can. This is all important work, and of course there are other measures as well, such as cat desexing programs. Also, we are the first state, presciently, to introduce mandatory reporting of animal fate data for dogs and cats in shelters and pounds, and it is from that action that we see the evidence shown by Ms Purcell in subsection (e) of her motion, showing the number of cats and dogs killed for behavioural reasons in the last two years. They are concerning numbers. I do not have the full context, but the allegations alone certainly warrant our looking into this in much greater detail. That is what this motion seeks to do, which is why I am supporting it.

No Victorian who has put themselves in a position of being able to provide safe and secure care and shelter for an animal deserves to have that animal's fate decided by someone else. I hope, whether it be through any further government action as a result of this or even as a result of the fact that we are discussing this here today, that that sunlight shines a little bit more brightly on this data and on this

issue; that for all the many, many incredible people who work supporting animals across the shelter sector, and for those few who have perhaps lost their way, that the rights and interests of animals are at the heart of the work that they do; and that governments, state and local, do everything that they can do to support them to do that so that we do not have any more cases like Murphy.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (11:26): I thank Ms Purcell for the opportunity to speak on this serious and really sad scenario that has occurred in relation to Murphy. I want to begin by reaffirming the Victorian Labor government's deep and enduring commitment to animal welfare and recognising that animals rely on our humanity and respect for their safety. That is certainly understood. Victoria has long been recognised as a national leader in this space. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986, together with its regulations and more than 25 codes of practice, provides a strong legal foundation for the protection of animals in this state, and under this framework we maintain a zero-tolerance approach to cruelty and mistreatment of animals. Every allegation is taken seriously and investigated in line with the legislation established and the procedures, but laws alone cannot create compassion, dignity and respect. Over successive Labor governments we have paired robust legislation with practical reforms that have changed lives, both human and animal. As part of the 2024 budget, which a number of my colleagues have already mentioned, Labor committed \$13.3 million over three years to continue delivering critical animal welfare regulatory services. At a time when cost-of-living pressures are driving record numbers of surrenders, Labor has allocated \$5 million over four years to the Animal Welfare Fund to bolster the capacity of shelters and rehoming organisations.

Our record of reform in this space is substantial. If I take you back, we did ban the cruel practice of puppy farms and set the strictest breeding rules in the country. I thank my predecessor Jaala Pulford for all of her work on that initiative. We made it an offence to sell a pet without a microchip and source number from the pet exchange register, and we removed the requirement for greyhounds to be muzzled in public. We produced Victoria's first *Animal Welfare Action Plan*, explicitly recognising that animals are sentient beings, a landmark acknowledgement in Australian policy. And we gave renters – as was also mentioned by Mr Galea and my colleague Ms Watt – the right to keep pets, recognising that animal companionship supports wellbeing and social connection. We also reformed the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to ensure expert advice guides government decision-making, and we became the first state to mandate public reporting on animal fate data for dogs and cats in shelters and pounds. Each of these reforms have made Victoria fairer, kinder and more transparent in its treatment of animals.

The government is very aware of the distress caused by the euthanasia of a 12-week-old puppy named Murphy at the Lost Dogs' Home in September this year. All pounds and shelters must comply with the Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds. This code sets minimum standards for accommodation, management and care, including veterinary treatment and, where necessary, euthanasia. These safeguards exist because the community rightly expects that decisions about animal fate are based on evidence, professionalism and compassion. However, we also recognise that when public trust is eroded, it is incumbent on all of us – government, shelters and the animal welfare sector – to rebuild that confidence. Transparency is central to that task, and that is why Victoria introduced mandatory reporting of animal outcomes and why this government is developing a guide for assessing rehoming suitability, a tool that promotes holistic behavioural assessments and supports shelters in making humane and consistent decisions. This approach aligns with the broader evidence. The RSPCA's 2023 report on national shelter data found that improved behavioural assessment and foster care programs can reduce euthanasia rates by up to 20 per cent. By investing in training and behavioural support, we ensure more animals find safe and permanent homes.

Supporting rehoming and community partnerships is really important. Labor recognises that not all animals start life on an equal footing. Some experience neglect or trauma or abandonment. Just like human beings, you can see that in their little faces, in their eyes and in their behaviours. They get nervous, they shake, they get excited, they show love, and these are all indications that a full and thorough behavioural assessment ought to be conducted before decisions are made about ending the

life of a little puppy. That is why the code permits behavioural rehabilitation in foster care and why we continue to thank and support the shelters, rehoming organisations and volunteer foster carers who make that possible.

I think it was a really lovely story that Mr Galea mentioned about Christmas and their donation to the Lost Dogs' Home, and I think that is a beautiful recognition of the volunteers that spend time in animal welfare right across our state, including where I come from in Warnambool and the south-west of Victoria. Across our state, volunteers form the backbone of compassionate animal welfare. For example, according to the RSPCA Victoria annual report, in 2024 more than 60,000 animals were successfully rehomed through registered shelters and rescue groups.

Animal welfare reform must be coupled with public education through programs such as Animal Welfare Victoria's pet plan and targeted cat desexing program, which help owners to make informed, responsible choices. According to the Australian Veterinary Association pet stats 2024, cat desexing before sexual maturity can prevent up to 80 per cent of unwanted litters. This proactive approach lightens the load on shelters and reduces the tragic potential for euthanasia. It also reduces the spread of disease and illness amongst cats who are feral or uncared for. Some of those diseases are occasionally spread to human beings. As my colleagues have said, we are not opposing this motion. Our attitude and care towards animals and towards any being that is vulnerable to our conduct as human beings is a reflection on ourselves as a society and as a community. I thank Ms Purcell again for bringing this matter forward. It has provided the airspace to discuss this issue.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (11:36): More than the odd one of my supporters tells me from time to time that I should always vote against what Animal Justice put up, regardless, and that we have got ideological differences – blah, blah, blah. I say, 'No, we can't do that all the time because sometimes our purposes align' – and here we are. I support Ms Purcell's motion completely because there is nothing wrong with it; there is nothing I disagree with. It is a little disappointing that it has taken a member of the crossbench to bring it up and that the government has not done this to date.

The first real inkling I had of the size of the problem, not necessarily with the Lost Dogs' Home – I will just put it out there – but with the RSPCA, was during the initial inquiry way back in 2016. Whilst they were busily being activists against duck hunting, they were putting down animals at an extraordinary rate. It is clearly not just the RSPCA, and it is probably not just the Lost Dogs' Home. I think the only welfare agencies that have any credibility really are the no-kill shelters, because at least they are giving it a go.

We are here today to discuss the issue. I look at this and I think, 'I've been accused of being cruel because I hunt.' I hunt and I love animals. You can call that a cognitive dissonance. You can call that hypocrisy. It is what it is. I am what I am. But I do not think shooting an animal, hunting an animal and killing it cleanly, is cruel. I think what is cruel is giving an animal the green dream and then killing it deliberately, even though it has got a home. That to me is cruelty. That animal had a life to live, and it was taken from it just because of God knows what.

The motion calls on the government to commit to investigating a number of things. I think the government should basically announce that it is. Government funding is one of those things – it is public money going into public things – and there is an expectation that you use it for what you say you are going to use it for. If you are a rehoming service, you should be rehoming them. If there is a problem, then you go back to the government and whatever. I have seen way too many of the organisations that are strutting around and being pompous just killing animals behind the scenes because it is basically convenient. I am only going to make a very short contribution, but I will say again that it is one of those rare opportunities to say I am completely in lock step with the Animal Justice Party on this issue.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:39): I am very pleased to rise and speak on Ms Purcell's motion with respect to the particular circumstance of one poor animal and what it tells

us about how animals are treated more broadly in rescue services. I commend her for bringing it to the chamber. Listening to the contributions of colleagues, including just then from Mr Bourman, it is very clear that the impact that pets and animals have is to soften even some of the toughest of hearts. I think that the genuineness we have heard in the contributions today reflects that all of us, in our own ways, have had very clear attachments to pets and animals in different forms over the course of our lives. And to think that there are mechanisms that are designed to help those that need it but in fact, in their practice, may not be living up to the standards we expect, is confronting and something that deserves attention and something that deserves a bit of scrutiny. I am glad that we have the opportunity today to have that conversation.

There is a broad regulatory framework in the state of Victoria about how we should treat animals. It is not perfect. It never is. No set of regulatory features can ever fully grapple with any individual set of circumstances, particularly where we, as humans, find ourselves having to make choices about how we act. But certainly the regulatory framework that exists with the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 and its regulations and codes of practice in respect of animal welfare in Victoria are matters that we do take seriously. We do have a zero-tolerance approach to animal cruelty here in the state of Victoria, and breaches of our animal welfare laws are taken very seriously by regulatory authorities. Those breaches should be properly investigated to make sure that every action that occurs between humans and animals in the state of Victoria complies with the law and with these regulatory frameworks.

The instigating incident that brought Ms Purcell's motion to the chamber today is obviously a matter involving a 12-week-old puppy named Murphy that was euthanised by the Lost Dogs' Home in September. It was, from what I have read and what I have heard, clearly a very troubling and sad set of circumstances and outcomes for all of those who were involved. We do expect that those who take in animals, whether you call them shelters or pounds or welfare services or rescue services, have a code of practice that they should comply with and that that code sets out minimum standards for accommodation and management and care, including the provision of veterinary care. What I think we need to think about is both how those codes and practices operate and how they are oversighted and implemented. I certainly think that if further consideration needs to be made in terms of looking at how they have occurred in this case, then we should do so.

Fundamentally, the public need to have confidence that those who we as a community give the responsibility to to assist and care for animals in need are doing so in a way that complies with the requirements of codes of practice. Members of the community expect that there is care and compassion, and certainly from the many animal welfare activists that I have spoken to over the course of my time in Parliament, the genuineness with which they take these issues is very clear.

What we all have also got to figure out, I think, is that animals, particularly those who are our pets, are not innately trained in a particular way. What we find is that as humans, as what some would describe as owners and I am sure others would use other terms, we have responsibilities in terms of the way we treat our pet companions. We have obligations to make sure that they are both cared for and looked after but also that we work with them to ensure that the behaviours that they learn are ones that are based on caring and not based on fear. We know that animals, particularly those that do receive proper care and attention, proper training, patience and support and in many cases love, do have behaviours that can mean that they are valued and cherished members of families for many, many years. We also know that even those who do not receive the right training and care from the humans who are in charge of them and find their way out of those difficult and dangerous circumstances and into fostering arrangements or alternative care arrangements or rescue arrangements that attempt to provide that to them still have a chance of being loved pets, of being the sort of companions that we want them to be with the behaviours that would allow that to occur.

In the last couple of minutes I will just reflect briefly on the circumstances that we have personally found ourselves in with one of these animals. My partner and I, many years ago, adopted a rescue greyhound who had clearly had some very traumatic experiences at the hands of a trainer and was

resoundingly unsuccessful in the pursuit of much at all, let alone that which would bring her success on a racetrack. She was, through the Greyhound Adoption Program, fostered and put up for adoption, and she found her way to our home where she lived with us for the better part of a decade. Despite having some idiosyncrasies that were clearly the result of the way that she had been treated by those who had brought her into the world, we found that with care and support, love and attention, and I would say training but I am not sure we ever quite got that far of suggesting that she was trained, we had a rescued dog, a greyhound, as part of our lives, who was a valuable member of our household for many years. When we had to take Daisy to the vet to get her put down because she could no longer walk, we did so with sadness in our hearts and with a sense that we were doing the last thing that we could to make sure that she had had a happy and fulfilled life. I think that has got to be fundamental. That has got to be what we all should seek and strive for in the course of the way we treat animals that are part of our lives, whether we do that as individuals and families who choose to take them on, who make the commitment to giving them the care, the support, the patience and the training that they need to be parts of our households and our communities or whether we do that overall in terms of the regulatory system that ensures that the rescue shelters do the same. I commend Ms Purcell's motion to the house.

**Tom McIntosh** (Eastern Victoria) (11:49): I am glad to also have the opportunity to speak to Ms Purcell's motion. Thank you for bringing it today. To follow on from my colleagues, the people in this situation, Elizabeth and Sean, I believe, are here with us today. I acknowledge you both.

Much like Mr Batchelor shared his personal story, I grew up on a farm, so I was surrounded by animals for most of my life. Perhaps I will touch on that a little bit more as I go on. I might even talk to my flock of pet sheep, Lamby and Nibs, and all the various sheep I raised by bottle and whatnot, Ms Purcell. There is absolutely no doubt of the special connection and bond between animals and humans and how strong that connection and bond is, whether it is pets that are dogs or a wide variety of animals. Indeed many people's connection with various animals are stronger than with the majority of humans.

As I said, Ms Purcell, thank you for bringing this to the chamber today. The events at the Lost Dogs' Home have resulted in many in the community having concerns, so it is right that we discuss this here today and that it has the light shone on it that it deserves. Animal welfare is a priority of the Victorian government due to the connection that people have with pets, animals and indeed wildlife, whether people are birders and have love for birds or various other animals. It does not have to be pets, of course – just appreciating and enjoying the serenity they can bring in our natural environment is an incredible thing. So the community expects that we do the right thing by animals, whether that be in our industries, our communities, our homes or indeed our local natural environments.

The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 regulates codes of practice to protect the welfare of animals in Victoria. Victoria has a zero-tolerance approach when it comes to animal cruelty. Any alleged breach of our animal welfare laws is taken very seriously and will be investigated with the relevant legislation and organisational procedures. While it is critical that we have robust regulation of the Victorian agriculture sector, in my experience the vast majority of the Victorian community care deeply about their animals. Indeed you can sit down and chat to anybody that has a pet, and they will probably feel more fondly about them than their children or partners or whoever else it may be a lot of days of the week.

The government is aware of the matter involving a 12-week-old puppy, Murphy, who was euthanised by the Lost Dogs' Home in September. It was a sad outcome for everyone involved. Pounds and shelters, including the Lost Dogs' Home, must comply with the Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds. The code sets minimum standards for the accommodation, management and care of dogs and cats, including the provision of veterinary care and, where required, euthanasia. More than 25 codes of practice for animal welfare exist under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986, covering a range of species and activities. With a few exceptions, codes are not mandatory but provide the defence to allegations of cruelty if recommended practices are followed.

Codes include guidance on issues such as shelter requirements, housing and cage use, and conduct of painful procedures. Under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 and the codes, public and animal safety must remain primary considerations. Shelters and pounds must assess each animal's health, temperament, sociability and behaviour for rehoming suitability. It is of course imperative that the public have confidence that this remains the case through increased transparency, which of course we all expect. We cannot have it eroded because the public do not have the confidence that this remains the case. It is clear work must always be done around transparency.

To ensure the safety of our community, the code prohibits aggressive antisocial animals or animals with known vices from being made available for sale. We understand that not all cats and dogs are given the best start in life and that with training, patience and care many animals can be transitioned to become a beloved family pet. It was good to hear Mr Batchelor's experience of his greyhound – sad to hear that it had been mistreated but great that it got what sounds like a beautiful life with him in his home. That is why the code permits behavioural rehabilitation of dogs and cats in foster care – and I thank and acknowledge our shelters, rehoming organisations and dedicated foster carers for their continued work in this area.

To further support good practice the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action is developing a guide for assessing rehoming suitability that promotes ongoing, holistic behavioural assessments. All shelters and pounds must operate under a written health management plan that sets documented temperament, health and behavioural assessment procedures. The community is right to expect that decisions about rehoming or euthanasia must be made in line with these procedures and sit with the established operations manager and veterinary practitioners, supported by relevant animal behaviour experts.

As part of the 2024–25 state budget the Victorian government committed \$13.3 million over three years to continue delivering critical animal welfare regulatory services, including to continue the delivery of domestic animal regulatory functions under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 and the Domestic Animals Act 1994, including continued operation of the pet exchange register and the commercial dog breeder scheme, and to implement nationally endorsed poultry welfare standards consistent with the 2023 commitment by states and territories to implement animal welfare standards and guidelines for poultry within two years. Obviously, with cost-of-living pressures our rehoming organisations have been experiencing challenges as a large number of animals are relinquished or taken due to animal welfare concerns, so to help address the rehoming issues being experienced, the Animal Welfare Fund allocated \$5 million over four years to support animal rehoming services, which not only sees those animals find homes but also brings a lot of joy to those of us that give them homes.

Our reforms over successive Labor governments have included banning puppy farms, with the strictest breeding rules in the country; making it an offence to sell a pet without a valid microchip and source number from the pet exchange register; removing the need for greyhounds to be muzzled in public; producing Victoria's first *Animal Welfare Action Plan*, which recognises that animals are sentient; giving renters the right to keep a pet; reforming the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to ensure government receives expert advice; becoming the first state to introduce mandatory reporting of animal fate data for dogs and cats in shelters and pounds; and launching the targeted cat desexing program. As I said earlier, the government is always open to investigating new ways in which organisations and the wider community can feel satisfied with the level of oversight and support provided.

We do not oppose the motion. As I have said throughout my speech, whether we are talking about pets or we are talking about animals in the wild, all our lives are richer for having animals in them, whether that be in the natural environment – our time spent observing them – or in our own homes, with the joy and love that that can bring to people living on their own or as couples or indeed as families, or as a community when we are out and seeing the pets that everyone owns and getting to share that love and enjoyment together.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Midsumma Festival**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:00): (1069) My question today is to the Minister for Equality. The Pride street party is a highlight of the summer. It is a wonderful way that we wrap up the season of queer celebration at centres around the various Midsumma Pride events. Gertrude Street and Smith Street truly come to life during this time. It is also an important opportunity for the LGBTQIA+ community to come together to take to the streets and enjoy the wide range of music, performances, queer culture and other events that are taking place. It is my understanding that currently Midsumma, who run the Pride street party, only have funding to hold the upcoming event in February 2026. There is yet to be confirmation of funding arrangements from the state government beyond this time. Minister, will you confirm that the Pride street party will receive ongoing and permanent funding to keep the party going?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:01): Thank you, Mr Puglielli, for your question to the Minister for Equality. Notwithstanding the great temptation that I have right in this moment to respond to your substantive question, I am going to continue with the precedent I set last night in response to an adjournment matter from the newly minted member of the shadow cabinet, Mr Welch, about the Suburban Rail Loop, and I am going to actually direct the question to the minister in the other place for a response in accordance with the standing orders.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:01): Thank you, Minister, for referring that on. It really is a fabulous and fun event, for those who have yet to go. I encourage all members to take part in the upcoming event. Minister, will you join me for a boogie at the Pride street party this coming February?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:02): Mr Puglielli, I note that in your supplementary question you referred to ‘Minister’ and not ‘Minister for Equality’, but that notwithstanding, and given the various pronunciations of ‘boogie’ versus ‘bougie’, I will in fact look to make sure that the supplementary is also referred to the minister in the other place, and I look forward to seeing you there in a different capacity.

**The PRESIDENT:** Before I call the next question, can I acknowledge a previous member of this house, Jan Kronberg, in the gallery.

**Triple Zero Victoria**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:02): (1070) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, you were until recently the Minister for Emergency Services, and at that time you were responsible for the Triple Zero service, but now you are Treasurer. Treasurer, noting the shocking stories today about the failure of the Triple Zero service and the return to pencil and paper recording of emergency services calls, I ask: why did you cut funding to Triple Zero in the recent state budget?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:03): Mr Davis, as you have indicated, as the previous minister I was responsible for the service and therefore responsible for securing substantive funding lifts to ensure that we could recruit more call takers, which we did. This is an amazing workforce, and again and again I have congratulated them on their commitment to the Victorian public and their emergency response. The last time I visited Burwood there was a brand new floor because they had to accommodate the increased staff that they have recruited in recent times. In relation to the funding for the CAD system, that has been confirmed and the tender let. I would direct you to the relevant minister for more details in relation to that. But we are a government that backs our Triple Zero workforce and



funds them to ensure that they are there in the worst of times for Victorians when they are in an emergency.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:04): Pointedly, the Treasurer did not refute the fact that she has cut the funding. Treasurer, the budget in 2023–24 was \$327 million, and the budget in 2025–26 is \$248 million. I ask: why did you cut \$78 million from the Triple Zero call service?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:04): Mr Davis, I refute the allegations that you are making in relation to the service. It is funded by a government that respects the work that it does. This is an emergency services organisation that has come through an amazing transformation to ensure that it is supported, respected and given the funding that it needs to do the important work that it does.

### **Ministers statements: multicultural communities**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:05): Victoria's diversity is one of our greatest strengths. Generations of migrant families have helped build this state, enriching our economy, culture and social fabric and creating the strong, vibrant Victoria we are all so proud of today. Sadly, we have seen this beautiful and positive contribution come under attack by those who seek to divide and spread hate, often for their own political ends. This hate is rooted in a misplaced belief about what it means to be Australian. It stands in direct contrast to the values of respect, inclusion and fairness that define our state. That is why programs like the multicultural infrastructure and security program are so important, and I am pleased to announce the opening of applications for this grant program. Through the Allan Labor government's \$5 million investment, we are supporting multicultural and multifaith communities to upgrade, renovate and secure their facilities, ensuring they remain safe, welcoming and inclusive for all Victorians. These are places where people come together to connect, to worship, to celebrate and to find belonging. The program recognises the vital role that multicultural and multifaith communities play in strengthening Victoria's social fabric and fostering connection and understanding across communities. They are at the heart of our multicultural story. Our message is clear: whoever you are, whoever you love, whoever you pray to, you are welcome here in Victoria. You deserve peace, safety and respect. When we strengthen the spaces that bring us together, we strengthen the very foundation of our state, because when every Victorian feels safe, respected and included, we all share in a stronger, fairer and more united Victoria.

### **Prisoner safety**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:07): (1071) My question is to the Minister for Corrections. There was much reporting recently about a particular male prisoner that was being held in Dame Phyllis Frost prison, and there was much concern from the public, primarily due to the nature of the crimes that the person was imprisoned for. I also note that recently the Northern Territory have announced changes to their policy in this area. I would like to ask the minister: what is the government's policy in this area, and what sorts of things is the government considering at the moment regarding this?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:08): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question and his interest in relation to this matter. I know it is a matter that in the past, in other justice debates, you have raised with me. What I can confirm about decisions about prisoner placements is that we have a women's system that does recognise gender identity, and women are placed in the women's system. More broadly, in terms of placement decisions, I will not be commenting on individual decisions – you would appreciate that – and Corrections Victoria will not be commenting on individual placements.

What I can comment on are the broader policies in place, and currently there are a number of policies in place that Corrections Victoria take into account before placing people in custodial facilities,

including keeping the community safe and the system safe, supporting rehabilitation and assisting people with reintegration. These are just some of the considerations, amongst many. I do note that there are some community concerns about the current balance. There is always a balance in justice. There is a balance of what is best for the individual prisoner plus what is best for the safety and wellbeing of other prisoners in the system, especially in the women's system. We know that it is not unusual for many women that enter our custodial facilities to have histories as victims of sexual violence and other forms of violence. I do expect Corrections Victoria to make these decisions very carefully, but as I have said previously, I will not be interfering in that decision-making because Corrections Victoria implement the policies that we do set. I can confirm that I have asked Corrections Victoria to update their policies to ensure that the safety and wellbeing of the wider women's prison population is a stronger consideration in placements. That also means a stronger consideration of the nature of the past offending. I think that is a relevant consideration, and it should be given greater weight in these decisions. The policy will be updated. That work is underway, and I will have an update shortly.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:10): I thank the minister for that answer. It sounds like these policies are currently being reviewed, from what the minister said. When do you expect that they would be finalised, and are those policies things that would normally be published?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:10): These are usually policies that Corrections Victoria look at; they are internal policies for Corrections Victoria. That work is being done shortly. When I say shortly, I am talking about a matter of weeks, not months or years, so in the next few weeks I will have an update. As a minister responsible for seeing that policies meet community expectations, there are operational decisions, so I will not be talking about individual prisoners. But I think when the policies are updated, they should be reflected in the system.

#### Prisoner safety

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:10): (1072) My question is also to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, why are you housing biological males convicted of sexually assaulting women and girls at women's prisons?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:11): Thank you, Mrs McArthur, for your question and your interest in this matter. Again, similar to Mr Limbrick, I do understand you have a longstanding interest in these matters in our corrections system. I think I answered part of your question in my answer to Mr Limbrick. We do run a system that recognises gender identity. We run a system that is modern and humane and that reflects human rights legislation and equal opportunity legislation, and there is a balance of interests here. What I have announced is that I am looking to update the policy to better reflect that balance in line with community expectations and in line with the history of many of the women in our custodial facilities. We are not going to go with the approach of the Northern Territory, as Mr Limbrick referred to, but we are going to rebalance the policies to make sure they reflect the risk to the system and risk to other prisoners in our corrections facilities.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:12): Thank you, Minister. You have an obligation as the corrections minister to keep the inmates in prison safe. You are not keeping the inmates in women's prisons safe if they are raped by men in women's prisons. Minister, the *Herald Sun* reported that FOI documents show that six biological males who transitioned while behind bars between 2003 and 2023 were transferred to a women's prison. I therefore ask you, Minister: is there a limit on the number of biological males you would be willing to transfer to women's prisons, or would this government transfer every man who transitions while behind bars, regardless of the offence committed, to a women's prison?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:13): I reject the premise of Mrs McArthur's

statement. I have been very clear that we do recognise gender identity, but there is a balance to be made with the placement of prisoners, and I have requested an update to the policies to give greater consideration to the risk to the safety and wellbeing of other women in our women's custodial facilities, acknowledging many of those women have past histories as victims themselves. But we need to understand that we do want a system that does recognise people's own identity and does balance those interests to make sure that the system is safe for the wellbeing of everyone in our system. I think your assertion is that people are automatically transferred – no, the policies do balance those interests. I am going to rebalance that to make it a better reflection of where community expectations are at – I am doing that work as we speak – but ultimately the final decisions about individual prisoner placements are for Corrections Victoria. Of course, as the minister, I am responsible for those policies.

#### Ministers statements: housing

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:14): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is ensuring that Victoria grows well, and we are unlocking surplus government land to build hundreds of new homes close to where Victorians work, study and access essential services. We know that being able to live within walking distance to public transport, schools, health care and jobs is of critical importance in making sure that as we grow, we are growing well.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Harriet SHING**: There are two sites in Brighton, which I know will appeal to you, as they also appeal to the new shadow – he is the Attorney-General this week I think, isn't he? One in Camberwell and one in Preston have been added to our landmark small sites program, joining those already announced across Croydon South, Carlton, Heidelberg West, Baxter, Bendigo and Geelong. Across 14 sites, up to 1000 safe, modern and energy-efficient homes for Victorian families will be built. At least 10 per cent of those homes will be made available exclusively for very low, low and moderate income households. Let me remind the house that under Labor we are unlocking land, planning responsibly and building the homes that Victorians need, the homes that everybody here is saying need to be delivered – until such time as the question of your own backyards emerges. Under those opposite, you are actually on your own.

Last week it was not surprising yet again to hear not only silence but the shadow housing minister saying his vision for Victoria's future is 'to be a vibrant state of cities, towns and communities that is well connected to services and infrastructure that enhances life and lifestyle opportunities'. I know that those opposite have had a fair bit on their plates as far as who occupies which real estate on which benches, but it does not actually translate to talking about housing. That same advocate, the shadow minister for housing, also opposes building more homes in his own electorate because they are too close – wait for this – to a cemetery. That is what it has become under those opposite, and from a former Minister for Housing, no less, who was in this place talking about iPhones and sneakers in the middle of Brighton. We are going to keep building – (*Time expired*)

#### Cannabis law reform

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:16): (1073) My question is for the Treasurer. The Victorian government has shown a distinct lack of courage by ruling out the decriminalisation of cannabis. Enforcing the criminalisation of cannabis with imprisonment, policing and the court system wastes \$1.7 billion across Australia, which is \$4.66 million per day. At the same time here in Victoria our state debt will soon balloon to almost \$200 billion, yet this government plans to continue to waste money arresting thousands of Victorians each year for possessing small amounts of cannabis. So my question is: how will this decision contribute to rising state debt?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:17): I thank Ms Payne for her question. I think I would like to pick up on parts of your question in relation to the impact on people. I want to talk about preventing and reducing

drug harm in Victoria, because you talked about the money that harm can cost but there is also the money that we invest in prevention and health initiatives. My advice is that since 2014 our government has invested \$3.3 billion in drug and alcohol treatment, support and harm minimisation initiatives, obviously sitting alongside substantive legislative reform that I know you are very supportive of in relation to medical cannabis and some of the other work that we have been talking to you about in relation to driving and the like. There is always opportunity to continue conversations with crossbench members and other members in the house about things that are important to them. We will continue to monitor and consider emerging evidence, including areas of harm minimisation and flow-on effects to vulnerable cohorts. But in relation to your specific question in relation to either AOD or indeed the justice system, it is better directed to the other ministers who hold those portfolios.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:18): I thank the Treasurer for her response, and I note that the greatest harm caused by the criminalisation of cannabis is actually that interaction with the criminal justice system. By way of supplementary, the government's failure to decriminalise cannabis ensures the profits of this billion-dollar market are kept in criminal hands. Will the Treasurer advise why the government has decided to give criminal enterprises millions of dollars, rather than the Victorian people?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:18): I thank Ms Payne for her supplementary question. As she is referring to the government's committee report response, I can confirm and reaffirm for the house that the government responses indicate that there are no plans to change laws regarding personal use or possession of cannabis at this time. I am more than happy to continue conversations in relation to a range of policies that your party or anybody else would like to talk to me about.

### Economic policy

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:19): (1074) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the Premier went to China between 14 and 19 September. I ask: Treasurer, was the Premier authorised by the government to negotiate any borrowing or lines of credit while in China?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:20): I can confirm that the Premier did travel to China –

**Harriet Shing**: Our largest trading partner.

**Jaclyn SYMES**: Indeed. I also met with the Chinese consulate general following that visit regarding the benefits of visiting China in relation to ensuring that there are reduced barriers for our agricultural sector and encouraging more visitation and therefore adding to the Victorian economy. But the way you phrased your question is not how our systems work.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:20): We all support the effort to sell more Victorian goods to China –

**Harriet Shing**: Do you?

**David DAVIS**: Absolutely. I sure do. I was active in work there, and Mr Baillieu took a huge group of people to China –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS**: Well, there was the super trade mission, the biggest in China's history, that was taken by Mr Baillieu. So that would be a good start, but let me just get –

**David Ettershank**: On a point of order, President, I would really like to hear what Mr Davis has to say.

*Members interjecting.*

**David Ettershank:** And I would like to have my point of order heard by the President as well. So, yes, could we have a little respect, please, for the asking of questions?

**The PRESIDENT:** I will call the house to order. I was just worried that Mr Davis might run out of time to ask his question, because there was a bit across the –

**David DAVIS:** I should not be drawn by interjections.

**The PRESIDENT:** Yes, ignore interjections as well.

**David DAVIS:** My question then to the Treasurer is: was the Premier authorised prior to the travel by the cabinet or the expenditure review committee, of which you are chair, to negotiate with any contractors on the multibillion-dollar cost overruns on the Big Build projects like the Metro Tunnel or the SRL?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:22): There are a lot of incorrect assertions in the way you have characterised your question, Mr Davis. I am not the chair of that committee either. The short answer to your question is no. But what I am concerned about is that the way you framed your question demonstrates a complete misunderstanding of how the state's finances work in relation to lending and borrowing. If you would like more information about TCV and how they do our borrowings, then that might help you ask a question that indeed could be answered.

#### **Ministers statements: multicultural story time**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:23): I rise to update the house on one of the many ways in which the Allan Labor government is supporting Victorian families by funding multicultural story time sessions. It was an absolute delight to join the member for Kalkallo on a visit to the Indian playgroup and multicultural story time session at the Newbury Child and Community Centre in Craigieburn. The Indian playgroup and multicultural story time session in Craigieburn is delivered to the community via VICSEG New Futures, and it was a pleasure to reconnect with Maree and Caspar from VICSEG at this wonderful event. The session was facilitated by the extremely engaging Harpreet, who guided the group through an interactive and immensely beneficial session in song and the bilingual reading of two of my favourite early years storybooks, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle and *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin Jr. The text within these stories presented Harpreet with the opportunity to use images, words and actions familiar to young children to speak and engage in both English and Punjabi, supporting the children's language and literacy development. The regular group sessions provide families additional opportunities to meet and socialise with other families from similar backgrounds, supporting the families' connection to culture and community and further supporting the child's social and emotional development.

At the event I heard firsthand from families about how beneficial these sessions are for their little ones. I even heard from one mum about how she has a permanent arrangement in place with her full-time employer to ensure she can attend the weekly sessions, as attendance at the event is one of the highest priorities for her family. The session was a lovely example of how we can support communities to be the best they can be, resulting in happy and confident children ready to learn and grow and pursue a wonderful life. I am pleased to speak about this wonderful multicultural story time session today, as it is the Allan Labor government that continues to support Victorian families with what matters most, because we understand families and what is needed to raise happy, confident and healthy kids and strong families.

#### **Cannabis law reform**

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:25): (1075) My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Multiple submissions to the Yoorrook Justice Commission noted the disproportionate impact on Aboriginal communities due to the criminalisation of cannabis for personal use, including

exposure to harmful impacts of the criminal justice system and imprisonment. The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service have called for the decriminalisation of cannabis as:

... a pathway to prioritise community health, reduce criminal legal system interactions, and improve social and health outcomes for Aboriginal people and their families.

If one of the key aims of the treaty bill being debated in the other place as we speak is to address the criminalisation and over-representation of Aboriginal people in our prisons, why is the government refusing to progress the decriminalisation of cannabis?

**Jaclyn Symes:** On a point of order, President, I would assert that the Minister for Corrections is not the relevant minister for that particular question, and it might be better directed to the Attorney-General.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Ettershank, are you happy for that to be redirected?

**David ETTERS HANK:** I am happy with that.

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:26): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question and his interest in this matter. I will make sure that is passed on to the Attorney-General in the other place for a response in line with the standing orders.

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:26): Let us have another punt, shall we? Jurisdictions including Canada, Germany and much of the US that have decriminalised cannabis have seen a substantial reduction in custodial sentences for possession of cannabis, leading to a reduced burden on prison resources and subsequent savings for the state. Given the government's new tough-on-crime bail laws have resulted in additional strain on Victoria's correctional facilities, will the government reconsider its opposition to cannabis decriminalisation in order to reduce the burden on our prisons and prison staff?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:27): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question and his interest in this matter and the impact that decriminalisation has had on other jurisdictions in comparison with Victoria. I am sure the Attorney-General will be happy to answer that question in line with the standing orders.

### Parentline

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:28): (1076) My question is to the Minister for Children. Minister, Parentline has spent 25 proud years serving our community. It is a crucial statewide lifeline for all parents and carers. It is the only counselling and support service of its type, operating from 8 am to midnight, seven days a week. No other helpline does this. Every hour it answers two calls from parents who need expert advice from a qualified person, be it a social worker or a psychologist. Parentline is our state's first and in some instances our last line of defence. It provides parents with the skills and help to de-escalate their children and has saved lives. Critically, it has helped prevent thousands of children becoming clients of our child protection and juvenile justice systems. Minister, why is Parentline to be cut, with the service ending tomorrow?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:29): I thank Mr McGowan for his question. I look forward to engaging with him in this place and beyond as we do our best to improve social services, which I know this whole chamber is committed to. When it comes to improving child and family services – and I just gave an example in my ministers statement of a service that the Allan Labor government is investing more in than has ever been invested before, in relation to story time – in the 25 years since Parentline was established, and I know it is a long time back for those who have sat on the opposite benches for a very long time bar a short intermission, we have more than tripled the investment in family services in this state. And instead of

just having a phone line, we have developed a complex system – an ecosystem, indeed – of child and family services that work together in a way that 25 years ago was unimaginable. But today, at every level across our community, families have available to them the different types of services, rather than just a phone line, that can provide them with the critical assistance that they need at those critical junctures in time – be it the de-escalation of their children and young people, as Mr McGowan has spoken to, or whether it be the early intervention and support, such as for emotional wellbeing and development, that occurs through things like the multicultural story time program that I spoke to in my ministers statement earlier. As I said, our government has invested threefold in child and family services. If we take just family services, those opposite in 2012–13 invested \$120 million in family services, and since then we have not just doubled that funding but increased that funding to over \$446 million.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, the minister well knows that this is not a time to attack the opposition. I can see that she is winding up to this, and she should just answer the question.

**The PRESIDENT:** I do not know if I heard an attack on the opposition, but I think the minister was being relevant to the question.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** I was not seeking to attack the opposition at all. I was just simply making the point that when those opposite were in power there was \$120 million in family services and today there is more than \$446 million, which speaks to that complex system of family services that supports families not just through a phone line but in a variety of ways. It includes phone lines. It continues to include phone lines, like the maternal and child health phone line, which is an amazing service which people can access 24/7, but it also includes those supports like the Orange Door and like multicultural story time. There are a range of services available to families to support them on their parenting journeys, and that is absolutely what the Allan Labor government is committed to doing.

**Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:31):** I thank the minister for her answer. 1800 RESPECT deal with family violence and abuse. Lifeline do not employ social workers. Orange Door operates Monday to Friday. Kids Helpline does not help parents. Safe Steps is for family violence. The maternal and child health line is only for zero- to five-year-olds. Headspace is for mental health only for 12- to 25-year-olds. The family relationship advice line focuses on parents' legal rights after separation. The Raising Children Network is an online resource only, with no human connection. CLAN advocate for those who grew up in care, like in orphanages and foster care. Minister, Parentline is the only anonymous professional counselling from 8 am to midnight, 365 days a year, serving 17,800 worried and concerned parents. Will you commit to reversing the closure of Parentline and extending the funding for Parentline for a further 12 months until election day 2026?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:32):** Again I thank Mr McGowan for his question and indeed for what I know is his genuine and heartfelt interest. But what I would say to this chamber is that in 25 years the landscape of services available has changed dramatically. I have given a few examples. Mr McGowan has just given a few examples, but I can continue to provide examples because across our family services we have tripled that investment. And through services like our universal services of maternal and child health, our schools and our health system more broadly, we are continuing to provide supports for families in their parenting journey and indeed for those children and young people. Another one is our mental health supports that are available to young people within schools. That is not something that, 25 years ago when Parentline was established, was available. But in 25 years, and I know it is a long time in opposition for those on the other side, we have developed an entire ecosystem of supports for families and for children and young people that speaks to those needs and their family's needs right across our state, available in different ways, shapes and forms 24/7.

**Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:33):** I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

**Ministers statements: economy**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:34): Today I rise to inform the house about the release of Victoria’s annual financial report for 2024–25, which is available for members to have a look through.

*Members interjecting.*

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Mr Batchelor is part way through his reading. I would have thought Mr Davis would be really interested in this.

The report shows that the government’s plan to create more jobs by backing business and state-shaping infrastructure investment is strengthening Victoria’s economy. Over the last decade Victoria’s economy has grown faster than any other state’s and is 31 per cent larger than when we came to government. Our economic growth is underpinned by a strong labour market, with both the share of working-age Victorians in employment and the participation rate at record levels in 2024–25. Employment growth is also strong in this period, and the unemployment rate remains low by historical standards, averaging 4.4 per cent, below the 20-year prepandemic average of 5.5. Business investment grew by 1.2 per cent in 2024–25, compared to an increase of just 0.7 per cent nationally, and has increased 53 per cent in 10 years – the strongest growth again of all of the states.

The report shows that we have continued progress towards our five-step fiscal strategy, and it shows that it is working. The government has delivered an operating cash surplus of \$3.2 billion for the general government sector. That is \$2.6 billion, Mr Davis, higher than the forecast in the 2025–26 budget. This is our third consecutive operating cash surplus. Net debt was \$4.7 billion lower than what the May budget forecasted, demonstrating we remain on track to meet steps 4 and 5 of the strategy over the forward estimates, which involves stabilising and then reducing net debt as a share of the economy. As the report shows, the Victorian economy is strong, and it continues to grow. As I said, our fiscal strategy is delivering. Victoria is a great place to work, a great place to invest – *(Time expired)*

**Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT** (12:36): That ends questions and ministers statements. Minister Erdogan will get responses from the Attorney-General for Mr Ettershank’s supplementary and substantive questions. Minister Shing will get from the Minister for Equality responses to Mr Puglielli’s questions, including the invitation to boogie.

**Constituency questions**

**South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:35): (1864) Yesterday I asked the Minister for Transport Infrastructure about the benefits to the Pakenham and Cranbourne lines following the completion of the Metro Tunnel and the big switch on 1 February next year, and today I would like to ask her about the benefits for the Frankston line. I know Mr Batchelor asked a similar question yesterday. I know he is proud to represent the inner section of the line, and I am proud to represent the outer section of the Frankston line. From 1 February next year, with the new Metro Tunnel opening and Cranbourne and Pakenham services running through the brand new Metro Tunnel and its five new stations, the Frankston line will again be restored to the city loop, providing more options and more connectivity for commuters along that line. Minister, how will this big switch support commuters on the Frankston line?

**Western Metropolitan Region**

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (12:38): (1865) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Local residents through the grassroots campaign Leakes Needs Lights and the dedicated efforts of campaigner Donna Southern have repeatedly raised the alarm over



dangerous conditions, chronic congestion and driver confusion at the intersection of Leakes Road and the Western Freeway interchange in Rockbank, Victoria. Nothing has been done, despite longstanding safety concerns and sustained community advocacy. Will the minister take action, urgently review what the delay is and fix this issue?

### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:38): (1866) My constituency question today is to the Minister for Ageing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs. I recently had the pleasure of hearing from a constituent in my electorate, Panayota from Prahran. Panayota volunteers with two clubs that run events for the local Greek and seniors communities out of the Grattan Gardens Community Centre. Through the Prahran Greek Women's Group Asklipios and the Friendship Club, Panayota and other community members enjoy building social connections and fun, skill-building and cultural activities like group cooking sessions and shared meals. Panayota shared that the clubs appreciate government funding that allows them to undertake valuable work in the community, but they would like more security of funding to give them more confidence that they can continue to participate in and deliver these activities in a sustainable way. Minister, can these clubs access funding opportunities that are longer term and more secure so they can continue to provide vital community and cultural connections?

### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:39): (1867) My question is to the Minister for Housing and Building. The question is: how is the new social housing development at Essex Street, Prahran, helping women and children facing homelessness? We know that women are the fastest growing group of people at risk of homelessness, and the Allan Labor government is doing something about it. We are building 155 new, modern, energy-efficient homes in Essex Street, Prahran. Eighty-six of those homes will be dedicated to women and children experiencing financial instability or homelessness or escaping family violence. The property is going to be managed by Women's Property Initiatives. I think the incredible thing about this development is that it has been designed with the needs of women and children, particularly those experiencing family violence, in mind. That is the sort of design you can only do through a rebuild and not a retrofit. The Allan Labor government is getting on with building more social homes in Victoria.

### **North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:40): (1868) My constituency question is in respect to the education portfolio and is for Minister Carroll, particularly in respect to Heathmont East Primary School. Heathmont East Primary School currently have stage 1 of their redevelopment program underway, and it does look spectacular. The school community love it, I love it; however, what we want as well are stage 2 and stage 3. The school has very significant buildings which still are in a state of somewhat disrepair, shall I say – I am trying to be kind here. But nonetheless we urgently need the following stages in order to ensure that those children, who receive an outstanding education from the principal team and the wonderful teachers we have at Heathmont East – we need state-of-the-art facilities, as all schools do, particularly our state schools. As a proud state school child, both at primary and secondary school level, with no disrespect to those who were not at state schools, I would urge the minister to find it in his heart and in his budget to make sure that Heathmont East receive stage 2 and stage 3 funding in the coming budget.

### **North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:41): (1869) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Health. The Mazenod Panthers All Ability Football Club community in my region have been devastated by the death of a young community member who died from sepsis caused by meningococcal B just recently. I send my deep condolences to their family and the broader community. I know that this loss is being felt deeply. In the words of the Mazenod Panthers club

president, ‘When one heart is broken, all our hearts are broken, and today our hearts are shattered.’ Their call is clear and one that my Greens colleagues and I strongly support: we need to expand access to the meningococcal B vaccine for infants and young people, including for those living in my region. Minister, will you include this critical vaccine in the Victorian schedule of childhood immunisations?

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:42): (1870) I want to share with the chamber that last week I had the pleasure of attending State Library station with the Premier and the Minister for Public and Active Transport for the announcement that across Victoria every weekend from December through to January Victorians can use public transport for free. As we prepare for the opening of the Metro Tunnel, we must acknowledge that Victorians have endured bus replacements, longer journeys and numerous disruptions – numerous disruptions, let me just say – yet they have remained patient and deeply understanding, recognising these improvements will deliver easier and more efficient travel right across the state. My electorate spans a vast and diverse region, with many of my constituents relying on trains, trams and buses to stay connected to work, study and community life. Across Victoria, more than 400 million –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sheena WATT:** I was interrupted, so I just want to say: how good is it for the people of Northern Metropolitan Region? That is my question for the Minister for Public and Active Transport.

### Northern Victoria Region

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (12:44): (1871) My constituency question is to the Minister for Children. It relates to a young father in my electorate who says he is regularly being asked to keep his child home from his local early learning centre due to staffing shortfalls. In recent months this has happened two to three times a week, which has been very disruptive for the family. When he keeps his child at home, he is told that he will not have to pay the usual gap fee. He is concerned that the early learning centre is still paid by the government for the placement even though the parents are looking after their own child. Can the minister explain why staffing shortfalls remain in our early childhood settings, whether all centres are meeting their recommended ratio of staff to children and whether centres are receiving a government payment for children they are not looking after?

### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:45): (1872) My constituency question is for the Minister for Mental Health. My constituent is a resident of Rowville. She is a pensioner who consumes cannabis to manage severe health conditions. Cannabis helps her manage her pain so she can attend regular volunteer shifts at the local op shop and connect with her community. But in Victoria she is considered a criminal because she cannot afford medicinal cannabis and instead grows her own. My constituent called my office yesterday to express her deep disappointment at the government’s decision to not decriminalise cannabis. Like her, thousands of people in the south-east are cannabis consumers. I got elected with Legalise Cannabis Victoria by the people of the south-east for this very issue. My constituent asks: how will the minister ensure vulnerable people in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region, like my constituent, are not criminalised?

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:45): (1873) My constituency question is for the Minister for the State Electricity Commission, Minister D’Ambrosio. Earlier this year the State Electricity Commission powered up, supplying clean, cheap, 100 per cent renewable electricity to the Victorian government for public transport, schools and hospitals. Ordinary Victorian businesses will soon be able to buy their power from the SEC. The SEC is leading the transition to 95 per cent renewable electricity by 2035. We know renewables are the cheapest form of new electricity generation. The more renewables we build, the more downward pressure we will put on the wholesale

electricity prices and, as a result, energy bills for all Victorians. My question for the minister for the SEC is: how do my constituents in the community benefit from the SEC powering sites across Southern Metro, like the Shrine of Remembrance, Alfred hospital and educational institutions, such as Holmesglen Institute and Swinburne Secondary College?

### **Eastern Victoria Region**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:46): (1874) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Residents of French Island are reporting starving and dying koalas, eucalypts without a single leaf and an unmanaged population of 12,000 – more than twice the sustainable level. Will the government rule out shooting and advise of the immediate, nonlethal actions to be deployed, including veterinary triage, transportation to shelters desperate for infection-free koalas, large-scale fertility control without timelines and the funding and agency-led response for delivery?

### **Western Victoria Region**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:47): (1875) My question for the Minister for Emergency Services is about the recent shameful vandalism at the Linton Firefighters Memorial, which saw bollards sawn off and wire cables stolen from a site dedicated to the five Geelong West CFA members – Matthew Armstrong, Jason Thomas, Chris Evans, Stuart Davidson and Gary Vredeveltdt – who perished in the horrific 1998 Linton bushfire. To say it has caused great anger and upset is an understatement. This site is profoundly significant as a memorial to those men and their families but also as a reminder of the historical importance of the fire, which led to major reforms in CFA safety and training. Considering the impact this senseless act has had on the fallen firefighters' families, the CFA and the community and the need to reopen this vital place of remembrance for visitors, Minister, what will you do to assist the restoration?

### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1876) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Today the RACV has released the results for the latest My Melbourne Road survey. The survey asked road users to nominate the most dangerous intersections across Melbourne. A number of the most dangerous ones were identified across my electorate, including at North Road and Mackie Road in Bentleigh East. A constituent raised this very issue with me when I was down in Bentleigh on Saturday and spoke about the concern he was having with traffic turning right into North Road around this busy area. So my question to the minister is: Minister, what are you doing to address the concerns of local Bentleigh residents, as identified by the RACV, to improve road safety in the area?

### **South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:49): (1877) My question is to the Minister for Local Government, and I ask: what support will the minister provide the Bakhtar Community Organisation after their recent eviction from council-owned premises in Noble Park North? Since their inception in 2021, they have supported over 8000 recently arrived refugees, including by distributing over \$3 million worth of food parcels, material aid and other support. Charitable organisations like this play an essential role in supporting vulnerable migrant groups, and they relieve the budgetary pressures on the government. I call on the minister to work with council to find alternative premises so that their important work continues.

### **North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:50): (1878) My constituency matter is for the Minister for Planning. I refer to her ministerial cabinet colleague Mr Carbines, the member for

Ivanhoe, who sponsored Assembly petition 202530. The petition describes a local development as having:

... the capacity to drastically and quickly alter neighbourhood character by applying bulk-scale, cookie cutter designs that overwhelm the area.

It says it lacks adequate mechanisms for independent oversight; that removing third-party rights and limiting the voice of local councils undermines transparency, fairness and integrity in the planning process; that it was rolled out without meaningful public consultation; and that it has not resulted in a single approved planning permit. These things all apply to a development in Rosanna. I ask that the minister please also consider this in the context of the Blackburn activity centre.

**Sitting suspended 12:52 pm until 2:03 pm.**

### *Motions*

#### **Animal shelters**

**Debate resumed.**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:03): I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Ms Purcell's name in regard to the Lost Dogs' Home. Can I say at the outset that I want to thank Ms Purcell and the Animal Justice Party for its continued advocacy in regard to our pets.

Of course we all love a doggo, I have to say. I will start my contribution with the fact that my gorgeous girl Skye came from the Lost Dogs' Home. I remember seeing her on the day that I went to see what they had available at the Lost Dogs' Home. She was a very forlorn looking staffie cross in her little pen. If anyone knows anything about staffies, they need to be around people, and staffies being in a pen on their own is not a good thing. She was pretty sad and looking very forlorn, so I was really pleased to be able to look at her and say, 'You're coming home with us.' It was a good day. So I do have a little bit of experience with the Lost Dogs' Home.

In preparation for this motion I was reading some of the notes. I think shelters generally these days do everything they can to rehome pets. But it is always concerning to me, as an animal lover, when I see that there are some animals that are just being euthanised. It is horrible, because there are plenty of people who want to offer loving homes for their cats or dogs. As I said, Skye, my staffie and Jack Russell cross, is a pet from the Lost Dogs' Home and a rescue dog, as they call them. My cat Rizzo is also a rescue, from the Cat Protection Society of Victoria, so I am a firm believer in giving pets a second chance. Particularly if they have been rescued or surrendered, they deserve a good home. I also have to say at the outset that the government does not oppose this motion. As I said, I do thank Ms Purcell for bringing this motion, but also for her continued advocacy in this space.

It is concerning to see the content of this motion. The events that have transpired at the Lost Dogs' Home have resulted in many in the community questioning these decisions and becoming distressed at the situation. I also share that distress. Animal welfare is a priority of the Victorian government. Our community does expect that we do the right thing by animals in our care, whether it be in industries or communities or our homes.

The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 and the regulations and the codes of practice protect the welfare of animals in Victoria. We have a zero-tolerance approach to animal cruelty. Any alleged breach of our animal welfare laws is taken very seriously and will be investigated with and by the relevant organisations who help us make sure that animal cruelty does not occur.

It is critical that we have robust regulations in Victorian agriculture sectors, and it is true to say that the vast majority of Victorians do care deeply about their animals. There are always some awful exceptions to that, and we see that when we see the RSPCA and other organisations going in to take action to have animals retrieved or when animals are surrendered. It is always distressing when we see those things. I think the most recent example that springs to my mind was the example of the horses

down on the Mornington Peninsula that were just recently surrendered. That was horrendous. I think sometimes what you find is – and it is a thing; sometimes people hoard animals as well – whilst they might have started off having their beloved furry or feathered creatures in their care with the best of intentions, sometimes it becomes too much and sadly, they cannot see any way out or just lose the capacity to care for those animals. But more than that, what we saw with the horses on the Mornington Peninsula I think was much more than that, and I know people were distressed about that situation. I know that people had been calling for the RSPCA to take action on that situation for some time.

More recently in regard to the Lost Dogs' Home the Victorian government is aware of the matter involving a 12-week-old puppy named Murphy, who was euthanised by the Lost Dogs' Home in September 2025. It was a very sad outcome for all those concerned. The code sets minimum standards for the accommodation, management and care of dogs and cats, including the provision of veterinary care and, where required, euthanasia. The public must continue to have confidence that this remains the case, and that increased transparency is part of that pact. We expect our shelters to uphold the standards set out in the law, the regulations and the code when it comes to animal welfare. When these codes are eroded because the public do not have confidence in them, there is clearly work to be done in terms of improving transparency.

To ensure the safety of our community, the code prohibits aggressive antisocial animals or animals with known vices from being made available for sale. However, we understand that not all cats and dogs are given the best start in life, and that was like my Skye. With training, patience and care, many animals can transition to be a beloved family pet. That has certainly been the case with my Skye. That is why the code permits behavioural rehabilitation of dogs and cats in foster care. I thank and acknowledge our shelters and rehoming organisations and dedicated foster carers for their continued work in this space.

I just want to conclude my remarks by saying that to ensure that the public does not lose faith in the rehoming organisations that rely on community support, volunteers and donations, along with government funding through Animal Welfare Victoria, and investigating ways in which we can further support organisations as they make difficult decisions regarding the fate of animals in their care, the government will not be opposing this motion.

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:10): I just want to briefly sum up and touch on some of the points made within the debate today. First of all, I want to really acknowledge the cooperation and the kindness of many within the chamber in acknowledging Elizabeth and Sean, the foster carers of Murphy, who came along to listen to the contributions today. Without Elizabeth and Sean's advocacy we would not be standing here and we would not have seen such a huge outpouring of support and more importantly outrage towards the decisions of the Lost Dogs' Home. Their story is actually not unique, but what is unique about it is the fact that they were willing to say that they would not accept it and that it was not good enough, because the Lost Dogs' Home operates on a culture of silencing people, of secrecy and of making people fearful of the repercussions of saying something about their practices. Elizabeth and Sean were not willing to take that. They have been so incredibly brave by standing up, and they have achieved something that we have been trying to achieve within the rescue and rehoming sector for decades now. I also want to acknowledge the work of organisations like Forever Friends Animal Rescue and Rescued With Love, who have been speaking about much of what has gone on within the Lost Dogs' Home for many years now as well and who I know are also so incredibly grateful to Elizabeth and Sean for their bravery – and for getting thrust into a situation that they did not choose but they could not be quiet about. I just want to acknowledge that they have achieved something really amazing in doing so.

It is disappointing that the opposition is opposing this motion today, and I was quite surprised by those comments. Something that has been made really, really clear is that this is not about staff, as they claim. In fact staff started organisations like the Lost Dogs' Home because they wanted to help animals, because they cared about animals – I am the first person to acknowledge that – but what happens is they are put within an organisation where they are not privy to decision-making a lot of the

time. They are left helpless, they are left powerless and they are unable to contest or speak out against these decisions. That has been evidenced by the amount of former staff that have come to me and the amount of current staff who have been outraged by this decision to kill Murphy. It has really shone a light on something that has been going on for such a long time. This is an organisation that is unwilling to change and must be forced into change. Like I said, this is a management problem that is decades old. It is not an attack on the rescue community. The Lost Dogs' Home as an organisation is an outlier and its practices are tarnishing the incredible work of other shelters and other rescue groups, who put so much into helping the lives of animals in this state every single day. The broader rescue community has condemned this. The rescue community –

**Sonja Terpstra:** On a point of order, Acting President, there is a lot of noise in the chamber. I am having trouble hearing Ms Purcell. I would just ask that perhaps conversations could be taken outside.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** I uphold the point of order, and I ask Ms Purcell to continue.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Like I said, this has been condemned by the rescue community. They are the experts who know these animals best, and we should be listening to them. Just finally, I also want to touch on a few other things. People have spoken about the code of practice today, and something that is important to know about the code of practice is while that code of practice allows what happened to Murphy within it, it does not mandate it. The Lost Dogs' Home is exploiting people's lack of understanding of the legislation and the rules to get away with this behaviour.

We are thankful that a number of councils are actually looking into this now. The Lost Dogs' Home operates off lucrative council contracts. They bring in a lot of money by servicing those LGAs. During the time of this debate we have been informed that the City of Melbourne is actually launching an investigation into the practices of the Lost Dogs' Home and will be demanding answers, given that the council contract lies with them.

Finally, on the point of paperwork as raised by the opposition, I would just like to say that if a little bit more paperwork results in letting more dogs and cats live, then I think that is a pretty minimal trade-off and a pretty fair trade-off. What this motion asks for today is the bare minimum of what we could do. We could be setting the standard of good sheltering practices in our state, because that is what these organisations should be doing. They are there for the purpose of sheltering and caring for animals, and we need to get that purpose back on track within this state. Thank you to everyone for their contributions today and their support. We are now calling on the government to act within the ask of this motion, and I commend it to the house.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Australian and Victorian flags**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:15): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the Australian national flag and the Victorian state flag are enduring symbols of the nation, representing Australian and Victorian history, values and unity;
- (b) the deliberate desecration of the Australian and Victorian flags are not harmless acts of protest but a threatening act of aggression, a symbolic call to violence against Australia, its institutions and its people;
- (c) 77 per cent of Australians polled by the Institute of Public Affairs believe that burning the Australian national flag should be against the law;
- (d) 63 per cent of Australians polled by the Institute of Public Affairs believe that those who burn the Australian national flag should face jail time;

- (e) 71 per cent of Australians polled by the Institute of Public Affairs believe that non-citizens who burn the Australian national flag should be deported; and
- (2) calls on the Allan Labor government to enact legislation to criminalise the desecration of the Australian national and Victorian state flags.

Today I rise to speak on a matter that strikes at the very heart of who we are as Australians: respect for our national and state flags. The Australian national and Victorian state flags are not just fabric and stitching; they are the enduring symbols of our nation and our state, a reflection of our history, our shared values and the unity that binds us together as one people. The Australian flag is the banner under which Australians have fought and died, the emblem carried into battlefields, disaster zones and Olympic stadiums alike. Wherever it flies it represents the strength of our democracy, the sacrifices of generations and the hope we hold for the future. When Victorians look to our flags, we see more than colours and patterns. We see the story of a young nation that overcame adversity and hardship, a people who built a fair and prosperous society and a democracy that, though not perfect, has given us freedoms many in the world still long for. We see sacrifice and achievement, courage, compassion and mateship – values that make up the Australian character itself.

Yet, despite all of this, in modern Australia people can burn our flags, trample them and desecrate them and face no consequences. This is an extraordinary situation and one that I deeply believe undermines the respect that our national symbols deserve. Let us be absolutely clear: burning our flags is not peaceful protest; it is a hostile, hateful act of aggression. It is intended not to persuade but to provoke, not to reason but to inflame. It is an attempt to divide our community and to show contempt for our nation, its institutions and its people. It is, in truth, a symbolic call to violence against our country and against those that call this land home. The Australian people know this instinctively. Polling conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs makes it crystal clear: 77 per cent of Australians believe burning the national flag should be against the law, 63 per cent believe those who do it should face jail time and 71 per cent believe that non-citizens who burn our flag should be deported. These are not fringe views. They are mainstream opinions of everyday Australians from all walks of life. They are the voice of a people who understand that respect for our national symbols is tied directly to respect for our nation itself.

Some will argue that this is about free speech. I reject that argument. Australians enjoy robust freedoms. We criticise government policies and politicians every single day, and rightly so. That is democracy at work. But the burning of our flags is not an argument. It is not reasoned speech; it is an act of desecration. It crosses the line between dissent and destruction. It is not debate; it is contempt. That is why I call on the Allan Labor government to show leadership by enacting legislation that criminalises the deliberate desecration of the Australian national flag and the Victorian state flag. Other democratic nations, including the United States, have long recognised the importance of protecting their flags. They understand that when the flag is attacked it is not just a piece of cloth that suffers harm but the dignity of the nation itself. We as Victorians should do no less. Our flags represent every Australian – past, present and future. They represent the young digger at Gallipoli, the migrant family finding their place here, the Indigenous service men and women who fought under their colours, the firefighters on the front lines of our bushfires and the athletes who carry our pride to the world stage. To protect the flags is to protect the dignity of our people and the unity of our nation. It is to affirm that while Australians may argue, disagree and debate fiercely, there are still many values, historical milestones and symbols we all hold sacred. So I urge the house to support this motion. Let us send a clear and unambiguous message: our flags deserve respect, and those who seek to destroy them will be held accountable. Let us stand for unity over division, respect over contempt and nationhood over anarchy.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:20): Thank you very much for the opportunity to rise and speak on the motion moved by Ms Tyrrell and the One Nation party. This motion has been brought to this place to serve as a distraction from the real issues facing Victorians and thrust us further into American-style culture wars. Victoria has no place for hatred and barbarism. We have not and we will

not follow in the steps of the rightist conservative leaders in other nations that aim to suppress the voices of our community.

Can I just say, Ms Tyrrell, you have previously brought motions to this place that were constructive and incredibly relevant – motions on drought relief for those in the regions who faced the devastating impact of the lack of resources. I would also note you were successful in your advocacy for the Environment and Planning Committee inquiry into consultation practices, which I sit on – and I find that it is so far actually a very helpful inquiry – as well as making sure that in the scope of that inquiry we really do investigate matters relating to the ongoing management of our land and resources. This motion, however, to my mind stands in stark contrast to those earlier contributions. Frankly, it is really just not in keeping with what I think we should be debating in this place. Those motions were useful, thoughtful and genuinely, deeply relevant to major issues facing Victorians. What you see before us today could not be more different. It is a right-wing dog whistle based on the findings of one so-called survey from the ironically named Institute of Public Affairs. To my mind, having read some of their recent findings, it is an organisation that is representing some rather extreme fringe views.

I know that my focus and the focus of those on this side is on creating jobs, unlocking housing supply, building major new infrastructure such as the Metro Tunnel, making Victorians safer and making Victoria a better place for everyone. Meanwhile, desperate for relevance once again, we are importing a foreign culture war about something that no ordinary Victorian really worries about – no-one really worries about it. People have lives, jobs, businesses, kids, families, studies and communities. They have goals, they have dreams, and they have things that they are passionate about and which they live their lives to advocate and fight for. This motion is none of those things. Ordinary people have far more important things to think about than One Nation's latest imported outrage. Just like them, the government will not be wasting time on this non-issue. Instead we are going to focus on the matters that are important to Victorians, ensuring that Victoria is a vibrant, growing, thriving community for all people to feel safe, to feel welcomed and to feel respected, with accessibility to services that not only improve the livelihoods of people across the state but stand as a reminder of the successes this government has brought forward for all Victorians.

Acting President, I am going to take a moment to direct you to one major omission, in fact, in the motion brought forward by Ms Tyrrell: it says nothing about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags. It is very telling that One Nation cannot even pretend that this stunt is all about flags when they have made it perfectly clear which flags they care about and which ones they do not. This to me is a brazen and disgusting act that has happened during the week of treaty being introduced into this place. It shows a complete and utter lack of respect for this place, for the flags recognised by the Australian nation and for Australia's First People. The Aboriginal flag does not just represent Australia's First People; it also represents the struggles that we have endured throughout history and our determination as a people. Any attempt to separate the Aboriginal flag from its rightful place as one of the flags that represent this vast nation should be condemned. The oldest continuing culture in the world, the one that cared for this country before colonisation and to this day fights for the land, sea and sky, should never, never be disrespected. Australia's First People deserve respect, dignity, acknowledgement and celebration.

I have to say that it is worth noting that the Commonwealth Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet already has detailed protocols regarding the respectful use of the Australian national flag. This includes ensuring it is not allowed to fall or lie on the ground, it is not used to cover a statue or a table and it should never be flown when damaged or dilapidated. This respect is because this place knows that the flags of Australia and Victoria need to be respected, especially in this place. I would ask that some of those here afford that same respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags as well.

On social cohesion – something incredibly important to those in this place – we will soon be introducing new protest safety reforms that will get the balance right. I could talk about all that for quite some time, but let me just say, recently members of this place and the other place and I were confronted with really horrible and unwarranted comments from those who do not share the values on



which Victoria prides itself: equality, freedom, shared responsibility and the commitment to diversity and inclusion. This motion does not reflect those values, it shames them, and I do not support it.

We have recently seen our new anti-vilification offences come into effect, which protect more Victorians from serious vilification and ensure that those who wish to incite hatred or threaten harm because of who someone is, who they love or who they pray to are held accountable. They help ensure our public discourse remains civil by respecting the rights of Victorians to express themselves freely. When One Nation and those opposite had the opportunity to support these bills and these laws – laws designed to protect people and strengthen the cohesion that holds our state together – they voted against them. Now, straight from the playbook of the far right, they have turned to another distraction plucked straight from overseas in a desperate, desperate bid for relevance. It is not going to work. Victorians will absolutely see through it, because they know that this government takes antisocial and violent behaviour very, very seriously, and the existing Victorian and Commonwealth criminal laws already deal with such acts and behaviours. Acts like wilful destruction of property, grossly offensive conduct, criminal damage or riotous and indecent behaviour are already offences. If someone burns an Australian flag or a Victorian flag, Victoria Police can and do take action where appropriate.

To focus on the actionable sections of this motion before us, there are some serious legal and constitutional issues that are being proposed. The actions of the motion would see a ban on flag burning most likely infringe upon section 15 of Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities – something I am familiar with from my now five years on the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee – which protects freedom of expression, including political expression. It would also breach the implied right to freedom of political communication under the Australian constitution, a core value and freedom that Victoria continues to protect. Furthermore, a Victorian law banning flag burning may be inconsistent with federal legislation. Section 6 of the Commonwealth's Flags Act 1953 explicitly allows for the defacing of the Australian flag in certain authorised circumstances. So not only would this motion before us be legally dubious, but it could also be constitutionally reckless. That is what we have got before us right now from One Nation.

Let me just say, Victorians deserve a Parliament that debates issues that actually affect their lives, one that does not waste time on imported culture wars and headline-grabbing stunts. This government stands firm. We are going to do what we were elected to do for the Victorian people: strengthen social cohesion, keep communities safe and focus on the issues that matter to everyday Victorians. I am going to leave my comments there.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (14:29): First of all, I want to take issue with Ms Watt's contribution, which was absolutely inflammatory and a dreadful attack on Ms Tyrrell's point of view. It is not acceptable that Ms Tyrrell's motion and Ms Tyrrell's arguments should be attacked in this personal way; I take absolute exception to it. Ms Tyrrell has every right to bring a motion of whatever flavour she likes to this house, and we have the opportunity to debate it, which is what we are doing now. I want to reiterate exactly what this motion is about:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the Australian national flag and the Victorian state flag are enduring symbols of the nation, representing Australian and Victorian history, values and unity;
- (b) the deliberate desecration of the Australian and Victorian flags are not harmless acts of protest but a threatening act of aggression, a symbolic call to violence against Australia, its institutions and its people;
- (c) 77 per cent of Australians polled by the Institute of Public Affairs believe that burning the Australian national flag should be against the law;
- (d) 63 per cent of Australians polled ... believe that those who burn the Australian ... flag should face jail time;

- (e) 71 per cent of Australians polled ... believe that non-citizens who burn the Australian national flag should be deported; and
- (2) calls on the Allan Labor government to enact legislation to criminalise the desecration of the Australian national and Victorian ... flags.

I rise to speak on the motion before the house today – a motion which asks us to consider the profound significance of our national and state flags and to address the increasing and frankly disgusting phenomenon of their public desecration. The very fact that this motion is necessary is, I believe, a sad indictment of the state of our public discourse and the moral failure of certain elements within our community. The Australian national flag and the Victorian state flag, as paragraph (1)(a) rightly states, are enduring symbols of our nation and our state, and they do represent our history, recall our shared values and symbolise our unity.

Even those who seek to desecrate them clearly agree. The very reason they choose to burn the flag is because it is more than a piece of cloth – these days probably polyester, unfortunately. It is because the flag represents our national story and our pride in Australia's story of democracy, freedom, tolerance and remarkable prosperity – all built on the sacrifices of those who came before us. It is indisputable that we have seen in recent times these symbols treated with despicable contempt. We have watched as protests, often driven by disorder and hatred imported from other countries, spill into our streets, where the most visible form of aggression is the burning or defilement of our national standard. In many cases this is not a harmless act of protest, as paragraph (1)(b) describes; it is a calculated, threatening act of aggression. It is a direct assault on the very idea of Australia as a successful, integrated and harmonious society.

To desecrate our flag is not an accidental decision, nor is it trivial. It is premeditated, calculated and all too often a call for symbolic injury against Australia, its institutions, its values and our people. Free speech is sacrosanct. It protects the unpopular and the provocative. This is where the dilemma lies. As a Liberal, I wrestle with the implications of criminalisation. I did not come to this place to add to the statute book, and there should be a very high bar on banning anything. I do, however, believe it can be consistent. I have always argued that everybody should be free to do anything and everything they like until they harm others, but there is an argument for this. Society should only restrict liberty to prevent harm to others. We ought only to intervene when actions cause tangible injury.

So is that the case here? I would say yes. Flag desecration arguably does cause tangible injury. It profoundly harms social cohesion. It provokes violence and it signals aggression against fellow citizens. It is not mere expression, but destruction – akin to vandalism – that erodes trust in our institutions. It is also a position that fits with a conservative view too – the idea that we would preserve respect for institutions to effectively safeguard the very freedoms those institutions guarantee. We do not ban ideas, but we can and arguably must curb acts that symbolically attack the polity itself. In the face of rising social angst I believe we should back this measure. The bar must be high, but in this instance I do believe the conscious public desecration of our flag risks eroding the fabric of our shared identity and causing deeper divisions which cause tangible harm.

In calling on the Allan Labor government to act, as the motion does, I urge a measured approach. Legislation should be carefully crafted to target deliberate desecration with clear intent to incite hatred or public disorder, balancing deterrence with proportionality. We must distinguish between sincere, even passionate, political speech and acts whose primary, indeed sole, purpose is to wound the nation and divide its people. We must use this moment to stand firmly against the corrosive anti-national sentiment that seeks to dismantle our society. We must speak out against the small but vocal groups who use the cover of protest to import foreign grievances and to express contempt for our free and successful way of life. The Australian flag is a symbol of our unity, our democracy and our hard-won freedoms. To treat it with such contempt is to treat the Australian people with contempt. We support the sentiment of this motion, and we urge all Victorians to reject this cultural vandalism and recommit to the shared values that our flags so proudly represent.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (14:36): I rise to speak on this motion. I know my colleague Ms Gray-Barberio was very keen to speak on this motion, but unfortunately she has lost her voice, so I will be speaking on behalf of the Greens and just putting our position on the record. I would like to say at the outset we strongly oppose this motion. One Nation are weaponising support for the Australian flag to fuel division. That is what this motion is doing.

This motion is nothing more than anti-immigration sentiment dressed up as patriotism. Of particular concern is point (e), which is discriminatory and unconstitutional. Suggesting a two-tier system of human rights based on citizenship alienates migrant communities and undermines social cohesion. You cannot have one rule for one and another rule for another based on visa status. It is absurd and fundamentally racist. I would also like to highlight the reliance on the Institute of Public Affairs, or IPA, polling in this motion, which was helpfully referenced by Mrs McArthur. I have a lot of things I could say about the IPA. I will not go into all of those things, but I will point out that the IPA's 2024 annual report shows that 10 donors each contributed more than \$200,000. It was difficult to find out who these donors were, but we should not be shaping public policy on the basis of opaque, privately funded polling from right-wing lobby groups who are, let us face it, bent on sowing hate and division. The racist scapegoating of migrant communities must stop. Australia's diversity is one of our greatest strengths. Attempts to divide communities along lines of citizenship are unacceptable and dangerous. The Victorian Greens say that migrants are welcome here. They deserve the same freedoms and opportunities as any other Victorian.

Additionally, nonviolent protests and demonstrations are a key tactic. They are a core part of democracy. They are essential for communities to be able to pressure governments into taking much-needed action. They have led to some of the most important changes in our society, as many people in here would be aware of, and maybe many of you have been part of some of these protests and movements. I know that many of my colleagues here have attended protests for different causes that are important to them. They have led to things like the right for women to vote. We saw the protection of the Franklin River come out of protests. The Wave Hill walk-off was a pivotal step in achieving Aboriginal land rights.

Political expression should be protected in a democracy. The Greens support nonviolent protest; however, criminalising symbolic acts as implied in this motion is disproportionate. Deporting non-citizens for symbolic protests raises serious concerns about freedom of expression and the democratic values we uphold. Human rights must be equally applied, protected and respected. All citizens in Victoria have the right to protest, and we must continue to protect that right.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:40): I rise to speak on this motion brought by Ms Tyrrell. I have had the benefit of listening to my colleague Ms Watt and also Dr Mansfield and Mrs McArthur. It is a very disappointing motion. Perhaps One Nation would think that it is a productive use of this Parliament's time to debate something that really is dog-whistling to racists and waging divisive culture wars. It really is an appalling way to continue to fan the flames of division.

I will play along. I have some genuine questions about this. I do not expect Ms Tyrrell to answer, but I do have some questions around some of the wording of this motion. Point (1)(b) refers to the deliberate desecration of the Australian flag. Who is going to be the arbiter of that? I see many people use the Australian flag in many different ways. Does it mean that we are no longer going to be able to put the Australian flag on a beer holder? Will that be desecration? What happens when a streaker runs out at the cricket cloaked in an Australian flag – completely nude but having the flag flowing along behind them? Would that be considered desecration of a flag? I do not know. Who is going to be the arbiter of this kind of garbage? Does that mean if you go down to Woolworths and buy a pair of thongs with the Australian flag on them that is public desecration because you wear them on your feet? I mean, this is how ludicrous this is. Where does it begin and end, and who is going to be the arbiter of this kind of stuff?

The motion goes on to say that the Institute of Public Affairs has run a survey. Everyone in this place knows and those who might be playing along at home will also know that the IPA is a right-wing think tank. It is hardly a credible organisation. I am an Australian and I have never been polled by the IPA. I wonder why. You are going to be looking at results that are clearly from people who are within their natural constituency. They want to talk to themselves. It refers to 77 per cent of Australians. Well, I do not know how big the sample size was, and we all know that if you are actually a credible organisation, you should outline who you sampled, when and how. So it is just complete garbage. It is really not appropriate that we have a motion that states these sorts of figures to try and give some kind of weird legitimacy to what is nothing more than a vox pop. They might have just sent out an email request: 'What do you think of this?' It is hardly credible, and it is quite concerning that the motion then calls for the government to jail people for stuff like this. Honestly, it is crazy. It really is just about fanning the flames of the culture wars, because that is all the Liberal Party, One Nation and people from those kinds of backgrounds have – to continue to be divisive, to continue to drive division and fear in the community.

How are Australians concerned about this sort of stuff when they are actually concerned about the cost of living? They are actually concerned about keeping a roof over their head. That is what they want their governments to be focused on, not something of this nature. It is just an opportunity to be in this chamber and talk about culture wars. I am sure this will appear on social media somewhere, and I am sure that many of us on the government benches and the crossbenches will feature in those videos and be attacked for it. It is a very sad state of affairs to say that these sorts of things are 'a threatening act of aggression, a symbolic call to violence against Australia, its institutions and its people'.

Dr Mansfield was right. Part of this motion talks about having a two-tiered system where based on race, you should be deported. I mean, how does that actually work? It is like going back to the days of 'Let's have a white Australia.' It is nuts; it is absolutely nuts. I do not know in what world this was written – it is actually quite like a parallel universe. It is, again, racist dog whistling, demonising people and saying that there is an us and them, and it is all cloaked in 'We love our flag.' Everybody on this side of the chamber can see that, and the progressive crossbenchers can see that. It is really disappointing. To state with any level of confidence that the IPA could have even conducted a credible survey on this – again, their natural constituency; they are talking to themselves. No-one is going to believe it. So I do not know what the point of this motion is. I am not sure what Ms Tyrrell is trying to achieve by bringing this motion other than to spend a slot in Parliament this week talking about culture wars. We see what is happening in other parts of the world. We see what is happening in America with the flames of the culture wars being driven and fanned by this type of rhetoric. I am sorry, it is really terrible.

**Bev McArthur:** Are you in favour of burning the flag?

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** On the interjection from Mrs McArthur about burning the flag: no-one is ringing my office and complaining about flag burning. They are not. What they are talking to me about is the cost of living. No-one is talking about this, Mrs McArthur, except people who vote for the Liberal Party or One Nation, and we get that because you want to continue to divide our community rather than bring people together and look at what we can unite over. You just waste time talking about these things. Really it is nationalist pride cloaked in aggression, divisiveness and frightening people. There are plenty of people who do not share your views, and that is why you are in the state you are in right now. You will probably be in electoral Siberia if you continue talking about these sorts of things, so go right ahead. Most people know that the IPA is a right-wing think tank. It has no credibility amongst normal, thinking people. People know this. That is why people do not watch the mainstream media anymore. That is why people are choosing to look with a lot of critical thinking at the information that they consume.

If I look at this motion, what you are calling on our government to do is legislate to criminalise the desecration of the Australian flag. Who would police it? How much would it cost? You continually come in here week in, week out complaining about the government and taxes and all this stuff, yet you

want somebody to set something up that would try people – I am assuming there would be some kind of criminal trial, because it is a little bit light on detail about how this would actually work. How are you going to fund this? Would it be funded by taxes? I do not know. It would mean you are going to have somebody who is going to sit there looking at operating some legislation and having criminal trials. If it is going to be criminalised, people would go before the courts and be jailed for this stuff. On the one hand you criticise us for having our jails full of people, but you want to add to them simply because you are upset about somebody who may burn a flag. Like I said, what would desecration and defilement look like? If you wanted to put it on a beer stubby holder or put it on a pair of budgie smugglers, could that be desecration? I do not know, I might find that offensive. If I am looking at somebody who is wearing a pair of budgie smugglers, I might not want to see that. That might be offensive, and I might consider that a public desecration of our flag. I mean, honestly, this is how ridiculous this is. This is where we have come to in this Parliament, that One Nation and those opposite actually think it is a good use of our time this week. I am glad Mr Limbrick is going, ‘Don’t look at me.’ That is good, because this is not a productive use of our time.

**Bev McArthur:** Well, sit down and don’t talk about it, then.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Well, no. I have been asked to, so I will.

**A member** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** That is right; I am doing my job. The people who elect us expect us, as elected representatives, to come in here and do the right thing in terms of arguing points that we want to argue and getting results for our communities. But this is such a fringe culture war – a dog-whistling, racist, divisive and hatred-motivated motion. Ms Tyrrell, you really are better than that. It is a real shame that you have brought this here today and that you think this is a good idea. It will come as no surprise to anybody in this chamber and anybody who might be playing along at home that the government opposes this motion.

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (14:49): Well, well, well, where to start? That was a whole lot of vitriol from over there.

**Sonja Terpstra:** No, it wasn’t. It was common sense.

**Moira DEEMING:** You think vitriol is common sense? That is what you think is common sense, isn’t it? That is, based on your behaviour, what you think is common sense – absolute vitriol and hatred, and obviously attacking the person rather than the argument as well. What did we hear? We heard ‘culture wars’. I am here to fight for my culture, 100 per cent, and my culture includes everybody in this country, regardless of colour, regardless of any kind of origin. It is not about division. It is one flag that we can all actually, as one society, unite under. Regardless of the legality of the last part of the motion, I am standing here to defend defending the Australian flag.

I also note, as Ms Tyrrell has told me, that for all of your outrage over there about not having the Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag also included in this, you did not go to her and offer an amendment. I would have agreed to that. I noticed it myself, and I wanted to say that I would have agreed to have it there, 100 per cent.

*Members interjecting.*

**Moira DEEMING:** Wait, it gets better. You are going to love this. Be patient. In October 2023 I asked the Attorney-General to please outline the rationale behind the decision not to display the Australian flag on any Victorian government department website alongside the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags. And the answer that came back was this:

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags appear on Victorian Government websites as a sign of respect and acknowledgement for our First Peoples. The Allan Labor Government is proud to be leading the nation implementing the full Uluru Statement from the Heart – Voice, Treaty, Truth.

**Jacinta Ermacora** interjected.

**Moira DEEMING:** Wait. You need to wait.

**Renee Heath:** On a point of order, Acting President, Ms Ermacora is continually ignoring your rulings, and I ask you to pull her into line.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** I ask that the remainder of Mrs Deeming's contribution is heard in silence.

**Moira DEEMING:** The other part of the answer was:

Victorian government departments and agencies are responsible for developing content for publishing on government websites.

Your side – your government – do not put the Australian flag on any of the websites. I agree with you that the three should be together. I agree with you. It is a disgrace that the Australian flag under this Victorian Labor government is nowhere in the public service. That is spitting in the face of this country. It is absolutely obscene, and for you to get up here and blather on about how you hate culture wars – if you hated culture wars, you would have put the Australian flag alongside the other two. You are the ones waging a culture war. You are the ones erasing any chance of social cohesion and unity and a unifying culture. You guys, I mean, I know you did not want the Commonwealth Games, probably because you do not like Australian flags, so you sent it over to another country. What are you going to do with people –

**Ryan Batchelor:** On a point of order, Acting President, the member should direct her remarks through the Chair.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** I uphold the point of order and ask Mrs Deeming to direct her comments through the Chair.

**Moira DEEMING:** What are we thinking about with the Olympics, then? Sending our Australian citizens, Aboriginals, people of different ethnic descents to represent this nation waving the Australian flag, are you calling them racist culture war fighters? Is that what is going on? The people opposite said it was a motion based on hatred, barbarism, Americanism – I mean, that is very racist. Why are you so against foreigners? 'Right-wing dog whistles', 'extreme right-wing views' – you realise Hitler was a socialist, which is left, but anyway. 'Imported foreign outrage' – I mean, the people opposite to me sound like the racist ones.

Flags are important. I do actually believe in the right to protest – peaceful protest. One of the best illustrations to me of the beauty of national pride was when I, as a councillor, went to my first ever Australian citizenship ceremony and I saw the emotion and the pride in the faces of those people when they got their Australian citizenship, holding and waving that Australian flag – people of every colour from everywhere on the earth, and they came here because of what that flag symbolises. How dare it be said in this place that the Australian flag represents racism and division when people from all over the world flee here from communism and socialism and war-torn, ravaged countries, divided by the kinds of things that the Labor Party is known for dividing and conquering over? How dare that be said here? What a disgrace. That is unparliamentary language. It is un-Australian, unpatriotic and, honestly, unbecoming. I cannot believe the disgusting, disparaging insults that were levelled against people who voted for parties other than yours. Just in general, you should not have contempt for any – not even one – of the people that you govern over. That is a disgraceful position to hold. I do not have any contempt for the people who vote Labor, because I am an adult. It is a disgraceful thing for a public servant to say or for a government to say.

Do you know what I did not hear? I did not hear any condemnation of the idea of disrespecting and burning the Australian flag. Where was that? Crickets, silence replaced with faux outrage. It is absolutely disgraceful. Then my colleagues opposite had the temerity to bring up the anti-vilification laws. Who on earth would be able to work out what is disrespectful and offensive? Well, they manage

to work it out in the anti-vilification laws, where they said that a little group of people from the group who might be offended get to decide. So we could just pick out a bunch of Australians and say they get to decide. Based on the stats that have been recorded in this motion, most people would find that offensive.

**A member:** From IPA statistics.

**Moir DEEMING:** Go on, do your own poll. Except we all know that the Labor Party only consults stakeholders who have a conflict of interest because they already receive taxpayer dollars. You are so against private money and private opinions. You only want opinions – Labor, I apologise. This government wants to pay for opinions using taxpayer dollars of people who did not vote for them. What they do is they get ‘stakeholders’ who are financially conflicted with those taxpayer dollars to give them the opinions that they already wanted. So forgive me if I do not really care if the Institute of Public Affairs is funded by private money. You still should not be speaking with such contempt about people who vote in this state and this country that you happen to govern over right now. You really ought to behave better than that.

The other thing that I have to say – and then I will finish up – is that these are absolutely disturbing times with regard to the social cohesion issue. We have actually seen, shockingly and disgracefully, actual –

**Jacinta Ermacora:** No thanks to you.

**Moir DEEMING:** On a point of order, Acting President, she said, ‘Thanks to you personally.’ What did you mean by that?

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** That is not a point of order. Mrs Deeming, you have got 53 seconds left to continue with the contribution.

**Moir DEEMING:** Condemning racism is never enough for Labor unless you vote for them, unless you say words that they want you to say, unless you betray your own culture and betray Australia. Unless you get down on your knees and you completely capitulate to Labor, they will call you racist. They will call you all kinds of names. They are not fit to govern. They are barely even respectful of the people that they govern over. They certainly do not respect Australians, and I absolutely condemn them.

**David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:59):** We are talking about the Australian and Victorian flags, and I actually am quite a fan of the Australian and Victorian flags. If you look at the Australian flag, you have got this cool bit of astronomy with the Southern Cross, you have got the Federation Star celebrating our achievement of forming a federation, and I know lots of people do not like the fact that were once a colony, but yes, we have the Union Jack signifying our history – that we were once part of a colony. The Victorian flag, as you can see, and this chamber, were built before Federation, and we have the crown where the Federation Star is on the Victorian flag. I am quite a fan of the Victorian and the Australian flags, even though I am not a fan of flags in general.

The time when I see the flags the most is actually at something that all MPs get invited to, and that is citizenship ceremonies. I have done a lot of them. I try and get to as many as I can.

**A member** interjected.

**David LIMBRICK:** Yes, they are good. They are really wholesome, actually. One of the things that you have to do at a citizenship ceremony – and it is actually compulsory before you can become a citizen – is you have to take the citizenship pledge. There are two versions, with and without God. I will do the without God version. Citizens who are born here can take this pledge as well, and in fact they are encouraged to do so at citizenship ceremonies, and I usually do when I am offered the opportunity. It says:

From this time forward,

I pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people,  
whose democratic beliefs I share,  
whose rights and liberties I respect, and  
whose laws I will uphold and obey.

You can see how, to a Libertarian, this is pretty cool because we are talking about respecting people's rights and liberties. Then straight after that, all the people come up one by one; they want to get a photo; you hand them a little plastic Australian flag – it is probably made in China, but the thought is there – they get a little bag, and it has usually got some little trinket present in it; and they look like they are having the best day of their life, most of them that I have spoken to. They want to have photos. They chose to do this. They chose to become Australian, and they chose to take this oath to respect other people's rights and liberties in Australia. That is a really significant thing. And I will say this: one of those rights and liberties is freedom of expression.

Freedom of political expression, as was pointed out earlier – or an implied right to political expression – is protected under the Australian constitution. As much as I think it is mostly useless, under our Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities it is protected. I would say that protecting that right of freedom of expression is actually one of the things that makes us Australian. In fact it is one of the things that ties us together under Western civilisation. Almost no Western country criminalises the burning of its own flags. That is not because they like it – it is okay to hate someone doing that; it is okay to be not cool with someone burning a flag – but because they recognise that in a free society, sometimes people are going to take actions that are peaceful but that they do not like. They are going to say things that you do not like, they are going to do things that you do not like, and if you live in a free society, you have to deal with that.

A long-time problem with the left is that they want to criminalise everything that they do not like. Unfortunately, it is also a problem with the right. They see someone burning a flag and they say, 'I want them to go to jail.' You do not go to jail in Canada if you burn a flag, even though lots of people might hate it, or in America, in Australia or even in Japan. Japan is not a Western country, but they do have a lot of Western values because of their history. In most of these free Western countries – let us not talk about New Zealand; they have got a fine for it, but we will bypass them for the moment – it is not a crime to burn the national flag, however horrific you may think it is.

I understand the concerns of people who see people burning the Australian flag, and for some of these people I actually share these concerns and wonder what they are doing in this country. In fact I have made very public criticisms of ASIO and the AFP because I am concerned that they are not doing their job properly. When I see people on the streets that somehow have a visa and they are promoting Hamas, for example, I wonder on what basis they are in this country and who they really care about. I think that we should take action on this sort of thing. When people are promoting terrorist organisations that are against Australia or against Australia's interests, we need to be very concerned. I have also been very alarmed by some of the things that have come out with the connections between what we have been talking about for ages with organised crime, specifically with the tobacco wars, and antisemitic attacks in Melbourne. How on earth have we let this get out of control like this? I think the AFP and ASIO really need to pull their socks up and do their job. But one of the things that these people – like these terrorist groups, like any of these groups that hate freedom – want us to do is to overreact and criminalise things that go against the principles of a free society, because then they can call us hypocrites.

Then they can say, 'Look at these hypocrites. They don't really believe in freedom. When this thing happens, they call for harsh reactions, just like we would.' That is what they are trying to trap us into. Western civilisation, in particular Australia, because that is what we care about here, must stand firm in protecting freedom. I will note the hypocrisy from the government. At the same time they oppose this, they want to criminalise things that they do not like at protests. It is coming up soon – I know I am probably breaching anticipation or something, but the government has spoken many times in public about the desire to ban masks and ban all these sorts of things. We are talking about free



expression again. The opposition has been just as bad. They have got a bill that is in debate at the moment. We have to stand firm in defence of freedom, otherwise we are abandoning the very principles that Australia is founded on.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (15:06): I think this debate comes at an interesting point where we are in the world at the moment. There seems to be a real hyper move to the extremes of politics. I think we all need to take some responsibility in trying to calm the state of politics down. I think we are very fortunate in Australia and very fortunate in Victoria – something I am very, very thankful for – that we have mandatory voting, so the sensible centre of our society has a very strong say in the way that our democratic institutions are elected and are run. I think that is something we all need to lean into. It is something I have had regular conversations about recently: ensuring that somehow we are keeping value in the institutions that we have that have existed for a very, very long time and have stood us in good stead.

We should be very thankful for the freedoms that we have in Victoria and Australia, the opportunities we have, the ability to express ourselves and the ability to live harmoniously. If you stop and think, it is actually quite incredible that these conditions exist where we can live such peaceful, happy lives alongside people of different opinions and of different faiths, people who are attracted to different people – all sorts of various things – and that we can get on with our lives. Of course there are going to be things that people feel very, very strongly about and people are going to want to take political action or various other action on – we understand that. Particularly for some of us, when we are younger we are more passionate in our views. I suppose what worries me about this motion is that we are perhaps overanalysing or over-reacting to an issue that does not currently present itself frequently and perhaps making it worse. I think what we can do to ensure our democracy, ensure participation in that democracy and ensure respect is work on tolerance and work on understanding people that have different opinions to ours.

Many times in this place I have spoken about it, that we should come here and have a strong contest of ideas, because that is what we are here to do. I am not trying to say that the world is all cherries, bubblegum and fairy floss and all that sort of stuff and everyone just gets along. We have to come in here and contest and debate ideas. The biggest problem I have is that the Liberal Party do not bring any ideas, but that is another point. We are not going to let them off scot-free over there. I really hope we are not (a) leaning into a problem that does not exist or (b) leaning into a situation where people make decisions or people take actions, particularly young people, that they may live to regret.

My great-great-great-grandfather got off the boat from Ireland and found himself digging gold in Ballarat. He was at the Eureka Stockade, and he was brought to Melbourne to be hanged. My mum, who is a passionate historian, has got all the paperwork that I have been meaning to put up in my office showing him getting off from that sentence. Thankfully for all of you, he did, otherwise I might not be here and you might not be enjoying my contribution right now.

*Members interjecting.*

**Tom McINTOSH:** Thanks for the support from the other side.

We need to respect and cherish our institutions, but that does not mean we cannot look to make changes to them. I am a supporter of a republic. I do not love having the Union Jack on our flag. Now, that does not mean I am going to go and do things to the flag that we have, but it does mean that I will take action to try and see changes occur to things that I want to see changed, as should everyone.

We see around the world this sort of hyperaggression in politics of they, the other, being completely wrong and I, or we in our position, being completely right and correct. Not to blame new technology, because it has always existed, but we see the presentation of this at a faster or more accessible rate through social media. I really do think it is upon all of us to lean in to society, to lean in to young people and to lean in to people who are isolated and finding solutions or answers in things that the majority of us do not believe. It is politics that is hate filled, politics that is violent, and effectively we

get to a point where it is politics that is dangerous, that endangers individuals in our society trying to live healthy, happy lives. What I am proud to do as a member of the Labor Party is focus on things that improve the quality of people's lives every single day. It is a fact that they can get educated from an early point in their life and develop their ability to engage meaningfully in our economy from an early stage in life. It is a fact that they can, through that education, whether it is in a university or training and skills, get out into the workforce and be a productive contributor to our economy, to their families and to their local community. They can have a house that they can live in and raise a family in if they wish, and they can live in a local community and neighbourhood and make those connections that make their life rich and worthwhile. If they make those connections that are rich and worthwhile, then we are less likely to see antisocial behaviour or feelings of ill will and anger towards others and all these things.

It is about ensuring those jobs are well paid so that people and their families can have a better quality of life than the generation before. So when you are putting in education, when you are putting in training and skills, when you are seeing the conditions of jobs and employment improve, when you are ensuring that housing is available at affordable rates and when you are ensuring there is a transport network, whether that is people being able to drive from A to B or people being able to take public transport from A to B, and all of this is in a sustainable local and global environment, we have the conditions where hopefully the basic needs of human life are met and the conditions people are living in are better than the generation before. That is essentially what I think we should be working on. We should be debating the best path to achieve that. I would hope that through doing so people do not find the need for violence, for aggression.

If people want to debate the best ways to achieve those core services and provide for the infrastructure needs of a community, of a society, of a state and of a nation, then absolutely let us do that. But let us not move to a place where people are finding themselves isolated, disconnected, frustrated, angry and violent, because we can see around the world what that leads to. It leads to horrible, horrific, very, very, very sad outcomes. So we should absolutely be thankful every single day for the democracy that we live in and the opportunities that we have in this state and this nation. I would say we should be absolutely proud of our state.

**A member:** Hear, hear!

**Tom McIntosh:** Yes, I genuinely believe in this state. I was fortunate that during my 20s in between working I would go away and travel for a while and do this and that. A lot of people would say to me, 'How, as an electrician, do you travel?' I would say, 'That's all right. We get paid all right wages in our country, in Victoria and Australia, as construction workers.' So it was good. The beautiful society we have is something that we should absolutely cherish and we should celebrate and we should not talk down. But we should acknowledge people have the right to push ideas and political positions that they see would improve society in a way they see fit. I have run out of time; I will leave my contribution there. Thank you for my opportunity to contribute.

**Renee Heath** (Eastern Victoria) (15:16): First of all, I want to thank Ms Tyrrell for bringing this important motion to the house. I also want to thank Mr McIntosh. That was a very good speech. I was so disappointed and disheartened at the ones before that, because I tell you what, in all honesty, I would give my life for this flag. I would die for this nation and I would die for this flag because of what it represents. Australia is an amazing place. It is the best nation on earth. It has an Indigenous heritage, it has a British foundation and it has a multicultural character, and the only way that we can move forward as one is if we begin to see each of those and respect them for the individual and vital parts that they play.

I was so disappointed to hear those from the other side. I hate to give Labor a free kick, but what we heard from two of those members I am sure is not what they believe, because this is an incredible nation and this is an incredible state. This has become the envy of the world – and it is because of the freedom and the democracy that that flag represents. Let me tell you – I do not think that it would be

from any ill will – that I would also be so offended if I saw the Aboriginal flag being burnt. I would never stand for that, because when you burn a flag that is never going to heal a heart. Burning a flag is never going to bring people together. What it does is it demonises, it expresses hatred and it divides people and just rips nations apart, and it should never, ever be accepted.

I was so disappointed to hear those two. I am not even going to mention their names, but I will mention some of the things they said about Ms Tyrrell, who I am sure is a flawed character, like all of us are, but she has come with her heart for the nation, which I absolutely love about her. We are all flawed, we all come with different things, but like Mrs Deeming said, when you do not have an argument, you begin to attack the person. I was so upset to see that, because surely we are better than this. Here are a few of the things that I was so mad with. One of the members of the government said she was desperate for relevance. That is absolutely not true. What she is desperate for is to see the fabric in the community work together. Western democracy has actually become a safe haven for people that are escaping poverty and communism. It is a safe haven for those girls that are escaping Afghanistan, where they can come to and get an education. It is an escape for those women that are in fear in Iran, where they are being shot and killed and executed in public because they choose to show their hair.

That is what the Australian flag means: it is freedom and it is democracy. It makes sure not just that people have the rule of law and economic independence and those things that protect us, but that everyone has equality of opportunity, if not necessarily equality of outcome. I love that flag, I love this nation, and anybody who burns that flag as a sign of resistance or a sign of – whatever it is – hatred should have the whole force of the law come down on them, because I tell you what, that flag represents values that people die for. People stand up in countries that are under communism and under different things where they are trying to break out of poverty. What that flag does and what that flag represents is freedom. What it represents is the hope that a little girl can come here and can get an education, and it does not matter who her dad is. She is not going to be traded off; she is not going to be a child that is subject to child marriage. What that flag represents is that little girl, not because of who she was born to but because she is human, gets a chance. That is what that flag means to me. I love this flag, I love this country. And to hear some of those things – let me read some others which I just thought were so incredibly upsetting. Why is it, by the way, that one-third of small businesses in this nation are started by immigrants? It is because this is the land of opportunity where people can come and they can put back and they can serve, and they can achieve their dreams. And from their success, they can make way for others. I thank God for people like that, because people like that have made way for me, let me tell you.

This is why it is important to me: Australia has an Indigenous foundation. One of the people that has made the biggest mark on my life and is like a north star to me is an Indigenous man who when he was younger was put in a prison cell where somebody had just been kicked to death because he was Indigenous. He has walked through and he has seen the change in this nation. He has seen the beginning of reconciliation but not the end. That is what this flag means to me. The second part is that the Indigenous heritage of this nation matters. It is the very soil that we all live on. It is the spirit of what we carry. It is the Indigenous heritage of this nation.

The second thing I want to talk about is the British foundation, which has allowed the rule of law and democracy, and to make sure that when people have arguments it is based on reason. It is the British foundation that has allowed people to live a life of freedom. It is incredible. It has forged the way for democracy, and it is democracy that allows people to thrive and live life according to their terms.

The third part is we have a multicultural character. It does not matter where you come from, you can have a go here. It does not matter if you were born in Afghanistan, China, Australia, New Zealand or America. If you come here, you have the same rights as everybody else, and that is what this flag means to me. To hear the hatred that has been spewed is just an affront to everything that we stand for in this place. Like I said, I am very serious. I have not even touched my notes, but I love this flag, and I live for this nation, and I would die for this nation because of what it represents. There are so many people who would absolutely give up anything to be here. I am very lucky that every few weeks I get

to attend citizenship ceremonies. Mr Limbrick quoted it before. They stand there and they say, 'I pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people, whose rights I will uphold and whose liberties I will respect and obey.' They give up everything else because they know that this is where they want to be. I tell you what, it does not matter where they were born, they are Australian because they carry that spirit and that attitude. To say that bringing something forward like this is racist is one of the most offensive things I have ever heard, because that flag is a sign of unity. It is something that every one of us can unite and stand under.

I just want to say one other thing, and this is what I was actually going to start my speech on, but now I have got about a minute and 15 seconds left. A couple of Sundays ago I was walking through the CBD with some friends, and I was devastated to see a pro-Palestinian march with people walking down with desecrated Australian flags. That broke my heart, because I tell you what, people in Palestine matter and people in Israel matter. But what should never come onto our streets is the desecration of the Australian flag, the very symbol that brings us all together. I commend this motion to the house, and I say well done, Ms Tyrrell, for bringing it on.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:25): I rise to speak on Ms Tyrrell's motion about the Australian flag. We have had a lot of passionate contributions in the course of the debate this afternoon, and I acknowledge Dr Heath's passion in her contribution. It may surprise some that there was a little bit there that I actually really agreed with, and that was that we need to take into account and listen to the contributions that have been made in this place before us today. I think it is important that in the context of a debate about whether or not it should be illegal to burn or desecrate the Australian flag, we should take some time to reflect on some of the prior contributions that have been made here in this chamber.

I will start my speech there. The first quote I will use is this:

Freedom of speech is the most important freedom we have.

That was from Mr Mulholland in his inaugural speech. In her inaugural speech Mrs McArthur said:

I will fight the dangerous march of thought police, who present a serious threat to individual freedom through political correctness.

Dr Heath in August 2023 said:

Freedom of speech is something that has been developed over centuries that humanity has only learned through great suffering.

She went on to say in that speech:

... no government that has ever censored people's speech has been on the side of freedom and democracy.

I make these remarks and I quote members opposite from their prior contributions in this chamber because, fundamentally, that is what this debate is about. It is about freedom of speech. It is about whether in a democracy we do not only say words that support freedom of speech when it is convenient for us, but we also do it when it is inconvenient for us. We also support that those words would be genuine, that we would be able to say that those words were sincerely spoken, if the defence of freedom of speech or the march against political correctness was something that we supported even when that speech or that action was against a symbol that we also loved. Otherwise, the protestation of support for an ideological principle is hollow. It means nothing if when it is tested it can be trampled upon by their own words. That is what we need to think about in today's debate. That is what people should reflect on when they claim to support freedom and yet seek to criminalise a political act because they like the object that is under consideration. That, fundamentally, is what many who believe in the rule of law and who believe in freedoms and who believe in democratic rights across the world believe in.

There were some references earlier in the debate today to what is happening in the United States, and I really want to make sure that no-one in this chamber is under any illusion about what the law is in the United States. The United States have a freedom to burn their flag. The US Supreme Court has

twice – most recently in 1989 – upheld that the burning of an American flag is protected by the American first amendment right to freedom of speech. We have the case of *Texas v Johnson* from 1989, where someone burnt an American flag outside of a political convention in a state that had passed a law that said that that act should be illegal. What did the US Supreme Court rule in 1989? The majority of the court agreed that flag burning constitutes a form of symbolic speech that is protected by the first amendment – this is the first amendment to the United States constitution – and that freedom of speech protects actions that society may find very offensive and society's outrage alone is not justification for suppressing free speech. In particular the US Supreme Court majority in that case noted that the Texas law, the law which had been put on the statute books to prevent the burning or desecration of the American flag, discriminated upon viewpoint. Although the law punished actions, such as flag burning, that might arouse anger in others, it specifically exempted from prosecution actions that were respectful of venerated objects. The majority said the government could not discriminate in this manner based solely upon viewpoint. That is what the law is in the United States. That is what people in that country who believe in their right to freedom of speech believe in.

In Australia we have an implied right of political communication in our constitution. Although there has not been a law passed by a state or territory that might impinge upon that right, what this motion today calls for is the enacting of such a right. So what we should do is think about whether the law proposed or the law sought by Ms Tyrrell's motion would also infringe upon the principle of free political communication that we have in this country thanks to decisions of the High Court. I think it is highly arguable that it would. It is highly arguable that the actions that this motion calls on the government to outlaw would in fact infringe upon the rights that we have as Australians under our constitution to participate freely in political discourse – freedoms that, from listening to them before today, I thought the Liberal Party believed in, because they tell us that they do. They stand up when it is convenient and say that they believe in free speech. They stand up and say that freedom of speech, according to Mr Mulholland, is the most important freedom that we have. He must have forgotten the 'but': 'but not when it's something I disagree with'. He might want to come into the chamber in the course of the debate and clarify those matters.

Mrs McArthur said, 'I will fight the dangerous march of the thought police,' in her inaugural. I must have missed the point where she said 'except when the thought police want to stop us from desecrating or burning a flag'. She thinks, according to her inaugural speech, that the thought police present a serious threat to individual freedom through political correctness. Well, through you, Acting President, to Mrs McArthur: I cannot think of how else we can describe the action Ms Tyrrell's motion calls for other than a form of political correctness, because it is saying there is a correct way to treat a civic object.

If people on that side of the chamber purport to believe in the values that they espouse when convenient, they should stand up and do so when it is inconvenient for them, otherwise it is hollow, otherwise we cannot believe them when they say that they believe in freedom. We cannot believe them when they say that freedom of speech is the most important right that we have and that no government that has censored people's speech has been on the side of freedom and democracy – the words of Dr Heath. We do not support this motion.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:35): I wish to rise to speak on the motion put forward by Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell from One Nation. I want to particularly thank my colleague Renee Heath for her very passionate speech, which will resonate with so many Victorians and Australians because it was about the pride that we hold in our national flag. It was about the pride that we hold in ourselves as Australians. I cannot tell you how many times I have shed a tear as I have stood and looked up at the Australian flag, whether it be in a moment at an Anzac service or whether it be because we are receiving a medal for an athlete that is representing our country. But when that national anthem plays and the camera goes to the flag, there are many times when I, and I am sure many Australians, have had a sense of pride in our nation.

As a person who attends many, many citizenship ceremonies – there are seven councils in the south-east that are represented – I can say that I know that that flag means a great deal to many new migrants.

They are so proud to become Australian citizens. One of the favourite days for people to become Australian citizens is Australia Day, and they love to have their photos near the flag because they know what they have left behind. That flag is a symbol of a nation that is providing freedom – freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of association. It has been said in this place before that people have given their lives for it. They looked up at that flag before they gave their lives, marching off to their destinations, where they may never have returned to Australian soil. That flag was part of the inspiration for them – that sense of identity and national pride that we stand for something, that we provide something.

We have a motion being ridiculed when it is talking about the importance of not desecrating that flag, of not desecrating the symbol for which we stand. It is not about whether someone likes it or does not like it. It is a symbol of who we are as a nation. It is incredibly important. Let me tell you, there would be a number of nations that would be very angry and people groups that would be very angry if people decided to demonstrate and burn their flag. Listening to some of the contributions, I can only wonder how offensive it would be for me and many other Australians if somebody decided to do something so abominable as taking somebody's flag that means something to them and burning and desecrating it. We are a nation, and we are a nation that is of freedom, but desecrating a flag is not appropriate.

I want to take up something that Mr Batchelor said, because he mentioned the American first amendment. I want to say that this was put out by the White House, and it says:

Notwithstanding the Supreme Court's rulings on First Amendment protections, the Court has never held that American Flag desecration conducted in a manner that is likely to incite imminent lawless action or that is an action amounting to "fighting words", is constitutionally protected.

It is not.

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS:** The Supreme Court, but this has been put out as well as a comment afterwards.

**Bev McArthur:** On a point of order, Acting President, I have listened to those on the other side interject continually while we have been speaking. We gave total silence to Mr McIntosh and to you, Mr Batchelor. Please do us the courtesy of the same.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** I bring the house to order. I just ask that Mrs Hermans be allowed to continue in silence.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS:** This motion is about standing up for those Australians who love their flag, who are proud of this nation, who are proud to be Australian, who have given their lives in many cases and who have marched off to war. Some have taken bullets for this flag, and we need to protect it, and I respect this motion.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (15:40): First, I would like to thank everybody in the opposition who has supported me. The speeches were fantastic, and I would like to especially thank Dr Heath for her very emotional input – it was very grabbing. I am really disappointed by the left, except for Mr McIntosh, who managed to keep it very professional, and Mr Batchelor, because they did not resort to low, petty personal attacks. But immediately the left went to racism. This is not what this motion is about. This motion is about the Australian and Victorian flags, and they represent everybody as a whole. This is not dividing at all. It is about the desecration and the burning of these flags, and that is what my point is. We do not want to incite violence.

As I said earlier, yes, this is about freedom of speech, but this is an act. This is a physical act that incites violence. If we look at Senator Lidia Thorpe, she started off with the burning of the Australian flag, and now she is proposing acts of terrorism against Parliament itself. This motion seeks to stop that in its tracks from happening further. Once again, I would like to thank everybody who contributed, and I would also like to thank those who showed their unprofessionalism in this chamber.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (17):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Adem Somyurek, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (23):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Motion negatived.**

***Bills*****Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill 2025***Council's amendments*

**The PRESIDENT (15:48):** I have received a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill 2025:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Australian Grands Prix Act 1994** in relation to the race period, the definition of *grand prix insignia*, acting appointments and public access areas, to provide for the Australian Grand Prix Corporation to host approved events and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

***Motions*****Retail crime**

**David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:50):** I am saddened, but believe it is an important motion to move:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for failing to adequately respond to the surge in crime in retail settings in Victoria.

This is a serious motion, and it is a motion that is a sad one to move, because too many people at a retail level are afraid and worried. Too much is being stolen. There is too much grief being caused in our stores and too much grief for those in the workplace, at the coalface, in our stores, in our retail settings. It is clear that the amount of retail crime has surged massively. In my own area – this is to the end of June 2025, the crime statistics under the retail offences category from the Crime Statistics Agency – in Boroondara retail crime offences were up 29 per cent; in the City of Melbourne they were up 23 per cent; in the City of Monash they were up 24 per cent; in Port Phillip they were up 38 per cent; in Stonnington, up 16 per cent; and in Whitehorse, up 14 per cent. The significance of this – and this is a pattern reflected right across the state – is that the crime rate in our retail settings has surged and surged decisively. It has also taken a decidedly nasty turn, with violence and threats an all-too-common part of it. Sadly, I have to report to the chamber that many of our business organisations are now extremely concerned about this and are talking actively –

*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Order! Mr Davis, just a moment. Can we have some quiet in the chamber, please. It is usually quite easy to hear Mr Davis, but I am struggling at the moment.

**David DAVIS:** Master Grocers Australia have made a number of statements, which represent retailers IGA and FoodWorks, and their members have reported a dramatic rise in shoplifting incidents compared to just a few years ago. MGA chief operating officer Mikaela McKenzie said:

What's most concerning is how brazen these offences have become ...

Offenders act with little fear of consequence, and they seem to know that once they become aggressive or vocal, staff are instructed not to intervene.

This is a very difficult point for these retail outlets. Their staff are right on the coalface, and they face these threats. I think the employers are actually correct to be most concerned about their staff's safety and security. If they are confronted by a violent offender, somebody who is threatening them, I think it is right that they step back, that they do not confront these terrible people, these shameful people, who are threatening them in the store. They call the police, they call security, and I understand why that advice is being given by large employers and small ones as well. It is not just the big boys that are affected here, this is also the small stores, the little family stores. They are being hit, they are being threatened. They are scared, they are worried.

I see Ms Terpstra shaking her head. Well, I can tell you this is very serious, Ms Terpstra. Do not underestimate what is going on here. Your government has lost control of this. It has got much worse in the last three to four years. There is no doubt that the community are very, very worried, and those on the retail coalface are very worried as well.

Woolworths has made it clear. They acknowledge that they are seeing an increased level of theft nationally, but said:

The majority of our customers do the right thing and we thank them for doing so ...

Although they have spoken more broadly about what is happening in Victoria and the problems in Victoria.

Coles said:

Despite record levels of investment in technology, security guards and safety training, our team continue to experience unacceptable levels of theft, abuse and threatening behaviours – particularly in Victoria, where we see the highest proportion of organised retail crime by individuals who pay no attention to the law ...

Coles chief executive Leah Weckert said shoppers no longer feel safe in supermarkets:

In Victoria, we continue to see significant upticks in threatening situations ...

Data from Coles identified Victoria as the state with the most violent repeat offenders, and we have seen pictures of some of this. We have seen people in shopping centres with machetes having a machete war. Well, I do not blame the shoppers for being scared. I am very thoughtful about this too. People are worried in these shopping centres.

**Sonja Terpstra** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** Well, Ms Terpstra, I tell you what, there has got to be some serious response here. This government has sat on its hands and it has done absolutely nothing to deal with this. I say there has got to be a proper response. Your government has failed, and it deserves to be condemned roundly for its failure to deal with these issues. The Australian Retailers Association chief industry affairs officer Fleur Brown said Victoria is now a hotspot for retail crime. It is very distressing for retail stores to have anything like a ram raid happen, but to have it happen repeatedly is a really traumatic event for those store teams. I can only agree with her. If I was in a store and there were repeated threatening incidents, I would be very worried. I think that is where our interest and our concern have got to be – with the shoppers, yes, but particularly with those store people, the retail workers. For those who are at the coalface I think we have got to have a significant response, and this government has not had a significant response. They have sat on their hands; they have let it get worse and worse. I have read out those new figures. It is time this government got off its hands and actually did something to help with this.

The weak bail laws that we have in this state, the terribly weak bail laws that were weakened by this government, are one of the key causes. They are not the only one, but they are one key cause, and it is entirely Jacinta Allan's fault. She could have acted on this, she could have dealt with this and she could



have pulled together a taskforce and actually responded on this, but she has not done anything of the sort. She has been too weak and too hopeless on this. The Super Retail Group spoke about this too. They slammed Victoria as the nation's crime and theft capital, calling on police to crack down on the industrial-scale theft. They said that crime is out of control.

Victoria Police deputy commissioner Bob Hill has noted that the overall crime rates in Victoria are totally unacceptable. You know what, the police are the other ones who are at the coalface of this, and I stand with the policemen and the policewomen who are at the coalface here and are often threatened. In some cases, as we have seen recently, they have paid a much higher price, and that price is something that we ought to respect. I must say today I was shocked to think that the state government is trying to remove the ability to provide proper compensation for police officers. If that is even half true, that is disgraceful.

Bunnings managing director Michael Schneider said that retail crime in the past two years had climbed by 50 per cent, that the vast majority was violent and that it was a 'significantly more challenging environment' in Victoria than in other states. That is what he said.

**Sonja Terpstra** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** He is not making it up. Ms Terpstra, you may shrug, you may roll your eyes and you may make gestures of various types, but none of that will change the fact that this has become a big problem in Victoria. I do not believe for one second that Michael Schneider of Bunnings is actually making it up. If you believe that, that is a problem. I do not believe he is. I believe he is reflecting on what is actually happening in his stores. I have to say, they need support, they need proper action from this Parliament and they need proper action from this government.

We have put bills in here to help on a number of these things, but your government, your party, has blocked proper strengthening of the bail laws, and that is one clear example. We have seen your government strip police out of the local police stations, where they could do good local policing work in communication with retailers and centres in their particular area and with a better and deeper understanding of their local area. That is not what has happened under this government. In fact this government has pulled many of those police away to taskforces and other distant responses that have proved ineffective. That is, sadly, the truth of the matter. The SDA – and others in the team may say more about that – is an important union for retail, warehousing, fast-food workers and others. Michael Donovan their secretary said:

Our members are suffering shocking aggression and violence every day and every week. We are looking for the Victorian Government to act swiftly to address this.

Well, I can only agree with him. Enver Erdogan is nodding, and we can see the importance. I do not actually see this personally as a deeply party-political thing. This is a matter where the state government has not got there, and we all need to work together to kick forward and actually help retailers, help retail workers and make sure that the environment is safer.

**Sonja Terpstra** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** Do you disagree with that, Ms Terpstra? I do not really think at a deep level, even in your heart, you could find it to disagree with what I have just said there. I think those workers deserve safety, they deserve security, and you should just get over your political self and recognise that there is a problem and deal with this directly. I shudder when you get into this particular mode, I really do.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** I am just saying that those retail workers would be shaking their heads at your behaviour just now. They would be saying, 'Why on earth is this Labor MP not prepared to stand up and work with everyone in the chamber to find some solutions for this sort of problem?' This is a declarative motion, it is not a detailed motion that is going to have 17 dot points or something like that.

It is a motion where the chamber makes a clear point that there is a big problem, a developing problem, and the community need a response. And I say those retail workers, I say the retail sector, I say the small employers, the small shops and the large shops too, all deserve a response. Further on this, the cost of all this is sheeted home to consumers. So there is not only a threatening aspect to this, but there is also a cost aspect. Who pays? We all pay. We pay in higher prices, and we pay in a society where we feel less free and less able to move around, and that is completely unacceptable. And for those who work in the sector, my goodness, they deserve a much better shake than this.

As I said, the Crime Statistics Agency has put out some very significant figures: increases of up to 58 per cent in the number of victims in eight of 16 crime categories, including kidnapping, abduction, motor vehicle theft, armed robbery and retail crime. People do not feel safe in their homes, their businesses, taking public transport and, as I say in this motion, even in the shops. Labor's weakened bail laws leave the community at risk – there is no question of that. Labor's soft-on-crime approach allows repeat offenders to walk free while innocent Victorians live in fear. It is time for the government to put community safety first. People do deserve to feel safe.

I have been working in the City of Monash a lot recently, and I am going to use this as a case study. Crime is up 23 per cent in the city compared to last year. Total criminal offences went from 13,687 to 15,609. Aggravated robbery increased by 63 per cent. Retail crime is up by 25 per cent in the City of Monash. Carjackings have increased by 49 per cent. I know that actually tonight Neighbourhood Watch in Monash has a forum, and Neighbourhood Watch can play a very important role. It is important that Neighbourhood Watch is a body that stands independent and firm. We do not need Neighbourhood Watch bodies that are not strong and independent, Neighbourhood Watch bodies that are too close to government or too close to individual districts, Neighbourhood Watch bodies that are not doing their full job. They should be doing that work of putting information across to the police so matters are seen and information comes to people. It should be passed on appropriately to the police to give them that additional source of information coming directly out of the community. Our Neighbourhood Watch groups can play a very important role. They can also play an important role in disseminating information to help the community and in teaching people techniques, teaching people ways of protecting themselves and their community, or their business in this case. That is a very important role as well. It seems the state government has cut a number of the crime prevention programs, and this is deeply false economy. Cutting crime prevention policies and support at times of a crime crisis is a silly idea.

Ms Terpstra asked me what we would do. Well, we would reverse some of these cuts to crime prevention programs. We do not think the crime prevention programs should be cut at this time. We think there should be stronger bail laws, and we think there should be deeper support for Neighbourhood Watch. All of those steps are important.

**Richard Welch** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** Jack's law is a very important way too, to deal with the issues around knives. The police should be in the position to be able to intervene and check whether people are carrying knives in certain zones. I do not think that is as controversial today as it once was, and it is certainly not as controversial in a time of rising crime. You can see, in areas of the City of Monash, that might be very appropriate. This is not an election policy, as it were, Ms Terpstra; this is something the state government could action today. They would have the support in this Parliament to do it today. We would support them if they brought through Jack's law today. We would say, 'Good on you. That's a matter that we can cross the Parliament with and work together to get some changes on.' If they brought through proper bail laws, we could also support all of those. These are the sorts of steps that can be taken. If the police had the additional resources that they needed, that could be a big and significant step too.

These are a number of steps that I am recommending here, but the point of this motion is to highlight the plight of our businesses, our retailers across the state – our large retailers, our small retailers, the

family businesses – and to highlight particularly the position of the staff. The workers, the employees in those businesses should not be subject to threats and violence. They should not be, and we should not tolerate this, not for one moment. I am very content to leave this as it is at the moment, because I note the support of a number of people in the chamber, and I would hope that even the government would recognise that they have dropped the ball on this matter. They need to reach out across the aisle and look for ways to strengthen our response to retail crime, to protect businesses but to protect the workers in those businesses.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:08): I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Mr Davis's name that calls for the house to condemn the Allan Labor government for failing to adequately respond to the surge in crime in retail settings in Victoria. It should come as no surprise to anyone in this chamber that the government will be opposing this motion.

The thing is, I have had the benefit of listening to Mr Davis's contribution, and nowhere in his contribution did he actually talk about the things that the government has done, because it is not in his interest to talk about the things that the government has actually done. In fact we have taken some very strong steps, which I am going to go through in great detail in a moment. Any of those people who may be playing along at home would be thinking this government has done nothing, but again, Mr Davis is not interested in facts, he is interested in perpetuating misinformation. There has been some work done. I am going to talk about the retail sector, but I am going to leave a lot of that to Mr Galea, because I know Mr Galea has very salient, real-world life experience in the retail sector and will be able to give a lot more force to that than I will, especially having worked for the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association, the union that represents retail workers. I might also say my daughter was a retail worker. She has talked to me about her experiences working in the retail sector as well, so I have a little bit of an understanding of that.

I think what I might do is basically give a broad overview of the sorts of things that our government has in fact done. Again, if you were listening to Mr Davis's contribution, you would think that we have done absolutely nothing, so I will go to addressing some of the points in a broad sense and then focus in on some of the specifics. In terms of our police, we have made a record investment of \$4.5 billion to ensure our police are equipped with the resources and the powers that they need. More than 3600 new police officers are on the beat to help keep Victorians safe, and there is \$1 billion to deliver new and upgraded police stations across our states. Contrary to what Mr Davis said, there have been no cuts to Victoria Police's budget. That is again a blatant mistruth.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** The interjection was that we made cuts. We have not. That is untrue. As I said, we have made no cuts to Victoria Police's budget, and we work with Victoria Police, not against them, to deliver the tools and the resources they need to keep all Victorians safe. Unlike those opposite, who cut \$100 million from the Victoria Police budget and failed to fund a single additional officer, we will always back Victoria Police to keep Victorians safe. That is a very stark contrast, and Mr Davis knows it as he is going to walk out and leave the chamber. I want to talk about our Victoria Police officers who work hard each and every day to keep Victorians safe, because all that those opposite want to do is talk down Victoria and our hardworking police officers. I know police are in fact making record numbers of arrests. They have made over 77,000 arrests in the last 12 months alone. If you listen to Mr Davis, we are doing nothing and we are not resourcing our police appropriately. If you listen to Mr Davis, there is nothing happening.

I am yet to hear any single policy offering from the Liberals other than condemning our government for doing nothing. Again, I am going to go through this methodically and point out all the things that we are doing. I am yet to hear any single policy offering from the Liberals. So let us go through it. In terms of retail crime, we are going to be introducing tougher laws. I am going to leave that to Mr Galea to talk about in more detail. Retail crime remains a key operational priority for Victoria Police, with dedicated efforts underway to disrupt offending, hold perpetrators to account and support impacted

businesses. Victoria Police continues to work closely with shopping centres and retail outlets to implement effective crime prevention strategies and high-visibility police operations.

One of the shopping centres where there was a recent incident – it was a while back now – involving machetes is a place where I go quite frequently. I do get concerned when I hear the constant talking down and saying that certain shopping centres and precincts are unsafe, because it does cause greater fear in the community. What I can say is at this place where I go quite frequently I have seen – and it has always been the case at this shopping centre – there has always been a police presence and there has always been a really decent security presence as well. People have returned to that shopping centre, but the constant talking down and scaremongering by those opposite about what is happening in our shopping centres does have an impact. Those comments are the very thing that impacts on businesses being able to make retail sales. Whilst Mr Davis wants to blame this government, I also ask them to take a hard look at themselves about what they are doing in terms of fanning the flames of fear and frightening community members about when they can return to the shops and shop in a manner that feels safe.

Victoria Police are continuing to work with shopping centres. Like I said, they have increased security presence and police presence. There is also an improvement in crime prevention through environmental design and review audits, online communications and priority patrol location meetings. Of course technology helps with a lot of these things, where there are increased numbers of cameras and surveillance operations and the like. Also Victoria Police have commenced Operation Stand, which is a dedicated team of police who work with Melbourne central business district and Yarra retailers to identify thieves who use aggression, intimidation and violence towards retail staff. This team alone has made more than 130 arrests and laid more than 1100 charges in relation to thefts exceeding \$400,000, but if you listen to Mr Davis, we are doing absolutely nothing. If you look at the last initiative alone, that is an initiative that has come from businesses working with Victoria Police to design solutions that work for them. And it is working – as I said, 130 arrests and more than 1100 charges laid in relation to thefts exceeding \$400,000.

Regional police are also undertaking intelligence assessments to identify and target prolific offenders, including collaborating with Crime Stoppers to identify wanted persons of interest linked to retail offending. Crime reduction teams have also been established across all regions to support persons of interest with pathways out of offending, and retail operations are working with the National Retail Association to promote best-practice approaches to target hardening and environmental design strategies.

I was heartened to see our new Chief Commissioner of Police the other day talking about having a refreshed Victoria Police but also noting that there needs to be significant work done in prevention, which is also a key ingredient to driving crime down. But if you listen to those opposite, it is just ‘Lock ’em up,’ and that is not going to fix everything. We need to have a holistic approach to driving down crime.

There is lots more happening. We have announced our machete amnesty, which is a \$13 million investment by our government. But again, if you listened to Mrs Werner in the other place, it was all about – what was it – Ferraris and the cost of Ferraris and the rest of it. She completely got wrong the cost of what we are actually rolling out and the components of it but got promoted to the front bench on the basis of that – wow. That is a really significant promotion for her, but she knew nothing about the actual cost of the program.

Since the start of the amnesty period over 5000 knives have been surrendered by members of the public and over 3000 by a major retailer. So again, those opposite said it would not work, but it clearly is working. We are seeing that people are returning machetes to those machete bins. The machete safe disposal scheme is continuing to get thousands of knives off our streets, with more than 2000 surrendered in the last fortnight. Again, Mr Davis said we were doing nothing, and I am just

talking about what we are doing. But we just get condemned for it over there because we are not doing enough – never enough, never good enough. But we are taking real action, because it shows.

In regard to knife crime, again, we know that too many young people are carrying knives. One of the things we have done is expand the stop-and-search powers for Victoria Police, and we have seen a record 12,000 dangerous knives taken off our streets this year through intelligence-led operations. Mr Davis would not know anything about that, because all this motion has been about is condemning the government. He knows nothing about the detail that we have actually embarked upon and the various mechanisms that we are using to focus on crime.

Mr Davis, I go back to the interjections that I was making during your speech. I am yet to hear any policy offerings from you and your lot. I am yet to see any policy offerings. Again, I have outlined in quite a lot of detail all those things that we are doing. I know Mr Galea is also going to go to quite a level of detail when he speaks about the sorts of things that retailers are doing to keep their workers safe as well. In doing that, we will be opposing this motion, but I thank Victoria Police each and every day for the work that they do keeping Victorians safe.

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (16:18): I rise to speak on motion 1094 in Mr Davis's name, condemning the Allan Labor government for its failure to adequately respond to the surge in crime against workers in the retail settings across Victoria. Before I get into this, I would just like to focus on the plight of workers rather than turning this debate into a proxy for 'Who is the toughest on crime?' The statistics when we look at this sector are clearly gobsmacking. As Mr Davis alluded to, the data from the Crime Statistics Agency suggests that there were 41,000 incidents of theft from retail stores in 2024–25, an increase of 27.6 per cent, and that is in the past year alone. Food theft has risen by over 80 per cent – there is obviously a whole story there about social conditions and poverty – and cigarette and alcohol theft has risen by 58.6 per cent. Shoplifting is one thing, but the rise in abuse and violence towards retail staff is beyond the pale. According to the state secretary of the Victorian Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association – I will also put my hand up to say that my first job was in Coles New World in Southport, and I was a member for four years and even offered a trainee managership, where I was told that I would also get the shop steward's position at the same time – Michael Donovan, their workers, their members, are being:

... screamed at ... spat on or shoved ... dragged across the counters ... slashed or stabbed ...

Every worker has the right to feel safe at work. It should be a given. But an increasing number of retail workers are regularly confronting harassment and abuse. It is a tough gig. Many of our members in Legalise Cannabis work in the retail sector. In fact during the recent Werribee by-election I got chatting to a couple of our wonderful volunteers who were on the early voting centres, lovely people who worked at Target, and they told me of the verbal abuse that they had to cop from aggressive shoppers. This sort of ugly behaviour seems to be becoming more and more common. As workers routinely face abuse, intimidation and violence, retailers are finding it more and more difficult to attract and retain staff – hardly surprising.

It is a particularly dangerous time to work in retail if you are a woman. Women represent most of the retail workforce, with more than a third of them being young women between the ages of 15 and 24, often in their first job. That is certainly consistent with the young women I was speaking to on the early voting centres. It seems to me that it is only a matter of time before a fatality occurs. This is another instance of the Victorian government failing to protect our young people, yet they are concurrently happy to criminalise them.

Yesterday the government ruled out decriminalising cannabis, a decision that disproportionately impacts and has a lifelong consequence for young people. We have all heard the evidence about the irreversible harm caused by contact with the criminal justice system and being left with a criminal record. Young people from Aboriginal and other marginalised communities in particular bear the brunt of the government's regressive policies on cannabis regulation. The Premier announced back in May of last year – that is a year and a half ago – that there were plans to change the laws to better protect

customer-facing workers from abuse and assault. But we are yet to see anything, and that is disgraceful. Maybe the Premier or the Minister for Police should go and work a few shifts in Woolies or Coles and learn what it is actually like to be in those frontline positions, because it is bloody tough.

**Michael Galea:** Jacinta was a shoppie. She used to work at Coles.

**David ETTERSHANK:** She did used to work at Coles, did she? Okay. That is interesting.

It seems only a matter of time before a fatality occurs. While this government fail to act on the epidemic of retail crime across the state, putting young, often inexperienced people on the front line, they continue to waste valuable police resources on an offence, namely personal use of cannabis, which 80 per cent of Victorians agree should not even exist.

As I said, every worker has the right to feel safe at work. If this government are so concerned about crime, so threatened by the prospect of a tough-on-crime election, maybe they should direct our police resources to preventing crimes which affect and traumatise Victorians, and particularly Victorian retail workers, instead of policing a victimless crime like cannabis possession and use. Retail workers deserve better, as we saw during the COVID outbreak. But how quickly the community, and in particular the government, seems to have forgotten this fact. They were the saints. They were the saviours. They were out there doing their jobs day and night.

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**David ETTERSHANK:** And they are – thank you, Mr Galea. They continue to do that, and yet now obviously they are not in the headlines. They are not so worthy, apparently, of this government pulling its finger out and putting in place some regulation and some programs to address the threats that they face. While I utterly repudiate Mr Davis's position on bail, the government's response is simply shameful. Legalise Cannabis Victoria will be supporting this motion.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (16:25): I rise to support Mr Davis's motion. I cannot believe that those on the opposite side seem to be against the workers. I do not know where they have gone astray in this. This motion is about protecting the workers and –

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** No, you are not. You cannot be, or you would be absolutely wholly behind this motion which condemns the Allan Labor government for failing to adequately respond to the surge in crime in retail settings in Victoria. Of course you should be supporting this motion. Retail theft is not just a line in a police report; it is a daily reality for small business owners across Victoria. Figures from the Crime Statistics Agency show that total recorded offences have surged by 15.7 per cent in the past year – the highest level since reporting began – driven by a 22 per cent rise in theft and a 47 per cent rise in retail theft.

Nowhere are the consequences clearer than in the CBD in Geelong in my electorate. Total crime across the region has risen 12.5 per cent compared with the previous year. Theft alone has soared from 5530 cases to 7281. Almost half of all crimes, 48 per cent, remain unsolved. These are not just abstract statistics; they are the daily experiences of thousands of residents, small business owners and families in Victoria's biggest regional city. For me, the worst figure is the victimisation rate – that is, the number of Victorians directly affected by crime. It has risen almost 17 per cent. Behind those numbers are real people, real losses and a growing sense that the rule of law no longer protects the honest and hardworking.

That is why, the week before last, I spent a day in Geelong with our Shadow Minister for Police and Corrections, David Southwick. The main focus of our visit was the surge in retail theft that is devastating local traders and driving honest business owners to despair. We heard the stories behind the statistics and of the frustration, the anger, the fear and the sadness of those affected. The local

traders, almost despairingly, told us they often do not even bother reporting theft anymore. There is just no point.

Talking to retail workers and small business owners, we heard some shocking stories of things which had happened in the days before our visit. At one fashion retailer on Malop Street staff said they always have to have at least two people on front of house at once, and even then they do not feel safe. The fear is not just of losing stock; it is of confrontation and of not knowing what might happen next. Next door another store had been hit just two days before we were in Geelong. A group of five young offenders hurled an energy drink through the front door and destroyed roughly \$1200 worth of stock – a total mess committed by offenders who enjoy impunity.

Across the precinct, at the crime forum we held in a piano bar – many thanks to Andy Pobjoy, ‘Mr Geelong’ – we heard similar stories time and again of retail staff having to physically push people out the door when they refuse to leave or to lock themselves inside when they see known troublemakers heading their way. The saddest reflection, as I mentioned, was from residents and businesses who are not even bothering to report crime anymore. They have given up. They know there will be no follow-up, no response, no justice and no compensation for their losses. That is a damning indictment of Labor’s failure to protect the community. This motion is important because, at its heart, systematic retail theft is not merely an inconvenience, it damages social order. A functioning society requires the state to provide security and enforce the laws protecting property and person. When honest Victorians, from the shop owner struggling to pay bills to the elderly customer facing higher prices, feel the law is a hollow threat, the foundation of law and order begins to fracture. The idea that each individual theft is a small, insignificant issue is a serious mistake. Systematic theft operates on a principle similar to the broken windows theory. If minor visible disorder is ignored, it signals that no-one cares, and serious crime will inevitably follow. Unchecked, small-scale shoplifting spreads, worsens and begins to infect the community’s sense of safety and legitimacy. Moreover, we know that these offences are often a gateway to greater criminality. The individuals involved rarely stop at petty shoplifting. Many graduate from these smaller unpunished offences to organised theft, fraud and even violent crime.

The government’s duty is clear: to address this disorder now and to restore faith in the everyday rules that bind our society together. It is not just a matter of protecting stock, it is protecting people too and protecting the fabric of communities like Geelong. When theft becomes normalised and when it is easier to steal than to work, the very idea of fairness, the idea that effort should be rewarded and wrongdoing punished, begins to disintegrate.

Retail theft does not just hit the balance sheets of small business; it hits morale, it hits investment and it hits confidence in our city centres. The Geelong CBD should be a place of life, energy and opportunity. Instead, it is becoming a place of boarded-up shopfronts, locked doors and metal shutters. Another sad lesson David and I took from our trip was this: the only business apparently booming in some parts of Geelong is the one installing security grilles. When people no longer feel safe to walk down Malop Street, to browse in the shops or to leave home after dark, the consequences go far beyond retail. The decline becomes self-perpetuating – fewer visitors, less investment and less confidence. It is a vicious circle that only concerted action can break. This is the broken windows theory in action. When low-level crime is ignored, when police are under-resourced and when offenders face no consequences, decline accelerates.

The truth is that Victoria Police are not to blame. Local police are doing their best. No-one doubts that. We were grateful for an excellent briefing from a senior local police officer. But he and his officers are being stretched beyond their limits. Custody suites are full. Officers are being forced to juggle local offenders while managing overflow from Melbourne and Warrnambool because those regions are full too. The system is broken. The Allan Labor government has left police in Geelong under-resourced, understaffed and overwhelmed. Instead of wasting millions of taxpayer dollars on glossy television ads spruiking failed bail reforms, Labor should be investing in frontline police and real community safety. While crime soars, the Premier and her ministers talk about community justice strategies and

restorative approaches. Meanwhile, ordinary people just want to know that when a thief walks into a store and steals they will be arrested, not excused.

Local traders we spoke to agreed on one thing: the only way to make a real difference is to get more police out on the street – not tied up in bureaucratic programs or glossy new frameworks but through genuine investment in frontline policing present in the community. That means more officers on the beat. It means fixing the resourcing crisis in Geelong's police stations and custody facilities. It means rebuilding the public's faith that the system works, that crime will be punished and that safety will be restored. Victoria's retailers, especially those in regional centres like Geelong, deserve better. They deserve a government that has their back, not one that turns away while they are being robbed blind.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:35): I rise to share a few comments on this motion as well. Many members will be aware that this is a topic that is of great importance to me. In my first speech in this place I discussed a desire and indeed advocated for tougher penalties for those people who assault retail workers. I will come back to that point a little later.

But I do as well, as Ms Terpstra mentioned, come to this debate having, prior to being in Parliament, proudly served as an organiser for the SDA union for around 11 years, covering a range of different parts of Melbourne. In that time I saw firsthand or second-hand the impact that abuse and violence can have on retail workers. There has been a long-running campaign from the SDA called No One Deserves a Serve. It is straightforward; it is to the point. People understand what it means. It resonates with retail workers, because no-one deserves to go to work and cop abuse or violence of any means on the scale just for doing their job. Many young people – or most young people – have their first job in the retail sector. Indeed, touching on my interjection to Mr Ettershank, the Premier's first job was at a supermarket in regional Victoria, where she was in fact an SDA delegate.

In my time at the union I saw the way in which this campaign changed the narrative. The culture in far too many retail workplaces, even not much longer than five years ago and definitely 10 years ago, was 'The customer is always right.' In the worst such instance I represented a bright young woman who, just doing her job, had a bag full of groceries thrown at her head, for which she received a warning. That warning was of course overturned through our intervention, but it should never have been applied in the first place. We now are at a point where most retailers are much more supportive of their staff, and most will have signs that very visibly say at the front of stores, as a result of this campaign, that their workers deserve respect, and instances of customers being given gift cards, having violently abused a retail worker, are fortunately much, much less common. So I would like to acknowledge the extensive campaign.

Customer abuse and aggression comes on a spectrum. Today we are talking about the extreme end, and I will come to some more comments about that shortly, but it does not start there. No worker – and no 15-year-old boy or girl on their first shift at a retail or a fast-food setting – deserves to have anyone abusing them, but for far too many, that happens on their very first shift. Last year the Premier Jacinta Allan made a very significant announcement, and I was genuinely jumping out of my skin, thrilled that the policy that I had advocated for in my first speech was being announced by the Premier at the ALP state conference. That policy was to bring in tougher laws and tougher penalties for those who violently attack retail workers. This is very, very good legislation.

I have had the privilege of working alongside Attorney-General Sonya Kilkenny over the past few months in helping to shape the formulation and the form of that legislation through the worker protection consultation group, and I would like to acknowledge all the stakeholders in that group, including the SDA; the United Workers Union; the Transport Workers' Union; the Rail, Tram and Bus Union; the Australian Retailers Association; the pharmacy guild; as well as police and prosecutorial stakeholders. I am very much looking forward to that legislation coming into the Parliament and to seeing that acquit the government's promise to get this into the Parliament this year. Wherever more work needs to be done I will be enthusiastically supporting that through the worker protection consultation group and beyond.



I would like to also touch on something that has come up – in fact Mrs McArthur came close to touching on this. Protecting workers is not a one-stamp-fixes-all solution. The laws which we will go into much more detail on and which we will discuss in much greater detail at the time will go quite some way not only to showing retail workers and other service workers that they are valued and that they deserve to be safe at work by implementing those tougher penalties but to the duty of care that all employers have for their employees. I would note as well that any legislation that any government makes does not absolve any employer from their duty of care in ensuring that their staff are safe and supported. That is obviously in the worst case of incidents, where employers are doing everything that they can, but it is also in the day to day. It is in the adequate staffing of stores to reduce the incidence of customers blowing up. It is to provide that additional staffing so that when incidents do occur they can be responded to and those staff members have team members to rely on. That does not in any way absolve the despicable actions of those who would seek to do harm to service workers, but it is important to note that this is not a simple, ‘We can do the legislation and fix this.’ This goes to a cultural issue.

Other speakers in this debate have mentioned COVID, and one of the distressing things to see as an organiser during that very difficult time – when people themselves were stressed about all manner of things, not least of all being infected at work and the protections that were in place for them there – was a number of peaks of customer abuse and aggression. Sadly, that does not seem to have died away nearly as much as we would have hoped. That does speak to a broader culture issue, and I will take this opportunity, as well as pretty much any opportunity that I can get, to really reiterate that it is a spectrum. Most people would never go out of their way to violently assault anyone, let alone a retail worker. Most people, I do believe – I have to be optimistic – would also never seek to abuse someone who is working in a service role, but far too many do. Far too many perhaps think of themselves as too important, or think their time is too important, or get upset that they cannot get their particular brand of yoghurt or whatever else, and feel that the person that they should take that out on is the single mum at the check-out or the 17-year-old boy at the check-out – that they deserve the abuse.

‘No One Deserves a Serve’ means no-one deserves a serve. There is no situation in which it is tolerable, and that is a conversation that we should be having as well, because our retail workers, as was mentioned by another speaker in this debate, are essential workers. We saw in the toughest of times that they were there for us. They were still there in the early days of the pandemic when we did not know what the risks were. And despite all the precautions that they were taking, that employers were taking and that unions were taking, they were putting themselves out there and going into work when so many people had the luxury of being at home. They were going out there to serve our society, and they were not the only ones too. Of course the legislation that will be coming through later this year does not just apply to retail workers. Based off the unions that I have mentioned, I am reasonably comfortable to say it will include workers in places such as hospitality; in public transport, including bus drivers who, due to the nature of their employment, can be particularly vulnerable in some situations; and other frontline workers who we rely on.

With these new laws coming in soon, I am very much looking forward to having a debate. I very much look forward in fact to the entire chamber supporting it. Based off the remarks so far on this motion, I would be hopeful to presume that it would be widely, if not unanimously, supported by this chamber, because these laws will make retail workplaces safer, but they will also send an important signal to retail workers and to other service workers: you are valued, the work you do is essential work all of us rely on and you deserve to go to work. You do not deserve a serve; you deserve to be treated with respect and dignity, and that is from not just your employers but from all of your customers as well.

Whilst the Liberal Party today have come in with a two-line motion and have not offered any form of policy development or proposals, those on this side will continue to proudly work, and I will continue to proudly work to do everything in my power in this place to advance the interests and protections for retail workers, and that includes the laws that will be debated in this place in coming weeks.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (16:45): It is tempting to tee off on all the various things that are going wrong with crime around the state at the moment, but I am going to try and stick within the brief today. It seems that the Premier and I had a similar sort of start to life. My first job was at a supermarket called Supa Valu in Beaumaris. Whilst it clearly did not turn out to be my career, it gave me an appreciation of what goes on in the world. Back then, in the mid-1980s, it was a bit quieter, but I think burglaries were the biggest thing – the stealing of cigarettes.

As time has gone on, I have noticed the treatment of others in general has taken a dive – the treatment of retail workers in particular and frontline workers, like police and so on. But retail workers in particular seem to be taking the brunt of a very violent cohort of people that seem to think that their wants or needs or however they want to put it are worthy of threatening or abusing someone who is just there to do their job. I guess it is not something new, but it is something I am seeing more and more of. Frankly, it is not good and it is not acceptable. We need to be, as a society and as a Parliament, dealing with it.

There has been a bit of argy-bargy across here about policies and this and that. I will be very intrigued to see what this legislation coming along is like. The trespass laws in this state partially, in my view, contribute to the problem we have. They are as weak as urine – they really are. If someone comes into your place and is violent and you tell them to get out and they do not, notwithstanding the assault problem for them, there is not a lot you can do until the police arrive. For the police to get there – and the police are generally 2000 members down every morning before they start, with about 1000 behind just on numbers and 1000 on sick leave – it can take some time. It can take a lot of time, and therefore that person probably would get bored and leave eventually before the police could get there.

Mr Galea mentioned that there is a bill coming. I hope this bill addresses this problem properly, because with these repeat violent offenders, if there is no legal way that we can keep people out of these places with a punitive outcome, what is going to happen? They are just going to keep on coming until they commit a crime that hurts someone at the retail location and gets the offender locked up. It will be interesting, and I will be watching this with a lot of interest just to see what is going on.

Mr Galea brought up something about duty of care. Duty of care is a bit of a hot topic – and I am slightly deviating here. The duty of care is to all workers. The current problem we have with the police officers is one of those things that is not actually this government's fault right now, but I would like to think they are going to fix it ASAP, because someone is sworn, not employed. That is talking about getting into the weeds, to deny something.

I was watching the news earlier today. It is a very different retail environment, but two women at the Gotham City brothel had to fight off a violent offender. He jumped the counter. It was quite a professional-looking counter, I have got to say – more than what I expected for a brothel, but whatever –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jeff BOURMAN:** I have only ever been in one as a police officer, Mr Welch, for official duties. Anyway, there was a fairly serious scuffle behind the counter, and then, lo and behold, out came a can of capsicum spray – problem solved. I would like to hope that these two brave women are not punished for merely defending themselves, because, frankly, I think they had no other option. The misbehaviour around society is just getting way out of control. Michael Donovan of the SDA has made a few comments regarding these things. I want to put them on the record because I feel that these things need to be on the record, because it is about the workers in these things, whether they are in a supermarket or that clothing shop I think on Collins Street, where some woman was kicking her way in and all the people watching thought they would just video it instead of helping the staff. He said:

Shoppers and staff deserve to feel safe, but right now too many workers are walking into shifts expecting to be abused or threatened.

As a police officer, that comes with the territory. As someone that is just trying to serve someone, that is not acceptable. He said:

The Premier made a promise to protect these workers with stronger penalties. It's time to deliver on that promise.

I hope the delivery comes when the aforementioned legislation drops. He said:

Our members are suffering shocking aggression and violence ... every week.

He said the government needs to act. Well, yes, the government does need to act. No-one goes to work wanting to be assaulted. No-one wants to go and be abused. A lot of them are kids – half the world are kids to me now as I get on a bit. But they are in first jobs and things like that, and a lot are females. I am old fashioned enough – I do not abuse anybody – but I think abusing someone that you perceive to be weaker than you physically because you think you will get away with it is just the depths of cowardice. Frankly, I have not been abused a lot during my life because I am not a small person and people know they will not get away with it. I see these people as nothing more than gutless cowards. To have them abusing people, throwing bags of shopping at them – you see videos of someone at the supermarket copping a punch to the head just because someone did not like something. It is not on. I will be supporting this motion, but I wait in anticipation to see what the government will deliver later. I really do hope they deliver on the promise to look after workers.

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (16:52): I am pleased, on behalf of the Nationals, to be supporting this motion that David Davis has put forward. It is such a significant issue, retail crime. We have heard, and Mr Davis spoke to it earlier, about some of the statistics and the larger retailers and supermarkets talking about how bad Victoria is in comparison to other states. It continues to skyrocket.

I was speaking with a business recently who was talking about some of the incidents that he is seeing, which are showing a real shift in the environment. It shows and demonstrates the urgency for reform in this space. Just recently I was speaking with a teacher who talked about an incident in a local store in Bendigo where there were a group of students going out to buy gifts and they actually witnessed some young people going in, grabbing a heap of stuff and then exiting the store. I think it is shocking that we are in this situation now where this is happening in broad daylight in the streets in Bendigo.

I think of our situation. We are fortunate with electorate offices; we have a lot of security on our offices. My office is based right in the centre of Bendigo. I am fortunate in that way because we do have the security there. We can lock down the doors if we need to. But for the rest of the retailers in Bendigo, they do not have that. They are exposed and vulnerable. I have spoken with businesses that have had people come in, take things, swear at them, get up on the counter and abuse them. It is appalling that we are in this situation. We have had assaults in broad daylight, and a lot of people are saying, 'What is the government doing about this situation?' Because it is one thing to talk about big projects, but if you do not feel safe in your home, we have a major issue in this state that needs to be addressed.

Our crime rates continue to rise. Retail theft, from the data that we have had this year, was actually one of the most common offences in Bendigo. There was a huge, almost 124 per cent, increase from the previous year. I meet regularly with Bendigo police and other community leaders to talk about these issues, and they do talk about the challenges that we have in the 10- to-17-year-old age group. That has increased; that rate of youth crime has jumped by 33 per cent. That is huge. When you consider the crimes that we are seeing at the moment, it is extraordinary that in Victoria we have a crime occurring every 50 seconds. Every minute there is another crime that is happening in this state. Yet nearly half of crimes are unresolved. There is no justice. Just imagine if that was, say, your child that was affected by that incident. How would you feel if there was no-one held to account for that?

We have said consistently on this side of the chamber that the weakening of the bail laws back in 2023, the decision made by this government, was not the right direction for this state to go. We are seeing the consequences. Whilst they continue to talk about the toughest bail laws in the country and they

keep trying to bring in bills to make the toughest bail laws tougher, I think we are seeing the implications of that, and it is having a flow-on effect. I have spoken with local police who are very frustrated because they go to a lot of effort to hold people to account, and yet they can go through the courts and be out in no time. I have spoken to victims who have had to face the courts and the frustration as they leave the court, knowing that the person has been let off while they have the experience that they have got to live with for the rest of their lives. I have had people who have opened curtains to their home to see people trying to break into their home. I had another lady that I met with whose husband was stabbed. I know a number of people whose cars have been stolen. It is just extraordinary the huge percentage of repeat offenders that we have in this state. They are actually responsible for a significant portion of the crimes and yet they continue to get off.

I will say I wrote to the Minister for Police and raised protective service officers and the need for more assistance, particularly in regional areas. It was pleasing that he has agreed to meet with the council and V/Line to talk about that issue further. Just recently we held a community safety forum in Kangaroo Flat with David Southwick. He came with Wendy Lovell, and it was very good to hear from residents and give them the opportunity to talk through some of the challenges and the issues. But the statistics that we are seeing in our region are extraordinary. Neighbourhood Watch contributed to that, and they did remind people, and I think it is always important to remind people, of the need to lock, lock and lock everything up – lock your car, lock your house doors, lock your windows and lock the door that is between the garage and your house, making sure that there is no possible way for people to get in. This is the environment that we live in at the moment.

Just recently I held a community chat in Strath Village. I talked with people there, and the issue that kept coming up was crime. They were wondering: ‘Where is the government in all this? What are they doing?’ There has been a lot of talk about big projects, as I said, but when people do not feel safe in their own homes we have a massive issue. I was speaking with another business owner recently, and he was actually telling me – Mr Bourman talked earlier about self-defence – that he sleeps with a bat by his bed. This is extraordinary that we that we live in this environment now, and I certainly do not want to see it continue.

We need a fresh start in this state, and we need to stop crime before it happens. We need to put victims first. Accountability matters. Prevention and enforcement are so important. That prevention – we have talked about that. I know Mr Davis was saying we would be happy to see reforms like Jack’s law come in in this state to get more knives off the street. We would be very supportive of moves to improve community safety and those prevention programs that we have talked about in our policy announcements. This is 12 months ahead of the election. We are being very clear about the need for reform and what that looks like, because ensuring that kids do get on the right track, are not surrounded by negative influences and have that mentoring over a 12-month period is important to ensure that there is a balance in that. Not every kid gets a great start in life, and we have a responsibility to ensure that they do not end up on the wrong track. Having that community involvement is really essential, but it is so important to have zero tolerance for repeat offending because, as I mentioned, it is having a real negative impact on our police force. At the moment we have I think it is close to 2000 vacancies, when you consider those that are on leave as well as the vacancies in the actual roles themselves. Currently we have more police leaving than we have coming in, and this is something that we should all be very concerned about. I will leave my comments there because I know that other people are keen to speak on this issue as well, but I will say that we are about 58 weeks away from the next state election, and it is time for a fresh start. We support this motion.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:01): I rise to speak on the important issue of crime and how it affects our communities. Crime is an issue which can affect every part of the state, and it is something that our constituents worry about no matter where they live. I know that in the Southern Metropolitan Region many of my constituents have the recent stabbing which took place in Southbank on their minds, and I join them. My thoughts are with the victims and their families at this time.

The moral question when it comes to crime and public safety is simple: people should be safe to go out in their own communities, even at night. This is why addressing the issues of crime continues to be a top priority for the Allan Labor government. Our tough new bail laws, the toughest of anywhere in Australia, put community safety first every time and ensure that repeat offenders are subject to a much tougher bail test than first-time offenders. As a result of the changes we have made to existing laws year on year, data shows that the number of adults on remand has increased by 26 per cent and the number of young people on remand has increased by 46 per cent. When repeat offenders demonstrate that they cannot be trusted with bail and that they have not learned from their past actions, they now lose that privilege. Community safety comes first in bail decisions in Victoria because of those changes we have made.

In this state we do not tolerate the breaking of bail conditions, we do not tolerate reoffending while on bail and we will not tolerate those who put the community's safety at risk. Between the toughest bail laws yet for repeat offenders of six serious offences and the new second-strike rule for those who commit certain crimes while on bail, we are making it harder for those who pose a genuine threat to community safety to receive bail. Further, we have changed how the system works, such that, because of our reforms, community safety is put first in every bail decision. Of course there are many complex factors that go into bail decisions, but under our reforms the consideration of the effect and risk to the community must always be placed as the number one priority. By targeting those changes to those that pose a threat to community safety we are able to prioritise our resources towards the policy objective of putting community safety first.

As a government who care deeply about community safety and the terrible, corrosive impact that crime has on our communities if it gets out of hand, we know that implementing those changes is not about slogans. That is why we have stayed focused on tackling crime and taking the steps to set up the toughest bail laws yet. Slogans do not solve crime. Yet this motion put forward by the opposition does not contain a shred of the substance of what they disagree with. The motion contains just one line, with no further elaboration or detail – just a quick jab at the Allan Labor government. There are no quick fixes for crime. You cannot make the changes to law which we have made and expect the system to naturally adjust, but we on this side of the chamber know that by putting in the reforms and the work we can help to shift the dial towards keeping the community safer. Wasting time on unsubstantial motions does not get us any closer to tackling crime. That is why we backed in these new laws in the budget, providing the necessary funding that these new laws need: \$1.6 billion in total, including \$727 million in additional prison funding. We knew that changing the bail laws would not be cheap, but in a state like Victoria, where community safety comes first, our government considers this spending to be an important priority.

The tough new bail laws are not the only measures we are taking to address crime in this state. We are tackling the issue from every angle, because it is an issue which requires and deserves that level of complexity and nuance. The ban on machetes is choking the supply of these dangerous weapons, and the amnesty period for handing them back is currently underway and getting them off the streets for good. Of course, there are some members opposite who have made some very interesting criticisms of the machete ban and who seem to think that the machete bins, which will cost roughly \$2400 each to produce, are an outrageous waste of taxpayers money. The machete amnesty took more than 1300 dangerous weapons off the street in its first 10 days or so. The suggestion by some of the members in Parliament that the machete ban and amnesty is a wasteful, decadent program pandering to the luxury concerns of the elite few just goes to show how out of touch some of those opposite are with the concerns of their constituents. I do not think the victims of knife crime and their families see getting these weapons off the streets as reckless or a waste of money – neither does the Allan Labor government. We see reducing crime and making the state safer as an important policy priority.

Our government is also addressing other areas of crime, including cracking down on some of those causes of crime. Social media platforms have been used by individuals to post themselves committing serious crimes. The practice of posting and boasting for the purposes of clout, reputation and

encouraging others to commit similar crimes can in some cases be a dangerous incitement of others to commit criminal acts. That is why the new post-and-boast laws will make it an additional offence to boast about your crime, with a video on social media worth up to two years in prison on top of the existing penalty for the offence itself.

Another aspect of crime which the government is currently looking at addressing is retail crime. Unfortunately, too many retail workers in recent months have been subject to threats, harassment, intimidation and even violent assaults. Like all workers, retail workers are entitled to feel safe at work. The worker protection consultation group is currently meeting, and ministers have been consulting with major retailers to consider what kind of legislation should be introduced to help keep workers and shoppers safe in retail settings. Retail workers who face aggressive and threatening behaviour at work should know that they have an ally in the Allan Labor government and that we will be always on their side.

In some of the aspects of justice policy which I have outlined so far, I want to highlight the way in which the Allan Labor government is determined to fight crime in a way that reflects the modern realities of crime. The challenges we face are not necessarily exactly the same as what they were in previous decades, so it is important that in addressing those challenges we acknowledge that we have an understanding that is modern and up to date on how crime works these days. That is why changes like making it an offence to post and boast are important and why it is important that the offences which are targeted by the tough new bail laws and the second-strike rule are chosen based on the crime trends in recent years.

Sometimes the causes of and solutions to these problems are simple and sometimes they are complex. That is why we have undertaken a multipronged approach to getting crime down, acknowledging that one method may not work for every type of crime and in every individual circumstance. As well as introducing our tough new bail laws last year, we passed the Youth Justice Act 2024, the first piece of dedicated youth justice legislation in the state's history. Like our new bail laws, the Youth Justice Act 2024 was about discouraging young people from committing crimes, particularly by discouraging reoffending. By targeting one demographic which is more likely to offend in the future – those who have offended in the past – with practices such as victim-centred restorative justice, we are offering youth offenders an alternative pathway through the system. Other achievements of the bill were to create diversionary pathways which help prevent young people from falling into the criminal lifestyle and helping them better themselves so that they can be better, law-abiding citizens. Further, the bill introduced better powers for police to warn and caution young people, allowing them to deal with antisocial behaviour and prevent it from escalating to the point where community safety is put at risk, because the best response to crime is to prevent it from happening in the first place.

The reason why I have spoken at length about both the tough new bail laws and the Youth Justice Act is because I want to highlight the way the Allan Labor government takes the issue of crime incredibly seriously. That is why we acknowledge that what works in some cases may not work in other cases. The Youth Justice Act will keep young people away from a life of crime and help them make better choices in their lives. But those who pose genuine risks to community safety and engage in repeat offending will not be tolerated. They will be subject to the toughest bail yet. What we have done in these areas has been with the goal of keeping our community safe. Keeping our community safe means preventing crime before it happens and, when it happens, ensuring that it does not happen again. That is the priority and that is what the Allan Labor government is focusing on. I will conclude my comments there.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:10): I am pleased to rise on Mr Davis's motion regarding retail crime and the threats to those who serve us in the community. As many speakers have already noted, crime is an epidemic locally. In my electorate, in the cities of Monash and Whitehorse, retail theft alone is up 18 per cent in each of those municipalities, and that is not from a low base, that is from a high base. That is multiple crimes a day. We also know that these crimes are massively under-reported, and I know this because as I go around and speak to businesses, they tell

me they no longer report petty theft, crime, harassment and assaults because there are not police there to attend to it in any timely way – not through the fault of the police, but because there are a thousand vacancies and a thousand on long-term leave. They know that 50 per cent of crimes will not be solved anyway, and they do not get their stock back. It is unacceptable.

We had a conversation earlier today about burning the flag and how it is a cultural change that people find that acceptable. There has been a cultural change that abusing shop workers and people who work in retail has somehow become normalised and acceptable in our society. Well, it is terrible; it is wrong. In the shopping strip near me, something like 12 out of 24 shops have had crimes or attacks or abuse. There are certain shopping malls that I know families in my circle do not let their kids go to for fear of crime. That is obviously bad for business, it is bad for those young people, but most particularly it is bad for those people behind the counter. How many shops do you go into now where there is a strip of photographs behind the counter of people who have come in and abused or stolen from or assaulted the people serving them? There are young people working in McDonald's who get drinks thrown at them. There are people working in clothes stores who have people grabbing clothes and being violent towards them. It is all appalling. Violence and theft – I get phone calls and emails to my office every day about this. It is significantly under-reported.

There is a husband-and-wife couple who run a business in my area. They love their business. They have been there for many years; they have been there for over 10 years. This year, out of 10 years, for the first time the wife no longer feels safe working in that store alone. The husband used to go out and do certain deliveries and errands and she would maintain the store, but she no longer can do that. She does not feel safe. It is very sad, in fact. And what we have is a government that simply has not responded to this. If they cared about this community, they would have done something and they would have adjusted their plans. When they saw that their plans were not working, when they saw that whatever changes they were making were not working, they should have done more. The opportunity is still there to do more.

I spoke to the national president of the SDA, Michael Donovan, and he is certainly very clear on where he feels the reforms should go. In the ACT they have a very interesting concept of the workplace protection order. That means, a bit like a personal protection order, workplaces, including retail stores, can actually put out a prevention order against an individual – they cannot come back. So no matter who happens to be serving that day, they do not have to be harassed. I think that is a very interesting concept in the ACT. I know that South Australia are also contemplating policy like this. That is something we should certainly be looking at in Victoria.

We also have things like Jack's law that have been suggested. Machete bins do not have legs – they do not run and chase after people; they do not constructively prevent crime. However, Jack's law would, because it would allow police to have the authority to get knives off the streets where they are the problem. At the moment all we have is people getting old knives, rusty knives, out of the back of their garages and dutifully following the law and handing them in. Obviously people who carry knives in the street do not care about the law. Prevention would be necessary.

We also have the fact that we have school programs and early intervention programs that have been cut or whittled back drastically. We are not preventing the crimes. When the crimes are committed, we do not have the police resources necessary to solve the crimes, and it is our retail workers right there in the middle who are vulnerable and unprotected. It is our business owners, who have to front up to this every day and bear the cost of it, who are not protected. I absolutely endorse the comments of the other speakers in support of this motion and call upon the government, on behalf of our community, to do more – change, address it.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (19):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu,

Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (20):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Motion negatived.**

*Business of the house*

**Notices of motion and orders of the day**

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

That the consideration of the remaining notices of motion and orders of the day, general business, be postponed until the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Statements on tabled papers and petitions*

**First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria**

*Report 2024–25*

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:22): President, thank you so much for the call and the opportunity to speak this evening on the 2024–25 annual report of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. This report truly captures an extraordinary year, one that will be remembered as the moment Victoria became the first jurisdiction in Australia to begin formal treaty negotiations.

In November 2024 on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung country at Darebin Parklands the ceremonial opening of treaty negotiations took place. It was a powerful gathering of traditional owners, community members and allies, marking the beginning of Statewide Treaty talks between the assembly and the Victorian government. Five fires were lit, dances were performed from every region across our state, and spears and a woomera were exchanged to symbolise the unity and strength required to move forward together.

The co-chairs Rueben Berg and Ngarra Murray described this as the biggest year yet for the assembly. For more than six years they have been gathering the voices and priorities of First Peoples across Victoria. Now those ideas have moved from consultation to negotiation. Their message is clear: Statewide Treaty is almost here.

Among the most significant developments this year was the first traditional owner group formally entering the pathway to a local treaty. The Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation notified the Treaty Authority of its intention to negotiate an agreement reflecting its local priorities and connection to Jaara country. This step demonstrates how local treaties will complement the Statewide Treaty – the bill of which is soon to come to this place – empowering communities to design solutions suited to their own lands and people. The Self-Determination Fund continues to play a vital role in enabling this work. This fund is managed independently. The fund supports traditional owner groups to prepare for negotiations and to build long-term economic capacity.

Since July 2024 it has funded more than 20 traditional owner organisations, from the Bangerang and Bunurong land councils to Eastern Maar and Yorta Yorta, ensuring communities can enter treaty negotiations on a more equal footing. Cultural guidance remains central to the Assembly's work. The Elders' Voice, co-chaired by Aunty Esme Bamblett and Uncle Rodney Carter, continues to provide wisdom and oversight grounded in lore. I also think it is essential that we talk about the Youth Voice. Convened by Alice Pepper and Jordan Edwards, they are empowering young First Peoples to shape the future they will inherit. Through workshops, summits and community surveys, young Victorians



are asserting their voice in this historic process. The Treaty Authority is the independent body of First Peoples leaders that continues to oversee negotiations with fairness, honour, responsibility and connection to country at the core of its work. This report also celebrates the power of truth-telling alongside treaty.

In 2025 the Yoorrook Justice Commission concluded its final report after a four-year process of hearing from First Peoples the truth about colonisation and injustice. Commissioner Travis Lovett led the Walk for Truth from Portland to Parliament House, and so many of us here in this place were out there to greet him. It was a 10,000-strong journey that reaffirmed that truth and treaty go hand in hand. Community celebrations and pride for our community were on full display through the Treaty Day Out Gippsland held on Gunaikurnai country, featuring A.B. Original, Electric Fields and Troy Cassar-Daley. These events have brought tens of thousands of Victorians together in a shared commitment to treaty.

I have got to say, these achievements represent the most significant advancement towards justice and self-determination in Victoria's history. The report shows an Assembly that is determined, that is driven by the principles that decisions about First Peoples must be made by First Peoples. As we look towards 2026 and the next phase of negotiations, the Assembly's message remains clear: treaty must deliver outcomes, lasting accountability and a better future for every Victorian. Victoria is showing the nation what it means to walk together in truth, respect and self-determination. The work of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria is laying the groundwork for a more just and inclusive state, and its impact will be felt for generations to come. With great pride I commend the 2024–25 annual report of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria to the house and welcome wholeheartedly the debate that will take place very soon right here to make Statewide Treaty a reality.

### **Legal and Social Issues Committee**

#### *Inquiry into Ambulance Victoria*

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:27): I rise today to speak about the report that was tabled just yesterday on the inquiry into Ambulance Victoria. At our greatest time of need we rely on ambulance and emergency services, and we need to make sure that in Victoria those systems are up to scratch. Unfortunately, over the past few years particularly we have seen those continually fail. We have heard stories in here about people who have waited hours for ambulances to arrive and then have ended up either finding somebody to drive them or being told to get a taxi and things like that. I told a story about a girl in Sale who waited three days for an ambulance because the person on the phone said, 'I can see you on the map, and you need to drive there yourself.' After a couple of days, her mum stepped in, as good mums do, and insisted that they send an ambulance. They sent a non-emergency one to Sale from Morwell, and then once they got there and assessed her, they realised that she was in a critical condition and they had to send a MICA straight out, which resulted in her having two surgeries for something that could have been a simple treatment.

These things are the tip of the iceberg. When our systems fail, it is often the end user who ends up in the most trouble. As we opened that can of worms and began to drill down and see where the systems are failing in Ambulance Victoria, there were a couple of things. Just in the short time I have I am going to talk about a few things.

The first one is a climate of fear. There was an unbelievable amount of submissions that were put in that either had non-disclosed names or had to be done in private, and that was because there was a huge fear that this could cause people harm if they were known to be speaking to the inquiry. That was something that piqued a lot of concern in all of us from I believe all sides of this chamber. The second one is there needs to be some pretty serious reform around the rostering systems. The rostering system they use is very outdated. It is not family friendly, particularly for a lot of young women that were saying they were really struggling to manage work with family and other commitments and therefore would end up giving up their role in Ambulance Victoria. There are high rates of stress and burnout. We heard that this sort of working condition is actually pushing people to breaking point.

There were many instances of exhaustion, huge workloads and burnout. It is not the most interesting part – I am sure some of my colleagues will cover the most interesting part of this inquiry in their contributions – but something that was very concerning was the toxic workplace culture. Bullying, harassment, nepotism and reprisal for those who challenged authority were reported. It was something that was not just a one-off. It was a theme that continued to come up over and over again. These are things that we really need to address, because when we do not have our systems right, it is the end user that ends up suffering, which is often people at their greatest time of need.

It was an extremely important inquiry. There are many recommendations which I really hope do get taken up. I want to just thank the incredible secretariat staff who always work around the clock and do so much organising with these inquiries. I want to thank my good friend and colleague Joe McCracken for leading an incredible inquiry; Ann-Marie Hermans for doing an amazing job; Georgie Crozier, the shadow minister for ambulance and healthcare in this state; and everyone. This is something that we really need to improve in order to improve the quality of life in Victoria.

### Department of Treasury and Finance

#### *Budget papers 2025–26*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:32): I rise to speak on budget paper 3 and the Department of Premier and Cabinet's output initiatives on multicultural affairs. Over the past week – and indeed it is still ongoing – I have had the great privilege of joining many in our Indian community in very many Diwali celebrations across my region and across the state as well, whether it be the BAPS Kids Diwali in Cranbourne, Tamil Pengal in Australia's Diwali in Rowville, the Celebrate India event at Federation Square, indeed the Premier's Diwali last week or the Cardinia Gujarati Association. I see Ms Shing is in the room; she was there. I got to partake in a wonderful garba dance – nothing like learning how to do a dance that you have no idea how to do and then looking up and seeing both the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop and Dr Heath filming you. There have been many, many terrific events and many opportunities to celebrate one of the many diverse, wonderful communities that we have here in Victoria and particularly in the south-east.

However, today I wish to comment on something that is altogether less pleasant, and that is some of the disgraceful attacks that we have seen made by some on our Indian community. Just about a month ago in an interview with the ABC's *Background Briefing* program, federal Liberal Senator Jacinta Price claimed that the federal government had a focus on bringing in migrants from particular countries over others before specifically singling out the Indian community. This is not only a disgusting assertion implying that Indian people are migrating here only to fill some sort of political objective of the government, it is laughably false. We have had a proud bipartisan immigration intake program for many, many years. But notwithstanding the idiocy of this conspiracy, it is an insult. No ethnic group should be told that they are only here to fill some cynical political ploy. They are here to make better lives for their families and to contribute to our societies. Certainly for most of my Indian friends and most of the other Indian people that I know, I am quite confident that if anyone told them that they had to vote a certain way, they would quite rightly tell that person to get stuffed, as they should.

But this Liberal attitude has not come up in isolation. In an *Australian* op-ed last week Liberal adviser, grandee and mouthpiece Peta Credlin disparaged new Australians, saying that migrants pose a threat to our prosperity and our social cohesion, and that Labor is apparently ambivalent about our history and wants to dilute our core Anglo-Celtic culture. She goes on to say that:

The multiculturalism that pervades official thinking is an abandonment of the Anglo-Celtic core culture and the Judeo-Christian ethos that have made our country great ...

What makes our country great is the contribution of all Australians – of our Indigenous Australians, of our Anglo Australians, of those of British and other European descent and of our multicultural Australians as well.

This is, of course, the same Peta Credlin who has been spotted sitting down for a nice little coffee with the Leader of the Opposition in Victoria and continues to impose her dogma and influence over the Liberal Party to this day. Words like this have consequences. Many in our Indian communities are feeling hurt right now, feeling like maybe they do not belong. I know this because they have told me, and I cannot imagine how many are feeling this but have not spoken up.

But to Victoria's Indian community, my message is clear: you belong. As the Premier said in her Diwali address last week, generations ago, European migrants came to Australia, and particularly Victoria, to build a better life for themselves and for their families. My grandparents were amongst them. But what they also did was contribute to this state and made it the vibrant, successful place it is today. Today, the exact same can be said of our Indian communities. Our new Australians living in Victoria could have chosen to live anywhere in the world. They chose us. They chose to come here. It is time the Liberal Party affords them some respect.

### **Legal and Social Issues Committee**

#### *Inquiry into Ambulance Victoria*

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:36): I rise to speak to the report that was tabled in this place yesterday, the report of the Ambulance Victoria inquiry undertaken by the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, of which I was a member. As Dr Heath has said, it was a very important inquiry that exposed a lot of the problems within the system and made significant findings and recommendations. I urge the government to consider these without delay and get on and fix what is really a very significant problem within the ambulance system. Now, that is not to go against the paramedics who are working tirelessly on behalf of the Victorian community. But as we saw last night when the 000 outage occurred, it is really tying one hand behind their backs as they were struggling to deal with that, let alone the issues across the entire health system, with ambulance ramping, the lack of capacity and the lack of an efficient and effective health system that is able to move patients through – a system that has been mismanaged under Labor.

This report showed a number of things. As was demonstrated by the number of submissions that were provided with names withheld, that went to the fear that so many paramedics had of reprisal if they spoke out. But those that did speak and came before the committee gave great clarity around the issues. It is true that the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, which commenced reporting on this in 2021, has been looking at the toxic culture within Ambulance Victoria. That toxic culture still remains, from the evidence that we heard just recently. Governance failures run deep. We have seen a revolving door of CEOs, and I do hope that the current CEO Jordan Emery can steer this ship that has been completely and utterly rudderless for the last number of years. What I think is incredibly concerning is the senior executives that came to the committee after one submission that was provided outlined an illegal gathering that occurred during COVID. It was something that I prosecuted during the committee's inquiry because of the importance of what happened. We cannot dismiss COVID; we cannot just sweep COVID under the carpet and pretend it never happened. The ramifications of COVID in this state are profound, especially amongst young people. We are seeing that with education outcomes, education attendance and a whole range of issues around mental health implications for too many young people. It is well documented now that keeping children out of school was not the right decision, and that was just one decision by this government, who made many, many poor decisions on behalf of all Victorians. I raise this because in that very significant time there was an illegal gathering that occurred in recognition of two paramedics who had, sadly, died, and it was signed off, as we discovered through the inquiry, by the former CEO.

The cover-up around this issue was the thing that bothered me. I do not think anyone really would see the gathering and such as anything that was wrong. However, it was illegal when the rest of Melbourne was in lockdown, with the severe restrictions that were undertaken. What alarmed me was the evidence that came before the committee by senior executives who, in the first instance, misled the committee. Then we had to recall those witnesses, given the emails that were provided to the committee, with the

information to say that they did know about it. But then one senior executive in particular came again and again misled the Parliament. One can be forgiven for misleading the Parliament once – but twice, I find completely contemptuous of this institution, of what we are doing in this Parliament and on behalf of the Victorian people to have inquiries, to conduct this work, so we can get better outcomes. In this instance, we want better outcomes for patients, because too many patients have died because of failures within the system. I find that the consistent misleading of evidence provided to the Parliament by senior executives is a clear breach of the guiding principles and the operation of the Parliament. For that matter, I am pleased that the Ombudsman will be looking into it. I will have more to say on this very important report in the weeks to come.

### **Department of Treasury and Finance**

#### *Financial report 2024–25*

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:42): I rise to speak on the 2024–25 financial report, which was tabled by the Treasurer earlier today. The report is a summary of the state of the finances here in Victoria in the last full financial year, and the report does two things: one, it demonstrates that the Victorian economy is strong and we have good economic foundations, and the second is that the government's fiscal strategy is working. In economic terms, this report demonstrates that the policies of the government are supporting jobs growth, backing business and building the state-shaping infrastructure that Victoria needs to lift our productivity and to lift the participation in the Victorian economy. We are creating a stronger Victorian economy.

In the last decade, the report shows, Victoria's economy has grown faster than any other state, up 31 per cent since 2014. In employment terms the share of Victorians in employment and our participation rate are at record levels. There has never been a higher share of Victorians in employment or a higher participation rate than we have here. Our state final demand, economic activity in the state, is growing in real terms. Dwelling investment, for those who want to get a sense of the impact that the government's housing policies are having, is up 3.9 per cent in the year. But I think the most important economic fact for Victorians in this report is that real wages are growing in Victoria. Real wages grew in Victoria in 2024–25 for the first time since the pandemic. As a Labor member I am very proud that this government is supporting an economy delivering real wages growth for Victorians.

If we take a look at the state's fiscal strategy, the government's fiscal strategy, we do have a five-step fiscal strategy, and this report demonstrates that step after step we are making the progress we need to be making to implement that fiscal strategy. The report itself demonstrates that we will have an operating result in 2024–25 of a \$2.6 billion deficit. Looking at that figure compared to what the deficit was in the year prior – it was \$4.2 billion – it is a considerable improvement on the prior year. But more importantly, the result we achieved at the end of the financial year is \$800 million better than we thought it would be at the time of the budget update. In net operating cash terms this financial year we delivered a net operating cash surplus of \$3.2 billion, which is \$2.6 billion more in cash operating surplus than the government projected at the budget update.

Things are improving in our fiscal position, according to the figures in this report. For matters like net debt, both as a percentage of GSP and in dollar terms, the net debt numbers are lower than they were estimated to be. What is interesting is that the general government infrastructure investment was lower in 2024–25 than the budget estimate but also compared to the expenditure in 2023–24, I think demonstrating that the government is spending what is necessary, but not more, on its infrastructure investment. There is a lot in this report that we could go through in terms of how the Victorian economy is strong and growing stronger and particularly, as I said, growing real wages. It demonstrates that the state government's fiscal strategy, ably led by the Treasurer, demonstrates that we are meeting our goals and we are delivering measurable improvements. I commend the report.

**Department of Treasury and Finance***Budget papers 2025–26*

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:46): I rise to speak on the state budget 2025–26, budget paper 3, page 8, the output initiatives. It outlines that \$5 million each year over the next three years will be put aside for incorporating renewable energy zones into the state planning policy, and we have gone through this process in northern Victoria recently. There was a draft transition plan put out on 16 May for consultation. A final version of that plan, the *2025 Victorian Transmission Plan*, was released in August. I was shocked to read it and find that the Allan Labor government had included in the final plan a completely new renewable energy zone east of Shepparton that was not in the draft plan. They created the new REZ without any notice, denying locals any opportunity to give feedback and to have their voices heard. This is a significant decision that could alter the landscape for a generation, and locals were not even consulted on the proposal.

In the draft transmission plan the Central North renewable energy zone was a very large area between Bendigo and Shepparton, and locals were well informed about the proposed zone and well organised in their opposition to its size and its location. They stressed the importance of protecting the irrigation district and productive farmland from inappropriate renewable projects, like the solar farm that was recently approved in Colbinabbin against the wishes of the locals and the Campaspe council. In the final version of the transmission plan this large renewable energy zone was reduced to a smaller area close to the existing transmission line. However, to compensate for the reduction in this zone the government created a whole new zone to the east of Shepparton between Pine Lodge and Glenrowan. The new zone takes in cropping areas around Dookie that are famous for their golden canola fields in spring. This section of the Central North zone was not in the draft plan, and farmers did not know that their land was being considered for inclusion in the zone. Stakeholders in the area never had the opportunity to view the draft boundaries of the zone and never had the opportunity to offer comment and feedback on the land use and landscape values in the area.

Labor's decision to completely bypass the local community and impose a renewable energy zone on the land without warning and without consultation is outrageous. Even worse, the transmission plan admits that the zone was created just to satisfy developer interest. This reveals the Allan Labor government's cynical contempt for regional Victorians. Creating this new renewable energy zone without warning has caused significant anxiety and uncertainty among the local community, who are already suffering under Labor's disastrous energy policies. The Dookie & District Development Forum has issued an open letter rightly criticising the total lack of consultation with local farmers whose land could be included in the new renewable energy zone. The letter tells us that Dookie has 17 owners in the Greater Shepparton area on the eastern side of Mount Major, 21 on the western side and 16 in the Benalla shire area that are all within 1 kilometre of the transmission lines. That is 54 landowners that have serious and legitimate concerns about the boundaries of this energy zone, yet none of them were consulted before their land was included in the final version of the *2025 Victorian Transmission Plan*.

The letter notes that data for grain production indicates that for Shepparton East, Dookie and surrounds the productivity of dryland cropping is 67 per cent above the state average. This is highly productive land that is not compatible with solar energy facilities that have thousands of solar panels covering the land in shadow. The letter also notes that Dookie and Mount Major are big drawcards for regional tourism due to the great views from the summit in an otherwise flat landscape. Members of the forum have said that the six-week engagement period is simply not long enough and does not provide for an adequate response time. I back their call for the finalisation of the plan to be pushed back to allow time for due process to be followed, for proper consultation with local landowners, for proper study and assessment of the agricultural value of the potentially affected land and to consider the impact on Aboriginal heritage sites in the area.

**Fire Rescue Victoria***Report 2023–24*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:51): I rise to speak on the Fire Rescue Victoria annual report for the 2023–24 financial year and to commend the remarkable work being done by FRV to keep our community safe and protect life and property right across Victoria. This is vital work, and it is strongly supported by the Allan Labor government. We know that modern firefighting requires modern equipment, and that is why we have committed to a \$40 million rolling fleet replacement program and invested \$13.7 million for five new aerial pumper platform appliances, ensuring that FRV has access to the latest technology when it matters the most. This is about giving our firefighters the tools they need to do their job safely and effectively.

Our firefighters are the best of us. They put themselves in harm's way to protect others, and their efforts last year were critical in preventing what could have been a disastrous summer. Sadly, we still saw significant fires across Gippsland, the Grampians and Ballarat during the 2023–24 season. FRV played a crucial role in fighting those fires through strike teams and incident management capabilities, working alongside CFA volunteers to keep Victorians safe. Over 162 FRV firefighters were deployed as part of strike teams embedded within the CFA structures to ensure seamless support and avoid disruption. That is collaboration at its best. But FRV is more than just an emergency service. As a part of the *Victorian State Emergency Management Plan* they play a key role in multi-agency responses even when it is for not a fire. They are leading innovation too. Our first Electric Vehicle for Incident and Emergency fire truck, EVIE, is already on the road, combining independent drive and pump systems with zero carbon emissions. How good is that. It is a great example of how Victoria's renewable energy revolution touches every part of our lives, even our emergency services.

The report also reminds us of something we cannot ignore: climate change is here, and it is driving longer, more intense fire seasons. That means we all need to be fire ready whether we are in Wonga Park, Warrandyte or anywhere across the state. FRV's mission is to create safer, more resilient communities, and that is something we can all contribute to by getting fire ready earlier. So what does this look like? First of all, smoke alarms are your first line of defence. Install them in every bedroom and living area. Many newer models include carbon monoxide detection as well. I want to thank FRV and the CFA for their smoke alarm campaign. It certainly is saving lives. There are other simple steps too that people can take. When you are cooking, do not leave food unattended and keep flammable items away from stovetops, although hopefully you are already using an induction cooker, thanks to the Victorian energy upgrades program. Make sure you have a fire escape plan and you are fire ready – for example, two exits in every room and a safe meeting point outside. Practise your plan, and remember, 'Get down low and go, go, go.'

FRV has been busy delivering community safety programs, and I know one of my favourite parts of it is the primary schools seeing fire trucks and meeting firefighters. These programs have only grown. Through fire education FRV delivered 718 risk-reduction sessions last year, teaching kids and families how to stay safe. They have also run countless community talks and prevention programs, building resilience from the ground up. To FRV, the CFA and all our emergency services, thank you. Your work saves lives, and this government will always back you in. That is what makes our community strong, and that is why I am proud to stand here and speak in support of the incredible work that our fire services do.

*Petitions***Guru Nanak Lake**

**The PRESIDENT:** Before I call the member, people in the gallery, I understand that you are interested in this next item. We are always very pleased when there are people that come and look at the workings of the Parliament. But just to remind you, there is no audience participation. We

appreciate your cooperation. If you hear something that you like, please do not applaud. If you hear something you do not like, no booing or anything like that. Thank you for your cooperation.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:55): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

Today we have a choice to make – a choice about how we treat our communities, a choice about how much consultation needs to be provided in order to show respect to the local community. Today in this chamber we have a number of people that have come out from their local area because this situation matters to them. They represent different religions and they represent different ethnic backgrounds, but they do represent their local community – a community that they love, an area that has become part of who they are, an area that they have known and loved as Berwick Springs. As a local myself, the only one here who lives near this community and has walked around this lake as part of my lifestyle and has spent time visiting people in this area, I know that Berwick Springs lake was a very important part of this community during the times of lockdown. It was a place where people would walk in order to get out and have that moment away from the pressure of not being able to see family and friends in their homes.

Berwick Springs has a long history. It dates back to 1855, when the gentleman who purchased the land called his land ‘The Springs’ – William Clarke. He started a legacy that has become part of what is known to the local community, and it is very, very important to them. What is in a name, you say? ‘What’s in a name?’ said Shakespeare when he was writing the speech for Juliet, who was trying to think about why the Montagues and Capulets could not get along, and trying to reduce the pressure of a name. But a name is something that has identity and culture. Many people think that it is part of their being. It is part of their history. It has personal meaning. It can have a profound meaning. It means a connection to family – a connection to who they are, a connection to their cherished hopes, a connection to their history.

This government showed complete and utter disrespect for this community when they came out and decided – because they do not live there, because they do not know what it is like to live there and because they do not represent that area themselves in terms of being a resident – to change the name of the lake without consulting the community. They were left out of that consultation. Minister Stitt here, the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and Minister for Planning Sonya Kilkenny were also part of this renaming. They brought out their big Labor team and went out and changed that name. How did that happen? It happened because Mr Daniel Andrews, when he was Premier, made a \$1 million promise when he went to a party of people and said, ‘While I’m here, we are going to gift you as well a name somewhere – maybe a street name, maybe something else.’ That would have been fine if it had been something that either did not mean anything to anybody or they had done proper consultation for – not as in a place that did not mean anything for the people but a place that had not yet had significance for the locals, a place that did not yet have a name. But Berwick Springs lake did have a name. It was Berwick Springs lake, and it meant something to this community.

This is not about religion. This is not about race. This is about a government that has failed its community and has completely disregarded who they are by lacking consultation. It has to stop. These people are standing for so many Victorians who right now feel that this government is just going to railroad how they feel about their local community and start naming things without consulting them. It is an appalling situation. Today we have with us many distinguished councillors from the local area, and even the Labor mayor himself has referred in social media to the Berwick Springs lake as Berwick Springs. What is this government doing? It is causing division. It is causing a community to be divided. This is not about hate. It is not about race or religion. It is about a lack of consultation.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (18:00): I rise today to reaffirm the Allan Labor government’s unwavering commitment to multiculturalism, respect and unity. These are values that sit at the very heart of who we are as Victorians. Victoria’s story is a story of migration. We would not be the Victoria that we

love today without the contributions of generations of migrants, from Italians and Greeks to Vietnamese and Afghans.

Nowhere more is this on display than in our large and proud Indian and broader South Asian community. Generations of migrants from India and its surrounding regions have not only chosen to make Victoria home but built the Victoria that we all love today. From small businesses to cultural festivals, from community organisations to places of worship, multicultural communities represent the very best of Victoria's values, and our Sikh community is a shining example of this spirit. Sikh Victorians contribute to every part of our state in health, education and business and to the work of charity and volunteerism. In just a few weeks the global Sikh community will celebrate the anniversary of Guru Nanak's birth, now approaching its 556th year. For the Sikh diaspora this is the most sacred day of the year, a time of reflection, prayer and service.

In this context the Liberal Party's decision to move a motion against the naming of Guru Nanak Lake has caused deep hurt and offence to our Sikh and our broader Indian communities. The timing of this motion, falling so close to both Diwali and Guru Nanak's birth anniversary, sends an unfortunate and insensitive message to those communities, especially when they should be celebrating. I have been contacted by numerous Sikh community leaders who have expressed their deep concern to me about the timing of this debate. It only adds to those voices who in recent months have sought to divide and to spread hate, often for their own political ends. We saw that on display at the anti-immigration marches that were attended and perhaps led by neo-Nazis, and we have heard it from the mouths of some politicians. It was also deeply distressing for members of the Sikh community to see notorious –

**Ann-Marie Hermans:** On a point of order, President, I think it is deeply offensive – and there must be some way of being able to call her to account – for the minister to start accusing the community of being neo-Nazis.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** It is not a point of order either.

**Ingrid STITT:** I would urge the member to read *Hansard*.

It was also deeply distressing for members of the Sikh community to see those notorious neo-Nazi figures attending community protests. To our Sikh community, to our broader Indian community, to our South Asian community and to all our multicultural communities, I want to say this: you are not strangers; you are Victorians, you are Australians. You are welcome here in Victoria. You deserve peace, safety and respect.

The naming of Guru Nanak Lake reflects the values that unite us, not those that divide us. The former Premier made an election commitment in 2018 to name a landmark in honour of the life and legacy of Guru Nanak Dev Ji in recognition of our Sikh community, their contributions to our state and the values they uphold: humility, peace and selfless service. Last year that commitment was fulfilled through the naming of a lake in Berwick Springs Wetland Reserve – a previously unnamed landmark now known as Guru Nanak Lake. I understand that there have been some concerns about the process of this naming. The local member and I have met with representatives of the Berwick Springs Community Association on a number of occasions in an attempt to find a constructive path forward. However, it is important that our placenames reflect the multiculturalism and diversity of our state, which is exactly what the naming of this previously unnamed lake has done. It stands as a symbol of the harmony that we continue to build and of our deep gratitude to Sikh volunteers for their ongoing contribution to our shared story. So as we lead into Diwali and Guru Nanak's birth anniversary, we are, on this side of the house, reaffirming what truly makes Victoria the place we love: our unity, our respect for difference and our belief that every person from every background belongs here.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:06): Firstly, I would like to thank the petitioners who went to the trouble of signing this petition and putting it forward and indeed getting



enough signatures to get it before Parliament. The government talks a big game on social cohesion, but I did not notice any problems with social cohesion in Berwick until the government did this. They have overridden a history that has derived from at least 1855, when it was named after a local property owner, that continued until the government renamed this without consultation with local people. Also, naming a local location with the name of a religious leader who does not have a local connection historically to the area I think is just so incredibly divisive. The government has created social division here where it did not exist before, and I think that absolutely has to be undone. We have to look into the process that went into this, because it is just unacceptable that the government comes in and overrides hundreds of years of history in this case. The government is talking about connection to place and things like this. Well, the people of Berwick had a connection to place too for over 100 years, and that needs to be respected. I just think that what the government has done here is absolutely outrageous, it absolutely should be revoked, and this consultation process should start again. What they have done here is wrong.

*Interjections from gallery.*

**The PRESIDENT:** That is the one you get. If there is any more, what happens is I walk out and the day is finished. If I leave this chair, it is all over. So thank you for your cooperation in the future.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:07): I rise to speak in response to this petition, which has been tabled by my colleague Mrs Hermans. While I recognise the concerns raised by members of the local community and recognise they are genuine, I do not actually support this petition. The renaming of Berwick Springs lake should be viewed in its proper context, as a simple and appropriate broader recognition of the contribution of Victoria's Sikh community – and a great contribution they have made and continue to make to our state. The Sikh community in Victoria is vibrant, generous and deeply woven into Victoria's social and cultural fabric. They are spread across many communities, including my own electorate in the northern suburbs, as well as the south-east, where this lake is located. From small businesses to essential services, from community kitchens to volunteer emergency response, Sikh Victorians have demonstrated time and time again their commitment to service, equality and hard work. The turban, the kara and the teachings of the gurus are symbols not just of faith but of responsibility: a responsibility to uplift others, to stand for justice and to treat every single person with dignity and respect.

When we talk about the renaming of Berwick Springs lake, we are not simply discussing a name on a sign; we are recognising a living tradition that has enriched our communities for generations. The Sikh community has built gurdwaras that are open to all, regardless of background or belief. I know this through my own electorate, having visited the Craigieburn Sikh gurdwara on several occasions, and having visited gurdwaras across our state, like in Hoppers Crossing as well. They are open to all. They are great places of community, and it is great to be able to go into kitchens and see them cooking meals for people, see people taking part in worship, taking part in their faith freely and humbly. The Sikh community have shown compassion through initiatives such as free meals for the homeless and disaster relief efforts during bushfires and floods. This spirit of selfless service, known as seva, reflects the best of Victoria's multicultural community.

At the heart of this discussion lies the wisdom of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism and a messenger of universal brotherhood. He taught us that all humans are equal no matter what their religion, gender or social standing. This message remains as powerful today as it was five centuries ago. At a time when the world was divided by hierarchy and discrimination Guru Nanak stood up as a reformer and a visionary. He rejected injustice, challenged superstition and called on humanity to see the divine light of every person. Guru Nanak also taught us the importance of hard work and honest living, Kirat Karo, and of sharing with others, Vand Chhako. These values remind us that dignity is found in labour and that community thrives when success is shared. They encourage all of us, regardless of faith, to live ethically and to contribute meaningfully to society. Guru Nanak lived simply and humbly. He travelled vast distances across India, the Middle East, Asia, spreading messages of

peace and unity – messages that we should take up and follow today and use as an example. The renaming of Berwick Springs should be seen as a celebration of these universal values and principles.

I will be asking the Minister for Multicultural Affairs for a briefing on the name-a-place campaign. I know there are a lot of diverse communities that have deep interest in this. As far as possible, I would like these kinds of things to have consultation, because there clearly has been a gap there, but also to be as bipartisan as possible. The minister says a lot of people and leaders have been reaching out to her – that is, I am guessing, correct – and says that some people are causing division. But you have had as recently as today Labor activists and even Labor MPs sharing social images, generated by either the Premier's private office or Labor HQ, causing division in the community about this petition. That is not social cohesion, as this government claims to stand for. That is wielding multicultural communities for their own political gain – the exact same thing they accuse some politicians of doing. The Indian community know I stand up for them. I called out the racism of the rallies prior to the rallies, prior to the Premier even doing so. I will stand up for the Indian community every single day of the week.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (18:13): I rise on behalf of the Victorian Greens to put on record our response to this petition. Once again, today I know my colleague Ms Gray-Barberio was hoping to speak on this petition but has lost her voice, so I will be sharing the Greens contribution.

While as a party we have always supported the right of Victorians to petition the Parliament, we do not have to support the subject of those petitions or support the views expressing them being given a platform in this place. In this instance, we are particularly appalled at the divisive nature of the petition and are incredibly disappointed to see it being brought to debate and given airtime by the member over there today. I want to be clear: landmarks should reflect and represent the diverse communities who live there and our shared commitment to unity, inclusion and belonging. This petition debate does not reflect those values. Instead, it feeds into the same tired, divisive narrative that seeks to pit communities against one another for political gain.

Victoria's Sikh communities are an integral part of our state, contributing to our neighbourhoods and our shared culture. However, people should not have to prove their worth or benefit to society in order to be respected. Every community deserves to be celebrated simply because they are part of Victoria, because they exist here, belong here and enrich who we are. Sikh communities deserve to feel seen and celebrated and to have their culture represented, not attacked or othered, especially by elected representatives. Today my colleagues, Mr Galea and I met with a group of young Sikh leaders aspiring to perhaps sit in this place one day representing our community. What sort of message does bringing a petition like this to this chamber send to those young people?

I am here to say that the Greens do not think it is acceptable. We should be working together to build a Victoria where everyone feels at home, where our public spaces and landmarks tell a story of who we truly are, a state strengthened by diversity and solidarity. This is something we should be celebrating. It is something that we should be proud of. Once again, we express disappointment in this sort of debate being brought into this chamber. I and my Greens colleagues will continue to promote a Victoria that is inclusive and representative of everyone, regardless of their background. Right now we should be promoting belonging, togetherness and peace, not division and hate – a responsibility that rests with everyone in this place.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:15): I rise to make some commentary on this petition. Whilst I understand the strong community view of many that the government did not consult properly – and no doubt it is fully true that the government has dropped the ball on proper process and consultation – nonetheless our multicultural community is precious to us. It is absolutely critical that we protect all parts of our multicultural community. The Sikh community is a very important part of our community in Victoria. I, for one, want to send the strongest and clearest message as Leader of the Opposition in this chamber that we stand with the Sikh community and we will do so into the future. Recognition of Guru Nanak is an entirely appropriate step.

Mr Mulholland has made a very good point to the minister that as we go forward with the naming of many features, there does need to be a proper process, it does need to include the full community and it should not be done from on high. But notwithstanding that very valuable point, it is true that the contribution of the Sikh community, Guru Nanak as the very significant beginner of that community and the community's ongoing contribution to Victoria should be appropriately recognised. Their incredible philanthropy is legendary. Whether it is floods or whether it is fire – whatever community need is there – the Sikh community is prepared to step in and provide that support for the community.

The opposition will not be supporting the taking note of this petition. We will not be supporting it because on this occasion we think the Sikh community does deserve the support of this chamber and of this Parliament. We will be very clear on this: we do stand with the Sikh community. Mr Mulholland has made very significant points about the need for a proper process, and we hold that out to the government. We say you cannot override and ride roughshod over communities. You need to start listening and engaging with communities properly. That is a deep and important democratic principle. But equally, in this circumstance, we are talking about a very important multicultural community. A community that is a big contributor to our community statewide is being recognised. We are prepared to support that.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:18): In reply I want to say that nearly 10,300 people signed two Change.org petitions, 4300 signed two parliamentary petitions, 1200 signed Brad Battin's original petition and 1610 signatures are on a recent e-petition, which will be tabled tomorrow. I want to thank Amanjit Gill, Anthony Tassone and Casey council's Jennifer Dizon, Melinda Ambros, Michelle Crowther and Shane Taylor. They have all played a key role in exposing the government's failures on this issue. As I said, in every public gathering that these people have held they have always upheld and praised the Sikh community, thanked them for their volunteer work and shown complete and utter respect for them. But there are a number of religions today, and to assume that every person that is from India is Sikh is wrong. There are people from the community sitting here that are from the Indian community, and they are not Sikh. There are people here from different parts of India and different parts of Southeast Asia, and they are not Sikh. It does not represent them either. It is a name that needs to be revoked out of respect, and the consultation process needs to take place. Guru Nanak can be placed somewhere, but not in the place that already had a name. Berwick Springs was the name of the lake, and nobody is trying to take away anything from the Sikh community.

I go to many multicultural events in many different areas; I get invited to them, and I love my multicultural community. Berwick Springs is up the road from me, and I know many people that live there. It is part of who I am and so is the multicultural community. I am the daughter of migrants. I grew up in multicultural communities, and most of you know that is true. I love the multicultural community, and I do not mind whether they are Sikh or Hindu or Buddhist or Muslim or Christian. It does not bother me; they are my community. I will be voting to support this petition, regardless of some of the ridiculous things that I have heard in terms of not being prepared to support a community when it is asking for consultation.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes* (3): Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

*Noes* (33): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Renee Heath, Shaun Leane, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, 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

**Motion negatived.**

*Adjournment*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (18:27): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

**Power saving bonus**

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:28): (1994) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on how many Eastern Victoria Region residents have benefited so far from the latest round of the power saving bonus.

**Flood recovery**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:28): (1995) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, and the action that I seek is for the minister to expedite the processing and approval of outstanding flood recovery funding claims and certified estimates and confirm by what date these will be completed. The Victorian Auditor-General's Office today released its report *Relief and Recovery Funding for the 2022 Floods*. The report reveals that the Allan Labor government dragged its feet on approving flood recovery funds for local councils, taking an average of 214 days to approve flood-related claims, and at one stage the average processing time hit a peak of 429 days – well over a year and in fact over 14 months.

Councils can make claims for reimbursement of the cost of relief and recovery activities following a natural disaster. Councils can also submit certified cost estimates for funding approval when they need to reconstruct damaged public assets like roads and bridges. For certified estimates, approval is necessary before the works can start, and we still have 33 of those outstanding. It is troubling that more than three years after the start of the floods in October 2022 there are 44 flood-related claims still in progress and there are 33 certified estimates still waiting to be approved – so the work cannot even start. Many rural and regional councils face very tight budget constraints and struggle to fund all the capital expenditure projects that they would like to deliver for the year. These councils desperately need prompt payment of reimbursement claims, and many are still seeking funding for repairs to roads that were damaged in the floods.

The report revealed that Emergency Recovery Victoria and the Department of Transport and Planning have an agreement that claims with all required documentation will be assessed within four weeks, but they have failed to track the timeline of when claims were first submitted and when all the documents were actually in. The report concludes that it is unlikely the standard is being met, and talking to people on the ground, it is clear to me that lengthy wait times in getting funding claims approved have been a source of great frustration in communities already struggling to recover from the devastation of the floods.

This report shows that Labor does not take flood planning and disaster response seriously and puts bureaucratic red tape ahead of rapid and efficient support to local councils who are trying to rebuild. Those of us who live in the flood-affected areas know how slow flood recovery has been under this government. Some of the important community facilities in my area that have still not been repaired or replaced include the Rochester pool, where residents are facing their fourth long, hot summer without a community pool, the Shepparton Swans Football Netball Club clubrooms and the bocce club in Shepparton.

**Monash Sustainable Development Institute**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:31): (1996) I rise to express the Greens' deep concern about the decision to disestablish the Monash Sustainable Development Institute, one of Australia's most respected and nationally significant hubs of climate science, public policy and community engagement. The institute is internationally recognised as a world-leading centre for

sustainability and climate research, and its work informs governments, trains students and professionals and connects communities with practical solutions to the climate crisis. For just a few examples of what the institute does, the Climateworks Centre helps bridge the gap between research and real-world policy. The Monash Climate Change Communication Research Hub has pioneered ways to engage the public on climate issues, from national broadcast partnerships to regular media columns demystifying climate science. In the Pacific region MSDI's Pacific Action for Climate Transitions program has empowered climate leaders to continue working in their own communities while delivering high-impact research.

At a time when Victoria has committed to halving emissions by 2030, when our state is experiencing record heat, bushfires and floods and when communities are calling for a just and orderly transition away from fossil fuels, this program could not be more important. To lose it now simply because of short-term budget pressures is absolutely a false economy. The costs of climate inaction are measured in billions of dollars in homes lost, in farms ruined and in lives disrupted.

The closure threatens the livelihoods as well of dozens of skilled researchers, communicators and educators whose expertise Victoria cannot afford to lose. Universities have already borne the brunt of three decades of neoliberal policy in tertiary education, where public funding has been steadily cut back, commercialisation has been prioritised over public good and institutions have been forced to rely on insecure contracts and short-term project funding. The result of all this is chronic job insecurity for staff and an erosion of the very public interest capacity that our state needs from its universities to confront serious policy challenges like the climate crisis. Retaining these jobs and this expertise in Victoria must be part of any serious climate plan, so the action I seek is for the Minister for Climate Action to urgently engage with Monash University to find a solution that secures the future of the Monash Sustainable Development Institute. Whether through government co-investment, industry partnerships or support for its core climate programs, the Victorian government has a role to play and a responsibility to ensure we retain this crucial expertise at such an important time in our climate journey.

#### **North-Eastern Metropolitan Region dog parks**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:34): (1997) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Environment Mr Dimopoulos in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to tell me the benefits of the dog parks program in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region. Parks like Warrandyte reserve, Burgundy Reserve and Aranga reserve dog park are all great examples of what this program can deliver. Like many in this place, I love dogs, and I know that Bracks the Wannon Frog Dog is always a treat for us when he wanders through the corridors of Parliament, and we get to give him many pats as well, which he loves. We all know that there is a place dogs love even more than Parliament, and that of course is the dog park. That is why it is so important that we have safe spaces for our beloved pets to play, to exercise and to socialise.

These parks are not just for dogs, they are for families as well, for neighbours and building community connections. With more than 31 dog parks completed so far across Victoria, more locals now have access to these great open spaces close to home, and that means less time travelling and more time enjoying the outdoors with our furry friends. That is why the Allan Labor government's new and upgraded dog parks program matters.

Our infrastructure should reflect the needs of all members of the family, including the furry and four-legged ones, and these parks provide secure areas for doggos to run free. They reduce conflict in shared spaces, and they encourage responsible pet ownership. I and many in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region would appreciate the minister talking about the benefits of these wonderful dog parks, because when we invest in spaces like this, we invest in community wellbeing and inclusion, and that is something I am proud to support.

### Metro Tunnel

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:36): (1998) My adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Public and Active Transport and Minister for Transport Infrastructure – both have got a role here, but especially the Minister for Public and Active Transport. It is about informing the community and commuters in particular about the truth of the Metro Tunnel.

The Metro Tunnel is in concept a good project. The government chose, though, not to connect South Yarra station, so what we will now see when the Metro opens is that the train will go past South Yarra station. You will be able to see the train disappearing into the tunnel – it could toot; you could wave at it. You could wave at someone on the train, but it will never, ever stop in South Yarra again from the Pakenham and Cranbourne line. People will not be able to go to South Yarra from the Cranbourne and Pakenham line; they will be forced to change. The government needs to explain to commuters that they are going to get a lesser service and a less frequent service and they are going to be forced to change. Nor will people be able to go directly to the MCG. If you are coming from Cranbourne or Pakenham and you want to go to the football on Friday or Saturday night, you will no longer be able to go straight to Richmond and walk across. You will have to go to another station, change and move. Let me just say: this will be a problem as people come out of the MCG in their droves after a big match, after having 100,000 people there, and they will not be able to get easily onto the station.

Let me also be clear that people who are coming from the Cranbourne or Pakenham lines and want to get to South Yarra will be forced to change at Caulfield. Even for those who would want to come through Malvern or one of those stations, it will not be so easy for them to get to Cranbourne or Pakenham. So this is going to become more difficult for many people. It will help some people. There is no question about that.

The minister also needs to come clean on the cost of the project, a project that started at \$9 billion and is now at either \$15 billion or \$16 billion. The government will not tell us the final cost of the project. I make that a more than 70 per cent increase in the cost of the project, and they need to come clean on the precise cost blowout.

Finally, the problem with South Yarra being cut out is that it is going to put more pressure on the Frankston line and more pressure on the Sandringham line, and the government is again not talking about these factors. They are not talking about increasing the services on those lines.

So the government needs to come clean. The minister needs to make a statement and needs to run proper advertising. They have run advertising about how magnificent the Metro is, but they are not running advertising to explain to commuters how the services for many of them will deteriorate.

**The PRESIDENT:** So that was to the minister for transport?

**David DAVIS:** And transport infrastructure. It is about the cost too. Transport is the most impacted, but it is the Minister for Transport Infrastructure who has got control of it at the moment.

**The PRESIDENT:** Yes, but you cannot do that – you know that.

**David DAVIS:** All right – transport.

**The PRESIDENT:** We will land on transport.

### Family violence

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:39): (1999) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and the action I seek is for the minister to extend the Safe at Home initiative to the City of Casey. The Victorian government's Safe at Home initiative is a three-year trial in Geelong to allow victim-survivors of family violence to stay safely in their home and community while perpetrators are removed and given support to change their behaviour. This initiative will also provide a rapid response to families, with wraparound specialist support in housing,

employment and child and cultural support. All too often it is the victims of family violence and their children that are forced to leave their home to escape perpetrators. The current system increases the risk of homelessness and social isolation, with victim-survivors forced to change jobs, take children out of schools and leave communities.

We know that family violence is the single largest driver of homelessness for women in Victoria. At a time when housing affordability is at crisis levels, the Safe at Home initiative is critical. I know many would like to see a similar initiative trialled in my region of the south-east. In this year alone almost 7000 family violence incidents have been recorded in the City of Casey. Shamefully, this represents the highest number of reports of any Victorian local government area. While we wait for a three-year trial of the Safe at Home initiative to be completed and to know if it will become permanent or expanded, areas like Casey continue to suffer through a family violence epidemic. Funding an expansion of this initiative to areas of highest need is common sense and recognises that, with an issue like family violence, time is so critical. While I commend the government on trialling innovative and wraparound early intervention support for victim-survivors of family violence, we want to see initiatives like this futureproofed. We need an assurance that these initiatives will be properly funded and quickly scalable to areas of highest demonstrated need as soon as they are successfully proven. So I ask: will the minister extend the Safe at Home initiative to the City of Casey?

### Frankston Hospital

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:42): (2000) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure Melissa Horne in the other place, and the action that I am seeking is that the minister provide me with an update on the redevelopment of the Frankston Hospital and how it will benefit health outcomes for my community in the south-east. The Allan Labor government, as we know, is investing \$1.1 billion in a full-scale redevelopment of Frankston Hospital, which is not only a massive investment in Frankston, it is in fact the largest health infrastructure investment in this state's history outside of inner Melbourne, with more families choosing to make Frankston and the south-east home. This will allow expanded women's and children's services; new maternity, obstetrics and paediatric wards; a women's clinic and a special care nursery. As well, an extension of the emergency department will deliver a new mental health, alcohol and other drugs hub and a dedicated paediatric zone, providing that specialist care for patients, families and carers when they need it most.

The hospital will be renamed Peninsula University Hospital to reflect the very strong work that already takes place in the hospital in partnership and collaboration with Monash University. That partnership will now be reflected through the new name. Once finished, the redeveloped hospital will have capacity to treat approximately 35,000 more patient episodes each year, reducing the pressure on other hospitals in the south-east in the process. It was wonderful to visit the hospital alongside the member for Frankston and the minister just a few weeks ago and indeed to be joined by some local primary school-aged children and some prep children from one of the nearby schools to help officially commission the new pedestrian lights on Yuille Street. They are now up and running, and it is great to see some ancillary infrastructure which will support the continued successful operation of this massively upgraded hospital. I ask that the minister provide me with the update.

### Renewable energy infrastructure

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (18:44): (2001) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. Minister, regional Victoria is once again being asked to foot the bill for Melbourne's energy needs. This time it is through the government's proposed payment in lieu of rates, or PILOT, scheme for energy storage systems. Under this plan, energy companies developing battery storage projects, which overwhelmingly serve Melbourne's grid, will be allowed to pay a token amount to rural councils instead of proper rates based on capital improved value (CIV). For a 100-megawatt battery, the difference is staggering. Instead of contributing \$500,000 to \$800,000 a year, the fair amount under normal rating, they will pay just \$25,000. That is a revenue loss of up to

three-quarters of a million dollars per project. Who makes up the shortfall? Rural ratepayers – local families, farmers and small businesses – who already carry higher infrastructure costs, lower economies of scale and ever-tightening rate caps. This scheme would strip millions from regional councils – Moorabool, Ararat, Pyrenees and beyond – forcing higher rates, deferred road maintenance and reduced services for communities that already host the infrastructure that powers the city. Let us be honest, these batteries do not exist primarily to keep the lights on in Ballan or Beaufort; they exist to stabilise Melbourne’s grid. Yet the cost burden is shifted to country ratepayers, a textbook case of Labor’s Melbourne-first mentality.

This is a simple matter of fairness. Councils are at breaking point. They have faced population growth of 35 per cent since 2014, construction cost increases of 15 to 20 per cent and waste costs that are up more than 30 per cent since 2020, all while suffering endless cost shifting from the state government and revenue restricted by rate caps. Now this government wants to extend the same broken PILOR model used for wind farms, which already pay barely 38 per cent of fair rates, to energy storage projects as well. These projects already pay a fraction of the fire services levy rates – now this. Regional Victoria cannot keep subsidising the city’s energy transition. This policy is inequitable, unsustainable and unjust.

Minister, the action I seek is this: will you scrap the proposed PILOR scheme for energy storage systems and instead mandate a fair, transparent model requiring developers to pay at least 80 per cent of standard CIV-based rates, indexed annually, so that regional ratepayers no longer subsidise metropolitan energy projects?

#### **Midland Highway**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:46): (2002) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for urgent repairs to be undertaken on the Midland Highway between Mooroopna and Elmore in my electorate of Northern Victoria. Once again, I find myself standing here raising yet another road that is in dire need of repair and maintenance. The condition of the Midland Highway between Mooroopna and Elmore is unacceptable at best and dangerous at worst. Sections of the road, especially around the areas of Ardmona and Corop, are littered with potholes, crumbling bitumen, sinking road surfaces and, most dangerous of all, rutting, causing huge rises and lumps in the road. This is particularly dangerous for the many trucks and motorcyclists who travel this road daily. Last week saw one of the largest agricultural field days in Victoria take place at Elmore. As I drove the highway from Shepparton to Elmore, I was deeply concerned at the conditions, watching truck after truck swerve to miss the deep rutting and potholes and cars thrown off course by the crumbling road surfaces. It is putting the lives of my constituents in danger every single day. Minister, the action I seek is for urgent repairs to be undertaken on the Midland Highway between Mooroopna and Elmore in my electorate of Northern Victoria.

#### **Metro Tunnel**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:48): (2003) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and Minister for Public and Active Transport. Victorians only have to wait a few more weeks before they can ride the Metro Tunnel, and just like many Victorians, I am counting down the days. The opening will be nothing short of one of the most remarkable moments of Victoria’s history. You see, the official opening in early December will be a milestone, but we cannot forget what will happen on 1 February – the big switch. Services will be moved to provide peak-hour services and have a full timetable for Victorians to get to and from work, school and everything in between. I am looking forward to this just as much because it means that the morning commute for so many Victorians will forever change. I have been able to even give some of my constituents a tour of the new stations, with representatives from local community and advocacy groups as well as First Nations representatives, who have all thoroughly enjoyed their time in the new stations. These stations have no shortage of ticks of approval from the public, and when they fully open, I know that everyone who has not had the chance to explore these stations will absolutely love



them. The adjournment action I seek today is to ask the minister to join me and my team at one of the two new CBD stations after the big switch to talk to my constituents and Victorians about how the Metro Tunnel is changing their commutes.

### **Nursing students**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (18:49): (2004) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, regarding Victorian healthcare services. The action I seek is for the minister to guarantee or at least ensure that the 2000 graduate nurses and midwives who are scheduled to complete their course in 2025 secure a graduate position, whether in our excellent public hospitals, private facilities, mental health service, aged care, community health, rural or regional health or primary healthcare system. Parents in my electorate are concerned that their children pursuing nursing and midwife courses who are hoping to secure a graduate position next year may be left out of alternative employment. This concern arose due to the Allan government's failure to effectively plan for workforce numbers, in spite of the investment covering university fees to increase the workforce in this sector. With the new hospitals in Footscray set to open at the beginning of next year, we should be ensuring these graduates have positions waiting for them.

The cost of living is causing many Victorians, including those in my electorate, to delay their retirement. This is destroying the state government's predictions about job availabilities and making it increasingly difficult for graduates to find work in the system that they spent the past four years or more preparing to enter. If these young Victorians do not secure immediate employment, they may be compelled to explore entirely different career paths, which could have severe consequences in our healthcare system. We need long-term solutions to address the short-term oversupply of nursing positions. Our hospitals are under pressure and have been for a long time. This issue has been building, and the government must take responsibility for rectifying its own mismanagement. Minister, please ensure that our 2000 Victorian graduates this year in nursing and midwifery are secure with a graduate position by the end of 2025.

### **Landcare**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (18:51): (2005) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment Steve Dimopoulos. This year \$3.6 million in Landcare grants will help fund Landcare and the environment volunteer groups to restore and protect vital habitats and waterways. The action I seek is for the minister to specify what grants have been made to groups in south-west Victoria and for what purposes.

### **Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (18:52): (2006) My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer, and the action I seek is for the government to scrap the unfair emergency services tax. I have been contacted by a not-for-profit organisation in my electorate that promotes local artisans and craftspeople. This group rent premises on a commercial basis, meaning they are responsible for paying council rates and now the increased emergency services tax. They are a small community organisation supporting 15 local members, and this new tax threatens their financial viability. This is not an isolated case. I have heard from a local resident in Kyneton who leases an aircraft hangar just 13 by 13 metres in size, who is being charged the same emergency services tax as for his family home – over \$400 for each property. This clearly demonstrates how arbitrary and unfair the current valuation and charging system is. He is particularly upset that this small piece of land, which he does not own, attracts the charge at all, let alone at the disproportionate rate that is currently being used to calculate it. Local councils across the state have expressed frustration at being forced to collect this tax on behalf of the state. Councils are not supportive of the levy, and they do not want to be the face of this unfair tax. This tax hits businesses, small not-for-profits, volunteer-run organisations, families and individuals. Victorians should not be punished for the financial mismanagement of this government. I therefore call on the Treasurer to address the concerns raised by these local residents and, better still, scrap the unfair emergency services tax.

**Box Hill brickworks site**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:54): (2007) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. The government has lied to the Box Hill community. The government, including the member for Box Hill Paul Hamer, have played the Box Hill community for years. Paul Hamer has strung the community along, saying he supported the Box Hill brickworks becoming permanent parkland – desperately needed space. He has walked the perimeters with community members, gazing at it and saying how it could be Manhattan Central Park skyline. For the last four years the Suburban Rail Loop project has always displayed this on every diagram as green open space. Then the language subtly changed and it became a ‘special purpose zone’. And then, with no formal announcement, the diagram subtly changed to suddenly have buildings on that green space.

But it gets worse. As part of the latest pseudo-consultation program, the government released documents. Amongst those there is an email from the property owner, Phileo Australia. Unfortunately for the government, when the document was circulated the email was accidentally left attached. And what does it say? It says that Phileo and the Suburban Rail Loop Authority have gone behind everybody’s backs and already agreed on a massive new high-rise development for the entirety of the Box Hill brickworks site, such that there will only be 5 per cent of open space left on it. This basically invalidates every other piece of so-called consultation or community information provided over the past five years. The SRLA have moved the goalposts, and the last thing they want is for the community to know it. It is the government yet again weaponising access to information and limiting the community’s ability to provide an informed response based on full information. There now can be no doubt whatsoever that any community group or organisation dealing in Box Hill has every right to question whether those conversations are in good faith or not.

On Monday night Whitehorse council unanimously – Liberal councillors and Labor councillors, every councillor – passed a motion that Whitehorse council should enter into negotiations for the purchase of the Box Hill brickworks site for the explicit purpose of turning the entirety of it into permanent parkland. The action I seek from the minister is to reverse her decision to make an agreement to build high-rise developments, to engage with Whitehorse council and to take all necessary steps to acquire Box Hill brickworks for permanent parkland.

**Commercial passenger vehicle industry**

**Maira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (18:57): (2008) My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer. In 2017 the government tore up the old taxi model. Licences that families had bought in order to shore up their future, often with mortgages, were cancelled, their values collapsed and many families were ruined. But to make it right the government put a new levy on every taxi and rideshare trip. We were told it had two jobs: to repay the families for the damage done and to cover the basic operating costs of the levy. But here is the context the public has not been given: the money never went to a special fund for compensation; it went into the general spending pool. They could have used that money to give fair compensation to the families destroyed, but they did not. They could have ended the levy once it served its purpose, but they did not. Instead it turns out that this government has lied about a huge surplus from this levy to make it look like it is necessary for it to continue, and they are using disabled people as a cover to do it.

The Treasury department reporting bundles a passenger fare discount for disabled Victorians into the system’s operating costs, but the Parliamentary Budget Office follows the law and strips that subsidy out because it is a disability program, not an operating cost, and their own words are the smoking gun. They say they exclude multipurpose taxi program payments from the cost of regulation because the MPTP existed before the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017 and was not provisioned in the act. The government provides the MPTP through its disability programs.

This is an absolute disgrace. Disabled Victorians deserve proper support. They should not be used as a camouflage to continue a tax that was supposed to be for something entirely different. I call on the

government to end this farce, stop exploiting disabled people and use the surplus to properly compensate the people that it was designed for.

### **Fire Rescue Victoria**

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:59): (2009) My matter is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and it relates to Fire Rescue Victoria and their breathing apparatus. There has been recent coverage in respect of the fact that our firefighters each and every day have now been left without equipment that will not only protect them but protect Victorians in the event of a fire if they need to use their breathing apparatus. Each and every one of the breathing apparatus in Victoria is now past its use-by date. They expired in September of this year. That is despite the fact that the United Firefighters Union (UFU), that is the union in this case, actually advised the government that in order to ensure that their firefighters are kept safe and can enter and be on the scene of a fire safely themselves as the firefighters – much less those they are going to protect, be it property or person – that they must have breathing apparatus that are capable of performing the function.

Breathing apparatus come in two forms, essentially a short and a long form. The short form is half an hour; the long form is 4 hours. It is with some irony that recently the firefighters themselves and the union were forced to protest and make this point publicly when the Premier chose to open the new multibillion-dollar Metro Tunnel system, although we all know it is not open yet. What we also know, thanks to the union and the workers in this case, is that if there is a fire in the Metro, firefighters will be ill equipped to fight it. That is a devastating, tragic, alarming set of events, that our firefighters will not have the equipment they need to keep themselves safe, much less save anyone else, much less save these multibillion-dollar train stations. It is an absolute travesty. This is billions and billions of dollars we have spent on train stations, and yet we have not bothered to renew the equipment of our dedicated firefighters, men and women across this state. So not only do they not have the long-period oxygen breathing apparatus, we know that every single one of the apparatus we send our firefighters in each and every day of the week actually is not up to the task. This is gross incompetence by the minister responsible, the Minister for Emergency Services.

We also know thanks to a 2024 report that there is a six-month lag time when you do order the breathing apparatus. So best-case scenario, even if they were ordered tomorrow, it would not be until around mid next year that the fire services and firefighters themselves actually receive the equipment that keeps them safe, that keeps Victorians safe and that keeps the property of Victorians safe. It is scandalous. It is alarming. It is a level of incompetence I do not think anyone in this chamber has actually seen in our lifetime. So the action I seek from the minister is for her to immediately order the equipment that the UFU, our dedicated firefighters and our workers need to keep them safe, keep Victorians safe and keep the property of Victorians safe each and every day.

### **Bushfire preparedness**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (19:02): (2010) The adjournment matter I seek tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Environment and it relates to the significant and serious topic of bushfire preparedness. It came to my attention last week and through contacts in my electorate that the minister through Forest Fire Management Victoria removed from service a quantity – a large quantity, which I am asking the minister to find out and report to the public – of its firefighting fleet. They are called G-Wagons and Unimogs. G-Wagons are a light vehicle, and Unimogs can hold up to 4000 litres. These vehicles – and there are substantial numbers of them, 500 in one, 90 in the other – are used in bushfire preparation. They are used in mitigation – in fuel reduction burns – they are used in terms of reducing that fuel load, either through these cool burns that Forest Fire Management completes or through manual removal of bushfire load.

The government over the past 10 years, through analysis, has only been completing approximately 1.6 per cent of its own fuel reduction targets statewide. Recommendation 56 of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission was a 5 per cent rolling target of fuel reduction to keep Victorians safe after one of the most horrendous bushfires on record. And what has the government done? Well, it is

only keeping approximately 1.6 per cent of its own Safer Together – or not so safer together – target. Who has been asked to backfill this? The CFA – the volunteers with ageing trucks and limited resources – have been asked to backfill while this significant number of this fleet is removed from service for structural defects.

The government has known about this for almost eight years. \$32 million to implement this – the minister has inherited this, but Victorians are inheriting a huge bushfire risk and the government is not addressing it. So the action I seek is for the minister to commission an independent review with real accountability to outline what it is going to do to protect Victorians, to get these vehicles back on track and back in service, reduce bushfire fuel loads and protect our communities in what the Premier says will be the most dangerous season coming around.

### Responses

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (19:05): Mr McIntosh raised a matter for the Minister for Energy and Resources. Ms Lovell raised a matter for the Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery. Ms Copsey raised a matter for the Minister for Climate Action. Ms Terpstra raised a matter for the Minister for Environment. Mr Davis raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and Minister for Public and Active Transport. Ms Payne raised a matter for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence. Mr Galea raised a matter for the Minister for Health Infrastructure. Mrs McArthur raised a matter for the Minister for Energy and Resources. Ms Tyrrell raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Ms Watt raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and Minister for Public and Active Transport. Mr Luu raised a matter for the Minister for Health. Ms Ermacora raised a matter for the Minister for Environment. Mrs Broad raised a matter for the Treasurer. Mr Welch raised a matter for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Mrs Deeming raised a matter for the Treasurer. Ms Bath raised a matter for the Minister for Environment, and Mr McGowan raised a matter for the Minister for Emergency Services. I will refer those accordingly.

**The PRESIDENT:** The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 7:06 pm.**